HISTORY, RELIGION AND PERFORMING YEVE:
EWE DANCE-DRUMMING, SONGS AND RITUALS AT AVE-DAKPA, GHANA

By

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A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

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To my Son (Worlasi), lovely wife (Allison) and my parents (Mr. & Mrs. Nyamuame)
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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people and we owe you so much. I pray that God will reward you abundantly. Also to my special Gainesville family; Abbey Chokera, Duncan Wambugu, Sheila Hugi, Sebastien, Aboubacar Soumah, Mohamed DaCosta and Ghana-Gainesville society I say thank you.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF OBJECTS</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TERMS</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aims and Objectives</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Relationship to the Research Topic</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems of Research into Ewe Traditions</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why Ave-Dakpa? Frustrations of a Native Researcher – A Personal Experience</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Reviews on Ewe and Yeve Rituals and Musical Practices</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Research and Methodology</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Research and Location</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant-Observation</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restrictions and Ethics</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Languages and Dialects</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Assistants</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Transcription, Transliteration, Analyses and Interpretation</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equipment</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Overviews</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF AVE-DAKPA</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location and People</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migration Narratives of Ave-Dakpa</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Invocation of a State Ave-Dakpa</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief System and Religious Practices</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Religion</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Events and Celebrations</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Social Musical Traditions and Dance Clubs .......................................................... 89
  Mekamio .................................................................................................................. 90
  Adzida ..................................................................................................................... 91
  Jama .......................................................................................................................... 91
  Novineno .......................................................... 92
  Ayisu and Afram ..................................................................................................... 93
  Atrima ...................................................................................................................... 93
Amesikpo and its Festival ......................................................................................... 93
Language/Dialect ..................................................................................................... 99
Education – Schools/Institutions ............................................................................. 100

3 THE YEVE CULT AND ITS RITUALS – PART ONE .................................. 104
  Yeve – The Cult and Its Origin .............................................................................. 104
  Yevekpor - The Cult House .................................................................................... 108
  Yeve Voduwo – Deities of the Yeve Cult ................................................................. 112
  Membership ............................................................................................................ 113
    Example One- Hutor Sofeda .............................................................................. 116
    Example Two – Tsale Agbelifufu ....................................................................... 118
    Example Three – Agbayiza Agbelifufu ............................................................... 120

  Initiation Rites of Yeve Members ...................................................................... 122
  Categories of Initiates and Hierarchy in the Yeve Cult .......................................... 127
    Kpokpor .................................................................................................................. 128
    Vodusi .................................................................................................................... 129
    Avle ....................................................................................................................... 129
    Husunu ................................................................................................................... 131
    Minawo .................................................................................................................. 134
    Midawo .................................................................................................................. 135
    Hugbono ............................................................................................................... 136

  Yeve Colors and Symbolism ................................................................................ 137

4 YEVE CULT AND ITS RITUALS – PART TWO ............................................ 141
  Adadada .................................................................................................................. 141
    Adadada Process ................................................................................................. 141
    Consequences ...................................................................................................... 144
  Adzaletsi Lele - Final Funeral Rites ....................................................................... 144
    The Organization ................................................................................................ 146
    The Performance ................................................................................................ 147
  Alagadzedze - Defilement ..................................................................................... 148
    Causes of Defiling a Yeve Member ................................................................... 150
    The (Re)Action ................................................................................................... 152
  Alagalele – The Arrest and Cleansing ................................................................... 154
  Tsifodi – Libation ................................................................................................... 155
    The Officiating Priest ............................................................................................ 158
    Elements of Tsifodi and their Significance .......................................................... 159
Purpose of Tsifodi ................................................................. 161
Structural Organization and Examples of Tsifodi........................ 164

5 DRUMMING - DRUM PERFORMANCE .................................. 171
Yeve Drum Performance ...................................................... 174
Drummers in the Yeve Cult ................................................. 177
Instruments of the Drum Ensemble ...................................... 181
    Gakogui ................................................................. 184
    Axatse ............................................................... 185
    Adodo ..................................................................... 185
    Kagan ..................................................................... 187
    Kpetsi ..................................................................... 188
    Sogo ....................................................................... 189
Notation and Playing Techniques ......................................... 190
Husago Drumming .............................................................. 194
Adavu Drumming ............................................................... 200
Aforvu Drumming .............................................................. 204
Ako Drumming ................................................................. 206
Sovu Drumming ............................................................... 210
Avlevu Drumming ............................................................ 214
Davu Drumming ............................................................... 219

6 YEVE DANCE FORMS AND GESTURES .................................. 224
Husago Dance ................................................................. 229
Adavu Dance ................................................................. 233
Aforvu Dance ............................................................... 239
Ako Dance ................................................................. 243
Sovu Dance ................................................................. 247
Avle Dance ................................................................. 248
Davu Dance ................................................................. 252
Dance Gestures ............................................................. 256

7 YEVE RELIGIOUS SONGS, MEANINGS AND TRANSCRIPTIONS .... 262
Song Texts ................................................................. 264
Song Organization ......................................................... 265
    Call and Response .................................................. 266
    Cantor-Chorus ....................................................... 266
    Interjection ........................................................... 267
    Harmony ............................................................... 267
    Scales ................................................................. 268
Consequences of Singing Yeve Cult Songs ......................... 268
Yeve Songs and Analysis ............................................... 270

8 CONCLUSION .................................................................. 291
LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3-1</td>
<td>Similarity between Yeve and Fon words/names</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-1</td>
<td>Togbi Nyamekor IV – Chief of Ave-Dakpa in regalia at his palace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-2</td>
<td>Togbi Ekpeter III (in white cloth) – The land Chief of Ave-Dakpa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>A section of Ave-Dakpa people heading to climb Amesikpe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-4</td>
<td>A section of people making their way on top of Amesikpe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-5</td>
<td>A section of people who did not make it on top of Amesikpe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-6</td>
<td>Dance-drumming groups celebrating at Amesikpe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-1</td>
<td>A ritual pot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-2</td>
<td>A section within the Yeve cult house also depicting the old style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-3</td>
<td>The modern cult houses with images of priests and priestesses to alert and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>caution non-members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>A photo of Husunu Hutodzehu Sofeda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>A photo of Tsale Agbelifufu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-6</td>
<td>Agbayiza Agbelifufu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-7</td>
<td>Kpokpowo (<em>dashi</em>-behind and <em>Soshi</em>- in front) in their clothes working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to makes some money for their graduation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-8</td>
<td>Husikpokpo making a hand gesture signifying supplication as she walks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-9</td>
<td>Initiate with scarification marks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-10</td>
<td>Cowry necklaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-11</td>
<td>A section of Vodusiwo/Yevesiwo and avlesiwo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-12</td>
<td>Husunu with the <em>agbadza</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-13</td>
<td>A section of Husunuwo in their regalia dancing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-14</td>
<td>The front view of husunu with the raffia and <em>Ese</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-15</td>
<td>The back view of the <em>husunu</em> in regalia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-16</td>
<td>A <em>minawo</em> in her white head scarf</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A midawo in his usual white head scarf ................................................................. 136
The Yeve cult Hierachical tree ........................................................................... 137
Agbayiza performing tsifodi with Yevesiwo supporting ..................................... 163
A section of Yeve drummers in Ave-Dakpa ....................................................... 181
Sections of Yeve drummers in Ave-Dakpa, ....................................................... 181
Gakogui ............................................................................................................. 183
Axatse ............................................................................................................. 184
Adodo ............................................................................................................. 185
Kagan ............................................................................................................. 186
Kpetsyi .............................................................................................................. 187
Sogo/Agbobli ................................................................................................. 188
Gankogui and Axatse notation key ................................................................... 191
Supporting drums notation key ....................................................................... 192
Sogo lead drum notation key .......................................................................... 193
Husago call and response patterns ................................................................. 195
Husago support patterns and drum texts ....................................................... 196
Husago - main drum text and recurring pattern ............................................. 198
Formula for drumming ..................................................................................... 199
Adavu slow supporting patterns ..................................................................... 201
Adavu lead drum- Introduction (slow section) ............................................... 202
Adavu transition pattern from slow to fast ...................................................... 202
Adavu fast lead drum pattern ......................................................................... 203
Aforvu supporting rhythmic patterns .............................................................. 205
Aforvu- lead drum pattern ............................................................................ 206
Ako supporting rhythmic patterns .................................................................. 207
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5-23</td>
<td>Ako lead drum patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-24</td>
<td>Sovu supporting rhythmic patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-25</td>
<td>Sovu lead drum pattern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-26</td>
<td>Avlevu supporting rhythmic patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-27</td>
<td>Avlevu lead slow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-28</td>
<td>Avlevu fast supporting rhythmic patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-29</td>
<td>Avlevu fast lead drum pattern and drum texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-30</td>
<td>Davu I supporting rhythmic patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-31</td>
<td>Davu I – lead drum (the search)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-32</td>
<td>Davu II support rhythmic patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-33</td>
<td>Davu II lead drum patterns and drum texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-1</td>
<td>Structure of Yeve dance arena</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-2</td>
<td>Husago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-3</td>
<td>Adavu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-4</td>
<td>Aforvu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-5</td>
<td>Ako</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-6</td>
<td>Sovu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-7</td>
<td>Avle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>Davu I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-9</td>
<td>Davu II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-1</td>
<td>Gamado</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-2</td>
<td>Yeve Nye Nuxoxo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-3</td>
<td>Gbogblamenu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-4</td>
<td>Ahodzo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-5</td>
<td>Ayisu Me Vem O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-6</td>
<td>Dalosu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-7</td>
<td>Eku Le Yewu Ge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-8</td>
<td>Agbenya Gbee Meva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-9</td>
<td>Dolawo Gbona</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-10</td>
<td>Demeku nenyo wu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-11</td>
<td>Gbayiza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-12</td>
<td>Huwoe ma ne gble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-13</td>
<td>Da fe nyado tsim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Object</td>
<td>page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-1</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Videos of the dances covered in this Chapter can be found by clicking on this link,
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ABEBUBU</strong></td>
<td>Speaking allusively on the drum in reference to something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ADAGANA</strong></td>
<td>The colloquial Ewe language, proverbs, metaphors and allusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ADODO</strong></td>
<td>A double ended iron bell used as an accompaniment often carried by the Yeve members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ADZALE</strong></td>
<td>A generic name for all types of soap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ADZALETSI LELE</strong></td>
<td>Literally, bathing lather water. In context, the final funeral rite for a Yeve member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ADZEXE</strong></td>
<td>An owl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AGBADZA</strong></td>
<td>The oldest social and funeral dance of the Ewe speaking people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AGBANA</strong></td>
<td>The notion buying something and pay later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AHEVI</strong></td>
<td>A non Yeve member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AKLALA</strong></td>
<td>A white cloth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AKPETESHE</strong></td>
<td>A local Ewe gin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ALAGA</strong></td>
<td>A person that has been defiled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ALAGADZEDZE</strong></td>
<td>The process of going through a defilement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ALAGALELE</strong></td>
<td>The process of arrest and cleansing a defiled Yeve member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AMEDZODZOR</strong></td>
<td>Reincarnation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AMEGIGLI</strong></td>
<td>A process of causing a Yeve member to be defiled. It is also known as amegbegble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AMESIKPE</strong></td>
<td>A mighty and revered god of the Ave-Dakpa people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AMESIKPE ZA</strong></td>
<td>A festival celebrated to commemorate Amesikpe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AMIDZE</strong></td>
<td>Red oil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ANLOGBE</strong></td>
<td>A language or dialect spoken by Anlo people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ASITSATSA</strong></td>
<td>Trading, the idea of buying and selling items in order to make a profit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATADI</td>
<td>Pepper or a common stew (two meanings)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATSIAWO</td>
<td>Gestural movements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AVIATSI</td>
<td>A type of sturdy tree. Often placed around the cult house.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AVLE</td>
<td>A category of initiate in the Yeve cult who are comedian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AXATSE</td>
<td>A rattle also called a shaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AZIDETSI</td>
<td>A ground nut soup also known as peanut butter soup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLI</td>
<td>Corn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLINUI</td>
<td>Scarification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLINUSISIS</td>
<td>The process of scarification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLIWO</td>
<td>Corn flour. Can also be spelled bliwor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLOR</td>
<td>Blue color. Also one of the main Yeve colors that symbolizes sadness and pain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DA</td>
<td>One of the major deity of the Yeve cult also referred to as voduda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAKPLA</td>
<td>A type of dressing &quot;prop&quot; that initiates wear across their body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DASHI</td>
<td>Da initiates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDETSI</td>
<td>A palm nut soup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEKORNUWO</td>
<td>A customs and indigenous knowledge system of values</td>
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<tr>
<td>DZATSI</td>
<td>A mixture of corn flour and water normally use for libation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DZODODO</td>
<td>The process of setting a fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESE</td>
<td>The feathers at the tail of a parrot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EWEGBE</td>
<td>The language spoken by Ewe people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FETATOTRO</td>
<td>Annual thanksgiving and sacrificial ceremony held at the end of a particular year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FETRIDETSI</td>
<td>Okra soup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAKOGUI</td>
<td>A double bell of the Ewe speaking people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GBOR</td>
<td>A goat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Head Midawo</strong></td>
<td>A high priest in charge of the cult house.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hudzedze</strong></td>
<td>Become yevesi or a Yeve convert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hugbe</strong></td>
<td>Yeve cult language also known as Yevegbe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hugbono</strong></td>
<td>A leader, elder and adviser of the cult also as the midawo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Husi</strong></td>
<td>An initiate of the Yeve cult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Husunu</strong></td>
<td>A male initiate of the Yeve cult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kagan</strong></td>
<td>The smallest and the first support drum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kalevu</strong></td>
<td>The drum of the brave men.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Koklo</strong></td>
<td>Hen or chicken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Koklotsu</strong></td>
<td>Rooster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kunuworworwo</strong></td>
<td>Ritual performances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kpokpor</strong></td>
<td>A neophyte or ungraduated member of the Yeve cult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Midawo</strong></td>
<td>A high priests of the Yeve cult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minawo</strong></td>
<td>A high priestess of the Yeve cult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Molu</strong></td>
<td>Rice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nyagadzi</strong></td>
<td>The color red. One of the main Yeve colors that symbolizes the seriousness of the Yeve cult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>So</strong></td>
<td>The thunder god and lightning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Soshi</strong></td>
<td>The initiates of So. Also referred to as Yevesi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Todziha</strong></td>
<td>Any drink foreign to Ghana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Togbeawo</strong></td>
<td>Ancestors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tohono</strong></td>
<td>An attribute of the Yeve God, So.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tomela</strong></td>
<td>Any type of fish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Treg</strong></td>
<td>Calabash</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tro</strong></td>
<td>Spirits</td>
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<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Definition</td>
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<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSI</td>
<td>Water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSIFODI</td>
<td>Libation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VODU</td>
<td>A generic name for deities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VUFOFOWO</td>
<td>Dance-drumming styles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VUGBE</td>
<td>Drum text or language also known as mnemonics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XEBIESO</td>
<td>Another name for the Yeve God So.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YEDUDUWO</td>
<td>Types of dancing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YEVE</td>
<td>The name of the society, the gods and a reference to thunder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YEVEFOFOR</td>
<td>The process of discovering Yeve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YEVEGBE</td>
<td>The dialect or language spoken by the cult. It is also know as hugbe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YEVEKPOR</td>
<td>The Yeve cult house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YEVESI</td>
<td>A member of the Yeve cult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZAKADZA</td>
<td>Another affiliated deity of the Yeve cult that resides in bees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This study examines the Yeve cult at Ave-Dakpa, its rituals and dance-drumming-songs performance practices. Yeve is a secret society whose practices are controlled and restricted from the public. Ave-Dakpa is a small town located on the Aflao-Ho road in the southeastern corner of the Volta region, Ghana. Throughout Ghana the Yeve cult can only be found in the southern part of the Volta region, where the Ewe people reside. Yeve is also practiced among the neighboring Ewe speaking people in Togo and Dahomey, now the Republic of Benin. In addition, Yeve has a historical tie to the Yoruba Shango in southwestern Nigeria through its characteristics and practices. Thus, Yeve and its practices become quintessentially Ewe religious and musical traditions.

The Yeve cult in general is no doubt one of the most overlooked traditional religious societies in the Eweland due to long lasting influences from the establishment of Christianity. Due to its practice of instant vengeance and punishment on dishonest people and immoral practices the cult consistently receives negative connotations and is frequently regarded as an evil society. In reality, the Yeve cult insists on moral values,
rituals that foster spiritual growth and healthy relationship between its members and God through deities who serve as intermediaries between God and man.

This study therefore introduces the significance of this subject by documenting the importance of the Yeve cult in Ave-Dakpa and its performance practices. Through critical examinations of the Ave-Dakpa peoples’ oral history, belief systems and migration accounts this study describes the Yeve cult as one of the significant religious cults whose ritual practices not only instruct, protect and empower spiritual growth among its members but also play crucial roles in Ave-Dakpa. In addition, this study examines the Yeve cult dance-drumming and songs as extraordinarily powerful tools in empowering and igniting successful ritual activities.

This study describes the Yeve cult in Ave-Dakpa and frames its practices as mechanisms of resistance to the influences of Ghana’s colonial past and its ongoing confrontations with modernity. It puts forth the positive notion that this resistance has resulted in the preservation of traditional values as embedded in authentic and unadulterated modes of its dance-drumming.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Aims and Objectives

The purpose of this study is to document the Yeve cult, its historical backgrounds, rituals and dance-drumming-song performance practices in Ave-Dakpa. Ave-Dakpa is a town located in the southeastern Ewe territories of the Volta region, Ghana. Generally, Yeve is considered the most feared, powerful, and secretive of all traditional religious societies of the Ewe speaking people; a tradition that is restricted from outsiders. The Yeve cult and its practices existed long before Ghana’s colonial era and have continued to be powerful until present-day. However, this tradition has been somewhat “neglected” due to the exclusive and secret nature of the cult and its resistance to outside influences stemming from the cult’s interest in reinforcing the maintenance of traditional rituals and dance-drumming performances in unadulterated form to preserve traditional values. My interest in this subject is a long time relationship established during my childhood with family members (immediate and extended) who are priests, priestesses and drummers of the Yeve cult.


1 Ave-Dakpa and its history will be discussed in detail in chapter two of this study.
(1981) and Friedson (2009) have focused on the brekete shrine also called gorovodu (see Rosenthal 1998) and its musical practices. Historians and anthropologists such as Fiawoo (1959), Akyeampong (2001) and Green (2002) have researched aspects of the Yeve cult and its practices but barely scratch the surface in their discussion of the role and significance of dance-drumming in the ritual performances. The Yeve cult’s oral histories exclusivity and resistance to change make it a unique group to study.

This study is organized into three main parts to help readers get an in-depth understanding of the contents and contexts of the backgrounds, rituals and musical activities and the people who are involved. The first part concentrates on the history of Ave-Dakpa and its people - their migration from Notsie (ancestral home) until their present settlements – and examines the social and religious philosophies and belief systems of the people of Ave-Dakpa as a significant component of their culture. It also reviews pertinent scholarly literature of earlier scholars.

The second part focuses in on Yeve, the name of the religious society, the major and minor deities as well as the institutions involved in the Yeve cult. The study examines the etymology of the term, Yeve and how it became the name for this particular religious cult. It further engages the discussion on specific rites and ritual forms associated with Yeve ceremonies and investigates the hierarchical status of its members and leaders as well as individual member’s histories in the religious cult. The control of an esoteric knowledge system and the role of the Yeve cult as a disciplinary court of justice for social control and crime prevention are also addressed.
The third part explores the dance-drumming-song repertory of the Yeve cult. There are seven major dance-drumming types considered as a “suite of dances” performed during Yeve ceremonies. This part describes the seven dance-drumming repertories of the cult and how each of them is linked to a particular deity or empowers and interprets specific ritual performances in context. Since musical activities are vital for Yeve, this work further examines the role of drummers, instruments, types of drum texts or language and how those texts/languages function in performance. Additionally, this work finally examines different types of songs/song texts and their roles in general Yeve ceremonies. It discusses the literal and deep meaning of the songs. Some of the songs discuss the powerful nature of deities while others advice non-members on the general background of the cult.

This dissertation describes the importance of Yeve since not much has not been written on this subject and the few relevant contributions lack substance. Additionally, the dissertation is a continuation of my master’s thesis I submitted to Wesleyan University in Middletown, CT in 2007. The content of this dissertation is a combination of my several years of field research in Ave-Dakpa and life long experiences from my childhood performing this dance-drumming in addition to listening to various Yeve dance-drumming traditions in other parts of the Southern Ewe territories. Despite my personal experiences with variant versions of Yeve performance practices, this dissertation does not compare and contrast differences in Yeve cult performance practices. Rather, it concentrates on Yeve cult and its practices in Ave-Dakpa. An overriding motivation is to reintroduce the significance and depth of Yeve to the

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2 Jones (1959) was the first to use the phrase “suite of dances” to describe various dance-drumming performed in Yeve cult.
academic community. It is my hope that this exposure will encourage interested scholars in the field of ethnomusicology, anthropology, African religions and African studies to further research the subject.

**Personal Relationship to the Research Topic**

My first exposure to Yeve cult dance-drumming was through my uncle Sefeda during one of the Yeve annual events known as *fetatotro*. But most importantly, my uncle’s wife Daenyametor is a Yeve priestess from whom I have also learned so much by spending lots of time around her when she was singing. Besides learning through my uncle Sofeda, I have also experienced several Yeve drumming styles and other traditional religious performances such as those I have mentioned above in my hometown, Whuti and neighboring towns. However, for readers to understand my close connection to Yeve and its musical practices, I give a perspective of how it all started until now:

My initial listening to Yeve music specifically Yeve song performance started with my aunt Daenyametor on our compound house. As a child I lived in my grandfather’s house including my parents, siblings, Uncle Akato Nyamuame (my dad’s senior brother) and his children on a huge compound house with a big tree in the middle of the house under which we all socialized telling stories and listening to the elders. The compound was fenced with palm branches (now cement walls) with three entrances

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3 Sefeda is an extended family uncle from my father’s lineage. Sofeda is his name when he got initiated into the Yeve cult. According to the ethics of the cult the moment an initiate adopt a cult name his/her original name from birth cannot be mentioned until his death. With that respect I will not mention his birth name. I will explain his name with other name in chapter three.

4 *Fetatrotro* literally means turning the tip/head of the year around. In context, it is an event or a gathering of where members celebrate a journey with their gods/deities for successful one year and also make resolutions to gods/deities for the coming year or the new years. In some instances, it is a moment to also commune with one’s or a particular god/deity.

5 Daenyametor is my uncle’s wife. Her husband is Akato Nyamuame was not extended family uncle as Sofeda. He was the first born of my Dad’s parents. Like Sofeda, Daenyametor is her initiation name and I cannot disclose her birth name. However, I will explain the meaning of her name with other names in chapter three.
(north, east and west). My uncle Akato’s family occupied the eastern side while our family occupied the western side. The two Nyamuame families mingled with great joy and organized evening story telling times together and sometimes made dinner together for over fifteen people. Religiously, my dad was a principal of the Presbyterian school and the minister for the Presbyterian Church. Meaning my dad’s family are Christians and Presbyterian by denomination until present. On the other hand, my uncle Akato did not go to church though he believed in God but received no baptism until his death. His children who attended Presbyterian school at that time were not Christians but went to church to escape punishments⁶. Daenyametor his wife was not a Christian but Yevesi (believer of Yeve and was initiated into the cult).

Occasionally, tension arose in the house and sometimes between the two families when there was a Yeve event and the activities that are associated with it. Why? During Yeve events it is a custom for Yeve initiates to start preparing for the day by singing praise songs and venerating gods/deities by singing as soon as they get up from bed and the same thing is repeated when they return from the event. As such, this is what Daenyametor also does starting from 4:30 a.m. or sometimes 5:00 a.m. until she leaves the house and also when she returns. Her loud singing accompanied with adodo⁷ at that time of the morning inconvenienced us and woke us up very early against our will power. This practice sometimes took between five days to a week before it ended. As no one confronted or questioned Yeve practices my family had to deal with this until it was over. During these times there was always tension between the children in the house and the family heads and no socialization took place in the evening. In other parts of the world, for instance the United States, a neighbor has every right to call the police especially for loud and disruptive sounds that deprive a person’s sleep, peace and comfort. However, this is not the case in my hometown. Calling the police will not resolve the issue. In actual fact, the police will not even show up to intervene if he/she is aware that the culprit is a Yevesi or from this religious order. My Dad and his brother could not resolve this issue because it could create further problems such as hatred and divorce among other things.

One Saturday morning, I had decide to pay close attention to the kind of songs and the messages in the songs. Surprisingly, I began to like the songs because they were songs that have potentials of instructing and educating the public if people actually pay close attention to the words, especially those songs in Ewe and not those in Yevegbe (cult language).

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⁶ Akato’s children are now Christians (Presbyterians by denomination). Some are choir directors, choir members and teachers in the Presbyterian school system.

⁷ Adodo is a multiple bell instrument normally used in the Yeve cult
became very interested and wished my parents could one day listen to the songs but at the same time it would have been an absolute disrespect for me to tell my parents due to the customs and values of my culture. From that time forward some of the Yeve songs became my thought for the day. Among the many songs I loved so much there was one that, in my opinion, was a recipe for living a good life. The lyrics of that song went this way; Ame adeke me nye aghetsi le xexesiam o, wo nyui na novi eye nayo segbedzi, ne salagatsi mi asiwoa, to wo dowu enue ma. This literally means: “No one is a tree of life to live forever in this world, do good to a friend and respect the law and the customs, when you die or when death knocks at your door, that is it and your journey in this life comes to an end.” Although I was in secondary school at this time this particular song became one of my life philosophy that I shared with my schoolmates who had hatred for their friends. Since then I have been trying to get the opportunity to one day learn more on the Yeve dance-drumming, songs and some of the ritual practices. Ever since, wherever I heard Yeve dance-drumming being performed especially publicly I went to witness the performances. This is just one scenario among others to give readers about my close relationship with this tradition and the people who perform it.

Though I lived with the memories of several Yeve events that I experienced as a child, it was difficult to gain access into the cult or question certain activities in details when I became an adult. This is simply because in some Ewe localities a child is allowed to participate in any music oriented activity be it social or religious. When a child grows and begins to understand or question the background of the musical settings he is prevented or denied the knowledge behind it unless he is initiated especially in the religious organization. Therefore, as an uninitiated Yeve member with a Christian religious background, I did not have any right to enter the Yeve cult nor could I question any of their activities.

In 1999-2000 I started investigating the history of Yeve in great depth from individual Anlo-Ewe elders residing in Accra at the same time I was a teaching assistant in the music department at the University of Ghana, Legon. My preliminary research started in Accra because I knew from an Ewe native’s perspective that it would be
difficult to engage in discussions on Yeve in the villages or within the areas where Yeve cults and shrines are located. As such, it was wise for me to start getting information from elders in the city before going to the village. The esoteric knowledge on Yeve and its practice is controlled by the ritual experts and initiated members of the group (Locke 2010). The control of knowledge surrounding Yeve increases its secrecy and spirituality. The consequences of an ahevi (a non member) being heard discussing aspects of Yeve is severe and no one, especially a villager where the cult houses are firmly established, is interested and willing to engage in a dialogue on Yeve. However, the few people who might risk deliberating on such issues typically reside in Accra or live several hundreds of kilometers from the Ewe territory in order to avoid being caught or heard. Despite their distance from home, most people are not comfortable engaging in discussions about Yeve.

While discussion of Yeve practices and beliefs are closely controlled, choreographed stage presentations of Yeve music and dance in Ghana and abroad are not uncommon. Such “folkloric” enactments began in the 1960s as part of Ghana’s efforts to highlight its cultural traditions in the context of rising national sentiment. In college, I was thrilled to watch the Ghana Dance Ensemble\textsuperscript{8} perform an aspect of Yeve dance-drumming at the University of Ghana, Legon-Accra. This was the first time I had seen Yeve performed on stage apart from its traditional setting. My previous knowledge and experience about Yeve dance-drumming revealed to me instantly that the staged version been choreographed. As I was trying to learn as much as possible about this religious tradition, I interviewed the performers and the artistic directors of the company.

\textsuperscript{8} The Ghana Dance Ensemble is a resident dance company established in 1960 under the Institute of African Studies in the School of Performing Arts, University of Ghana, Legon-Accra
The interviews disclosed that neither the performers nor the directors had any direct knowledge about the history of the Yeve cult and its ritual dance-drumming practices. I finally contacted Mr. Johnson Kemeh⁹ who provided me with insightful detailed information about this religious tradition including the difficulties and challenges people had encountered researching this tradition. After several days of speaking with Mr. Kemeh I developed an even keener interest in this topic. I must note that my teenage experiences with my family members Daenyeametor and Sofeda combined with several inquiries on the subject and my affiliations with some of the high priests and priestess further familiarized me with the traditional context of the topic. Based on my close association and knowledge on this religious tradition I became motivated to document the Yeve tradition for scholars and individuals who might be interested in researching it in the future.

Problems of Research into Ewe Traditions

The musical traditions of the Ewe speaking people have attracted many scholars who have investigated various components of its performance practices such as the acquisition of musical knowledge, rhythmic principles and aesthetics (see Cudjo 1952; Locke 1989; Chernoff 1979). Unfortunately these researchers have predominantly concentrated on the non-religious musical traditions of the Ewe. In contrast, Ewe traditional religious musical genres have received little attention in ethnomusicology scholarship, especially by native scholars. The difficulties of conducting such research in a society where history is primarily maintained orally, and where many religious

⁹ Mr. Johnson Kemeh is a senior drumming instructor at the University of Ghana, music department. He is a native Ewe musician whose relatives are part of the Yeve cult but he was not initiated into the cult although he had deep knowledge on some of their practices.
practices have been suppressed or forgotten due to the long lasting influence of colonial rule has kept most researchers from investigating this topic.

During the colonial period, many traditional rituals and their musical genres (including Yeve religious tradition) were degraded and treated as evil by colonial authorities. Yeve was one of the traditional religious and musical societies of the Ewe people that missionary and colonial rulers found to have unsavory mystical activities and relationships with the spirit world. Despite such persecution, the Yeve practices survived in resistance to attempts to discourage its practice. This makes the Yeve one of very few groups in Ghana to have maintained their traditional religious practices intact.

The colonial era was dominated by negative attitudes towards traditional worship and music practices in Ghana. Meyer (1999) discusses the effects of these attitudes as the missionaries introduced Christian doctrines among the Ewe speaking people in the early 1830s. Recounting his personal experience living among the Ewe, Meyer discusses how Christianity promulgated a view of traditional rituals and musical practices as heathen. Meyer states: “The missionaries thus represented Ewe religion as Pietism’s Other, thereby defining the two religions in terms of radical differences and denying Ewe Christians their previous expressive form of worship.... The missionaries diabolized the Ewes religious concept, and above all, religious practices, and this resulted in the overall construction of Ewe religion as heathendom” (1999: 85). Traditional customary rites and indigenous drumming and dancing were disparaged as evil practices and those who indulged in these practices were inevitably considered pagans. As a result, most traditional beliefs have been degraded, lost and affected.
However, Koku and Yeve cults among others still maintain their ritual activities in unadulterated form.

Further, the establishment of mission schools and colonial education affected Ewe elites through the introduction of foreign concepts of musical tradition in the school system. The church strongly advised Ewes against participating in events involving traditional music and dance. This attitude, until today, has had detrimental effects on traditional religious musical practices. For instance, through missionary controlled education in the schools, students caught watching or participating in traditional music and dance or watching traditional ritual performances were subjected to severe punishment; a situation I personally experienced during my early school days. Attendance roles were strictly checked every Sunday after church services. The missionary’s influence against participation and observing traditional music performances affected Ewes (and other Ghanaians) and linked social class differences to religious and musical life. The educated elite (predominantly Christians) aspired to be civilized and modern and regarded as backward the uneducated general population who participated in traditional religion and other traditional cultural activities. Discussing this point, Meyer points out that: “The Ewe experience with modernity has been structured by the Christian duality between good (Christian, modern, advance) and evil (traditional religion, primitive, backward)” (1999: 65). This created a gap between elites (Christians) and their counterpart, the uneducated natives. Gbolonyo (2009) has extensively expounded on the pervasive influence of missionary impact, the western education that came with it and its effects on the youth culture and on the African people in general. Agawu shares his personal experience of disassociation from his
local traditional community performances because of his father’s background as a pastor and his educated family background. Agawu was not permitted to participate or even watch *adabatram*, a religious dance-drumming of the Siwu people. He writes: “As a minister’s son, I never saw *adabatram*, but heard its music from a distance” (1995: 97). My own father, a principal of the evangelical Presbyterian school and a minister of the church, punished me for watching traditional music by giving me a number of lashes. Thus, Agawu’s experience and honesty is one common to many Ewe scholars. The result is that many educated elites in Ghana initially reject their own cultural heritage including knowledge of indigenous rituals and traditional forms of music making. However, Ewe native scholars recently have begun searching for their roots by investigating their local traditional musical cultures. But, this is not a simple matter as there are traditional rituals and initiation procedures one must go through to gather information and learn the esoteric knowledge in organizing and performing its associated music. It is still difficult and frequently uncomfortable for native scholars who risk their social status when they are seen kneeling in front of deities and walking bare footed and topless (with no shirt) to perform rituals that will enable them to enter shrines or cults to conduct research.

The negative associations of traditional religious beliefs extend to the most important instrument used in Ewe religious traditions, the drum. The drum itself is an important symbolic object and a powerful instrument for the Ewe speaking people (and other ethnic groups in Ghana and Africa) in all forms of music making and the significance of the drum projects well beyond musical contexts (Fraioli 2006). As a linguistically communicative tool, it speaks in metaphors and proverbs that non-native
speakers typically do not understand. In the past, the sound of the drum and the drum texts were employed to help win battles and defeat enemies. Among the Ewes, there are different drums that also have different functions (Gbolonyo 2009). Every society, family, clan, shrine, cult, stool house and venerated ancestor may have a specific set of drums. My own grandfather gave me an account of how he was accused of worshiping a drum in the stool house during the missionary’s house-to-house evangelism. He was confronted because a sacrifice had been made and blood sprinkled on the drum that was then lifted up and beaten. A few pastors I have kept in touch with since 1985, including my father, recently expressed serious concerns of the missionary’s misconceptions about the drum and its uses. They questioned specific drums that have human skulls adorning them yet they did not understand their historical significance. For instance, in my mother’s family house there is kalevu (the drum of the brave men). The sound of this drum and the language it spoke to warriors, according to oral history, encouraged and assisted them by intensifying their mood until they defeated their enemies. Selected parts of defeated skulls were used to ritualistically adorn the drum. However, according to their belief system, anytime members of that clan go to war the sounds of the drum will ensure that they always defeat their enemies. A few people who understand this history and the functions of the drum also have the ability to interpret the proverbs that drummers play on the drum. Therefore, drums were not allowed into the church and the missionary education system strongly advised against the drum. Sadly enough, due to these old issues, most educated Ewe natives to this day have neglected their indigenous musical tradition, lack knowledge of traditional values,
customs and institutions, and instead appreciate music and cultural practices that are foreign to them.

Yeve research is also problematic due to the complexity of the Ewe language and its variant dialects. The Ewe language (and the variant dialects) is one of the most difficult indigenous languages of Ghana to be learned by non-native speakers. The Ewe language and variant forms are challenging and complex to speak due to the polysemy of certain words, proverbs, colloquial expressions and the difficulty of pronouncing specific words that combined certain consonants and vowels. Besides the Ewe language and its dialects, many African languages have been challenging for scholars researching indigenous musical genres. However, researchers should at least have basic linguistic skills so that native ideas and concepts are not misconstrued and misinterpreted. Some non-African researchers observe and document musical performances without even the minimum level of language skills needed in order to interact with the native performers. This needed competency in linguistic matters also extends into the musical realm. Ethnomusicologist Mantle Hood (1960) first championed the notion of “Bi-musicality” for ethnomusicologists in order for field researchers to become conversant in more that one musical “language.” This, he contended, would allow the ethnomusicologist to better understand the culture’s music as an insider. Hood proposed that ethnomusicologists should be able to also speak at least a dialect of the musical cultures or traditions they are researching to foster an in-depth understanding of its content and context. Following Hood, Agawu (2003) also realized that the misinterpretation of songs, concepts and the context of music making is often due to inadequate language skills among researchers. He therefore calls for an increase of
native African scholars, most importantly, those with indigenous linguistic ability and knowledge to properly document song texts in their precise contexts. In the case of Yeve, the linguistic situation is made more complex because the cult has its own ritual language in addition to the use of Ewe language and its several dialects. The cult language, Yevegbe (also known as Hugbe) is a combination of Ewe, Fon, Adagana and other Ewe variations based on the geographical location of the cult (Akuetey 1989/9). As a result, many terminologies and phrases used in Yevegbe are full of metaphors and allusions that are difficult for even native Ewe speakers to comprehend. Thus, Yevegbe requires several years of practice to master. The little I know and can speak from my childhood in addition to what I learned throughout my research from 2006 as a native Ewe still does not qualify me as someone who can fluently speak Yevegbe. The same kind difficulty relates to competency in understanding the Yeve cult dance-drumming and its drum texts. The drum texts performed during Yeve ceremonies are not the randomly crafted and comical types that Burns (2005) discusses amongst Dzodze Ageshe group and its performers. Instead, Yeve drum texts are carefully selected and performed in close connection with rituals being performed (Villepastour 2010; Locke 1980). The drum texts are highly poetic and are full of proverbial phrases termed abebubu (speaking allusively on the drum in reference to something) that is most often used in performing the agblorvu – the Ewe talking drum. In the purely musical realm, the study of the drum text is also significant in understanding the organization of rhythmic phrases, dance forms and gestures in Yeve music and its educational components to both cult members and non-members.
This study’s goal is to document a neglected powerful religious tradition as a means of preserving and communicating details on the significance of its rituals, values, customs, esoteric knowledge system and dance-drumming performance practices. Furthermore, this dissertation addresses Agawu’s (2003) call for native scholars with musical and linguistic skills to research their own indigenous musical cultures. To add personal opinion to Agawu’s contribution in researching traditions like Yeve, it is also important for native scholars to have preexisting traditional knowledge on *dekornuwo* (indigenous knowledge system on values, custom and institutions), their significance and functions as well as practical experiences and knowledge of performing specific traditional social and religious musical genres to facilitate in-depth understanding of the musical activities. In this context, this study examines a specific Yeve cult, its ritual forms and deities, the seven dance-drumming-song types, movements and gestures and the functions of drum texts or languages from a native scholar’s point of view.

What this study will not do is to attempt to present a generalized description of the performance of Yeve ritual and music tradition across the entire Volta region or to compare and contrast different Yeve performance styles. I am very aware of and have knowledge of other regional and local variations in Yeve performances (both ritual and styles of music). I have discussed the range of differences with Professor Midawo Aloworyie, C. K. Ladzekpo and Dartey-Kumordzi among other knowledgeable ambassadors of the Ewe cultural and musical traditions both home and abroad. However, comparing the various forms of Yeve among the Ewe is for a future project. Therefore this study focuses on documenting Yeve performance practices at Ave-Dakpa and all information regarding its ritual or music performance practice described in
this study represents how Yeve ceremonies and performances are organized in the town of Ave-Dakpa.

**Why Ave-Dakpa? Frustrations of a Native Researcher – A Personal Experience**

Deciding on my research location, Ave-Dakpa, was the result of several disappointments I had in my hometown, Whuti where I initially intended to do my field research for this dissertation. I was born and raised in Whuti where my parents live and work. My grandfather, a chief and a family head, taught me a great deal about traditional values, customs and institutions of the Anlo-land. My father on the other hand, was teacher, principal and a minister in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church at Whuti. As a result, my Christian background and academic education stem from my father while my traditional knowledge stems from my grandfather. As a result, I became a kind of bridge between my father and grandfather and was able to observe and interact with each side respectively until now. When I was growing up there were lots of traditional dance-drumming clubs and performance groups, both social and religious. Most of these groups performed at least one to three times a week. I initially intended to research the musical traditions in my hometown to promote its rich musical culture. As I was growing up I developed a keen interest in Yeve music, although knowing for a fact that my Christian parents would not welcome the idea. They held the same negative perception of traditional dance and drumming as evil that was mentioned in Meyer (1999). I did not disclose my interest to my parents despite their support of my music education from secondary school through college and to my master degree. My father knows that I have so much love for traditional drumming and dancing in addition to missionary-influenced choral music because I have also been featured on various national television stations in Ghana. I also had my father accompany me during
previous research that I conducted because of his status and popularity throughout the district.

In the middle of April 2006 I called my father from the United States to ask him to arrange the preliminary groundwork for my master’s research. It was difficult but I finally told him that I was coming home to research on Yeve and that he should contact my uncles and aunts in addition to a couple priests I had already spoken with regarding this research. The conversation almost brought to an end to our father-son relationship. To cut a long story short, it was not fun at all. I hope those who have researched or traveled to Ghana and other parts of Africa will agree and understand the Christian and non-Christian relationship especially in modern times where Charismatic churches are all over in the continent. My father being a lovely man decided to go ahead and jeopardize his status by agreeing to visit certain priests of the Yeve cult to ask their permission for me to come. This was a very tough endeavor not only for my father but also for my entire family. My father finished his arrangements and since that time I have personally been contacting all the priests over the phone at least once a week also to see if they will have any further concerns or reservations about me. My final call was at the airport to assure them that I was coming and they were all excited.

I arrived in Ghana and headed straight to my hometown in the first week of June 2006. Without wasting any further time I arranged a meeting so that we could have a decent schedule since most of them were farmers and fishermen who went to their various jobs during the day. To my surprise and my father’s dismay, the people he and I had contacted instantly changed their minds and refused to work with me. They finally attributed their resistance to my father’s religious background. The main midawo (high
priest) I spoke to when I was in the United States before getting to Ghana said in the Ewe language, *Mie dibes miawonaneke ne fotowonana gbloe le soleme alo gbedoxome*, which literally translates to “We [the priests] do not want to do anything or teach you anything which your father will preach about in the church.” There has never been anything as heartbreaking and frustrating in my life as this disappointment. It affected me so much that I perceived everyone around me and in my community at that time as an enemy. Anytime I slept there was only one sentence that kept recurring in my mind and dream; “I am not a stranger and my own people disappointed me.” My father and I followed up many times but still they refused to work with me.

It was one fateful morning, two weeks after my disappointment trying to think of a new research topic outside my hometown when I got a call on my cell phone from an unknown number. Although I normally would not answer an unknown number, this time I did, out of desperation. Surprisingly, it was my former college roommate, best friend and a brother, Isaac Hirt-Manheimer. Without welcoming or asking him his purpose of coming to Ghana I let out my frustrations and disappointments to him. As always, Isaac comforted me and then declared his purpose of coming to Ghana, which was to perform engagement rites for his fiancée Gloria Dorwu and needed me to be his support and translator. During the engagement rites I spoke with Gloria’s relatives to ask if they knew of any traditional religious group and someone they could introduce me to. More

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10 Isaac is my best friend and a brother to me. We lived in the same room called Commonwealth Hall (residents are all male) during college at the University of Ghana, Legon. We have drummed, travelled and done many activities together. Isaac was the one who recommended me to Wesleyan University for my MA degree in Ethnomusicology (World Music).

11 Gloria Dorwu is a lovely wife of Isaac Hirt-Manheimer with two beautiful children namely Dodzi and Hannan. Isaac met Gloria during our college time at the University of Ghana, Legon. Since then they became very interested in each other and decided to be engaged.
than five people pointed to a man who was part of the engagement rites and happened to be Gloria’s uncle called Agbayiza. When I saw him before the beginning of the rites I knew he belonged to the Yeve cult because of the scarifications on his face. However, as Ewe custom demands, one cannot walk to a person let alone an elderly person to inquire about his background. Also, according to my existing experience and knowledge on Yeve an inquiry of that nature could lead to multiple mishaps or offenses leading to defilement of the person. One elder of the community called Prosper Awunyo finally introduced me to Agbayiza describing my relationship with Gloria’s husband, Isaac and my intentions of learning with him. Surprisingly, Agbayiza responded that he would be willing to teach me but had to discuss it with his elders and then consult the deities first to find out if I truly had this research at heart or just wanted to make money out of it. The following day, Agbayiza took me with him to a shrine where the consultation took place between the deities and us. The third day Agbayiza sent for me and confirmed that the gods had spoken and it was safe for me to conduct my field research with the Agbelifufu shrine in Ave-Dakpa. Agbayiza and I went back to the shrine to thank the deities for allowing me not only to research about Yeve but for revealing themselves to me in order to be studied. The adage, “one good turn deserves another” came to play in this situation. If I had not taken Isaac to Ave-Dakpa for the engagement rites, I would not have met this wonderful priest and my going to Ghana would have been full of frustration. Agbayiza then introduced me to chiefs and elders, religious leaders, and Yeve initiates and I became part of the town. Since 2005 until now Agbayiza and his family talk very often over the phone and sometimes discuss concepts and issues that I still find difficult to comprehend. I want my readers to note that I do not hate those
priests from my hometown who highly disappointed me. This happens to natives frequently and for some reason I had the feeling it might happen and it did. I still cherish the fact that we have the same social life and fun going on as we used to and respect their religious backgrounds and ethics.

**Literature Reviews on Ewe and Yeve Rituals and Musical Practices**


Traditional religious or ritual dance-drumming has not received significant attention in the scholarship. Scholars in the field of traditional religion, cultural anthropology and history have documented a variety of traditional religious events and ritual practices among the Ewe speaking people of Ghana. However, these scholars have not investigated and analyzed the musical aspects of the rituals. This is surprising as it is widely perceived that the Ewe speaking people and perhaps most African societies have no successful ritual or magico-religious performance for spirits, ancestors or deities without music as the driving force. This perception is also emphasized in the works of Nketia (1975) Berliner (1978) and Agordoh (1994) and many others. Hence, with support of good dance-drumming the rituals are effectively performed and are able to transcend into the spiritual realm of ancestors and deities. As Agordoh (1994) puts it, “no one who has visited a scene of public worship in Africa can be in doubt that one of the attributes of the gods is that they are music-loving gods. The most common situation in which they manifest themselves is the musical situation in which affects them is performed” (1994: 38). Despite this reality, the musical aspects most often seem to be neglected or treated as unimportant in relation to the ritual performance. At this point I will critically look at the works of scholars who have attempted to document or research
Yeve religious dance-drumming including Jones (1959), Fiagbedzi (1966), Avorgbedor (1987), Agordoh (1994) and Locke (2010). I will start from the oldest work to be found to the current ones.

Jones (1959) is with no doubt a groundbreaking scholar of African music and much of his work centered on the Ewe speaking people of Ghana. His studies discuss a variety of social dance-drumming styles such as *agbadza*, *adzida*, *nyayito* and the instruments of the Ewe drum orchestra. Jones explained the social history, the significance and method of performance including play and fishing songs among children and adults. In addition, Chapter 5 of Jones’ *Studies in African Music* describes aspects of traditional religious dance-drumming of the Yeve religious cult and present the Yeve cult’s background to his readers. He states that Yeve “is a secret society and all joining it have to undergo a period of instruction during which they learn the special cult language, the cults songs and dances, and the cults custom” (1959: 93). A significant assertion Jones makes regarding drumming and drummers in the Yeve cult is the high level of esoteric knowledge and skill in performing authentic drumming unlike what is recently seen among some creative drummers discussed in Burns (2005). According to Jones, the Yeve religious dance-drumming is “the true unadulterated traditional music of the Eve people” (1959: 97). Despite Jones’ important contribution to Yeve dance-drumming traditions there are flaws with his investigations. For instance, Jones contends there are seven successive dances in the Yeve cult as *husago*, *sovuu*, *sogba/sogo*, *adavu*, *aforvu*, *agorvu* and *avlevu*. In my opinion, Jones was making a generalization about the dances and did not tell his readers what Yeve cult he researched. It is important to emphasize and clarify that there are several Yeve cults
across the Volta region. In their dance-drumming practices some cults have seven, nine, ten, twelve and thirteen dances depending on the locations, sizes and the number of deities involved as well as the types of rituals associated with the cult. To make an assumption and generality that there are seven dances without specifying the specific Yeve cult that practice it that is confusing and disrespectful for Yeve ethic codes.

Jones also failed to mention davu as part of the Yeve cult dances. Davu is one of the principal dances performed to venerate the da (royal python) and cannot be omitted when listing Yeve cult dances. This is ethically unfair to the musical tradition. Jones investigation relied on Desmond Tay (who was an Ewe, but not a Yeve initiate) as the only source for this publication. Fieldwork is a significant aspect of research to help the researcher understand the context of various musical characteristics and behaviors of people involved in the performance (see Barz and Cooley 2009; Nettl 2005). As Jones’ work serves as a foundation, he could have done exceedingly better by visiting the Volta region to properly inquire about this wonderful tradition as later scholars such as David Locke, John Chernoff, James Burns, Gavin Webb and other have done with their research. In addition, in his analysis, Jones employed inappropriate western musical terminologies to explain the activities such as the dynamics within the dance-drumming performance, drum text and mnemonics.

Fiagbedzi (1966) has produced the most extensive document on the Yeve cult and its musical performance practice. He is perhaps the first native Ewe music scholar to research this musical tradition. Fiagbedzi’s Sogbadzi Songs is an unpublished master’s thesis researched at Dzelukope, a suburb of Keta and written seven years after the publication of Jones Studies in African Music. Fiagbedzi’s fieldwork examined
a variety of Yeve songs, song texts, scales, melodies and dance-drumming performances. Concentrating on the cult in Dzelukope, Fiagbedzi examined a variety of songs and song texts associated with different dance-drumming styles including: songs that venerate specific deities and spirits; songs that mediate between the initiates and non-initiated audience; and songs that trace the history and origin of the Yeve cult in Dzelukope. A significant aspect of Fiagbedzi’s thesis was his ability to decode and interpret the complexities in structure and languages used in these songs for readers and those foreign to the musical tradition. The languages of the songs involved Yevegbe, (cult language) Ewegbe (Ewe language) Anlogbe (Anlo dialects) and adagana (colloquial Ewe language, proverbs, metaphors and allusion). He discusses in great depth the type of musical scales employed in the song performance, their dynamics and timbral qualities. Fiagbedzi also gives perspectives on how ritual activities and dance-drumming-song relations are entwined to give broader understanding of events around which Yeve performances are organized. A few of the many rituals he mentioned were scarification processes, defilement and redress mechanisms.

Notwithstanding Fiagbedzi’s significant contribution to Yeve discourse, he does not sufficiently explain dance-drumming and does not give detailed interpretations of the movements gestures. Similar to some ethnomusicologists in the late 1950s and 1960s who studied only portions of entire musical performances, Fiagbedzi was perhaps interested primarily in the study of the songs and other vocal properties as his title suggested. Despite his contribution, he could have done extensive research on the holistic performance of the musical performances. The scholarly understanding of an African musical tradition in the discipline of ethnomusicology should involve the
drumming, dance, songs, dramatic elements and other artistic features referred by Stone (1998) as a “constellation.” In my opinion, Fiagbedzi’s work was not a holistic approach to studying or understanding a complex religious musical tradition like Yeve.

In the summer of 2011, I was in Ghana and met with Fiagbedzi to get his perspective on Yeve research and share the challenges he encountered during his fieldwork at Dzelukofe. Fiagbedzi affirmed that penetrating the spiritual realm of the Ewe traditional religiosity in general and that of the Yeve religious system in particular could be overwhelming. Fiagbedzi admitted that he discontinued the research when he started having emotional and spiritual uncertainties and realized that his spirit could not handle some of the practices in the cult.

Avorgbedor (1987) published a small article in *African Music Journal* titled, “The Construction and Manipulation of Temporal Structures in Yeve Cult Music: A Multi-Dimensional Approach.” This work was published twenty-one years after Fiagbedzi’s master’s thesis. Like Jones and Fiagbedzi, Avorgbedor gave a brief historical background of the cult and its practices but more detailed than Jones. In his description of the cult Avorgbedor explains, “Yeve (also known as Xebieso, Hu or Tohono,) is a thunder-god, a pantheon with a historical relation to the Yoruba Shango and Dahomean Xevioso...the cult is one of the most ‘powerful’ and secretive among others that exist in the Ewe society (Anlo-Ewe specifically)” (1987: 9). While Jones gave general superficial descriptions of musical performance and instruments of the drum ensemble, Avorgbedor centered his discussion on just two dance-drumming styles, *adavu* and *sovu*. Avorgbedor systematically describes and analyzes the structures of *adavu* and *sovu* using a multi-dimensional approach to facilitate understanding of how the music is
organized. Avorgbedor explains *adavu* as the most serious and esoteric of all Yeve dance-drumming and as a medium for heightened spiritual experience in the cult. *Adavu* according to Avorgbedor is "a moment during which magico-spiritual objects are brought out, and sometimes miraculous feats may be performed" (1987: 12). Unlike Jones, Avorgbedor acknowledges the existence of *davu* in his article as part of Yeve dance-drumming.

The problematic aspect of this article was that Avorgbedor does not mention where he conducted his research or how he got the information. Perhaps the article was based on several of his experiences witnessing Yeve performance in different parts of the Volta region or a choreographed staged version performed by one or more dance companies. This resonates with Agawu’s testimony about *adabatram* based on his Christian background and his father’s status as a pastor (1995: 37). Avorgbedor, like Agawu was a product of the missionary education that studied western music and also has extensive knowledge on traditional customs and ritual performances including that of the Yeve cult. This article could potentially be the result of his several experiences involving both his traditional and western musical knowledge and analyses.

Agordoh’s (1994) book, *Studies in African Music* discusses traditional and popular musical genres of Africa and discusses specific elements of music performance such as instrumentations, characteristics, uses of music and regional performances. A sub-section on religious music is devoted to the Yeve cult and its musical styles. This section is quite disappointing due to the fact that it is quite similar to Jones’s section on Yeve and, in fact, contains entire paragraphs derived from Jones’s book. Like Jones,
Agordoh’s section on Yeve and its music is a general survey with simple narratives from people explaining what the Ewe speaking people generally know about Yeve.

Locke (2010) is a concise article that discusses Yeve and its instrumental ensemble published in the Society of Music Theory Journal Vol. 16, (4). Titled “Yewevu in the Matric Matrix” the article focuses on five dance-drumming styles of the cult namely husago, davu, sogba/sohu, adavu and afovu that he studied with his instructor Godwin Agbeli between 1975 and 1977. Although Agbeli was not a Yeve initiate or affiliated with any Yeve shrine by inheritance, his arrangement, according to Locke, became very popular among folkloric groups in Ghana. Locke’s main objective in this article was to “demonstrate the value of analytic concepts that can become part of a theory for this style of African music. The intent is to model a way to think and talk about the structure of this music, as well as the aesthetic experience of listening to it and playing it” (2010: 1). In his analysis, Locke provided transcriptions on the basic patterns of stable instruments such as the gakogui (bell), axatse (rattle), kagan (first support drum) and further shows the relationship between response drums and the lead drums in a dialogue. A fascinating aspect of this article that facilitates easy understanding is the sound recording files that accompany the transcriptions. Locke recorded each instrument of the ensemble on separate tracks so that readers could listen to each instrument as they follow the transcriptions.

Locke’s several years of research in different parts of Ghana, specifically among the Ewe and the Dagbamba people, provided him with the basic analytical skills to analyze multifaceted drum pieces performed during Yeve ceremonies. Although Locke’s
analysis is oriented to music theory interested readers, others will also find fascinating the descriptions of structural organization and its performance.

Younge (2011) is a CD recording of Yeve dance-drumming titled, *Yeve: Ritual Music and Dance of A Secret Societies*. This recording featured the Yevesiwo (Yeve initiates and drummers) from Adagbledu, Dzodze at Mama Ahoewornu Yeve shrine in the Volta region of Ghana. The performance recorded was very clear and I was able to determine the type of instruments, dance-drumming styles, songs, rhythms and analyses of the performance. However, there are differences and variations in Yeve dance-drumming across the Volta region. The similarities are recognized from my analysis and the differences are noted. Despite the quality of the recordings themselves, the CD has no liner notes to give directions or a brief description on any of the dance-drumming pieces. It will be difficult for those who do not know about this music to relate to it without any guidance from the liner notes. Unlike Avorgbedor and Agordo, Younge clearly states the town he consulted for the recording and the shrine where the members agreed to be recorded.

As a native Ewe, drummer, dancer and a trained musician in both African and western musical traditions I understand the rigor and the challenges involved in researching a cult like Yeve. Unlike some social and publicly performed musical traditions, it takes the special skills and backgrounds of being an insider, most importantly a participant, to understand the organization of Yeve dance-drumming. In my case for example, I have performed with lots of dance-drumming groups both at social and religious events with the community and dance companies. During any communal events when I am not drumming I am dancing or playing a specific role. I am
also a native Ewe who fluently speaks my mother tongue and have in-depth understanding of traditional system of knowledge, values and practically involved in its implementation in terms of language, music and rituals. It is this backgrounds that facilitates my understanding of the rituals and the musical tradition of Yeve.

While Jones, Fiagbedzi, Avorgbedor, Agordoh and Younge have laid the foundations for carrying Yeve research to another level, their studies would have benefitted from the kind of first-hand ethnographic research advocated by Barz (2009) and Nettl (2005). The benefit of the researcher going to the field and participating is an ability to grasp the context in which people make the music, what they think of the music and conditions surrounding the organization of the music and the community’s response to the music. This kind of research is very tough and challenging both emotionally and spiritually as recounted by Fiagbedzi. However, as Agawu (2003) suggests, my background as native Ewe coupled with a vast knowledge in a variety of both social and religious dance-drumming performances facilitated my grasp of different rituals, dances, songs, modes of performances and linguistics skills for both cult language and the Ewe language.

Field Research and Methodology

The data gathering and interpretation for this study can be categorized into three major areas: (1) fieldwork collection and documentation (interviews, narratives and oral accounts); (2) participant-observation; and (3) transcriptions, transliterations, analyses and interpretations.
Field Research and Location

The field location as stated in the title of the study is Ave-Dakpa\textsuperscript{12} located on Ho-Aflao road in the southeastern part of the Volta region. Also, I must emphasize that the information collected for this study exists in oral tradition and involves the power of narration. Narratives, especially in oral cultures, are essential data of ethnography as in the case of Ave-Dakpa. Scholars such as Hood (1970), Seeger (1987), Nettl (1983, 2005), Locke (1992) and Chernoff (1979) among others shared their experiences in the cultures researched using the narratives of the people in their works as well as reflecting on their experiences during their research. Hence, narratives recorded during my field research and various interview sections constitute significant aspects of this work.

My field research on the Yeve cult and its practices informally started many years back with relatives and family members (both extended and immediate) whom I regularly visited at home or worked with on the farm. The opportunity of getting first-hand information from some of these practitioners is reflected in the popular Ewe phrases \textit{Devi tso do, ye dua amesime nu} or \textit{Devi tso do, ye wo na nue}. This simply means, “a child who likes to be sent or likes serving others (elders), always gets a gift.” If a child is respectful and always helps his/her parents, family members or elders in his society, the society grows to like him/her and be proud of him/her. Hence, what ever that child needs be it money, clothing or knowledge, he/she shall receive it, if not from parents it will come from someone from the family or the society. My relatives and family members contributed to this work by transmitting in-depth knowledge on Ewe traditional

\textsuperscript{12} The description of this town is detailed in chapter two of the dissertation.
religious practices, social values and customs to me since I was a child. The knowledge I acquired was also based on various testimonies from community members and elders. My own respectfulness toward elders and traditional values and my willingness to serve and relate to people anytime they needed my assistance helped establish trust within the community. These are values that came from my parents and I am proud to say they are with me. Indigenous knowledge became a foundation in understanding certain religious practices and norms during my fieldwork. I also have to mention that both of my grandfathers\(^\text{13}\) played significant roles in this processes. Hence, my relation with prominent elders, traditional ritual experts and knowledgeable community members greatly impacted and enriched my experience during this fieldwork.

**Interviews**

Organized fieldwork for this dissertation started in June of 2006 in Ave-Dakpa after my disappointments at Whuti, my hometown. Before starting any interviews Agbayiza Agbelifufu (my principal informant and the director of the local Yeve cult) and Mr. Prosper Awunyo\(^\text{14}\) introduced me and my purposed research in Ave-Dakpa to the head Chief, Togbi Nyamekor IV, Patrick Ahiabu (the assembly- mayor) sub-chiefs, elders and other political authorities. We also visited traditional religious leaders due to the spiritually challenging nature of my research. For security reasons, the two men also

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\(^{13}\) My mother’s father, Besa Baya was a regent and the family head in the Laga family who also served as the head advisor on traditional rituals for the late Togbi Doe Dzata. My father’s father, Otumfo Nyamuame was the *agbotadua*, for the late Togbi Tamakloe III of Whuti and also the chief consultant for rituals and war issues.

\(^{14}\) Prosper Awunyo was one of the elders who was at the engagement ceremony and initially spoke on my behalf to the high priest. Without him I would not have been accepted. Also, he arranged a room for me on his compound house, which is fenced with cement wall with secure gates so that my field equipment was safe and secured. Later, I got to know that he was related to my grandmother and that my grandmother took care of him when he was growing up in Galo Sota, a remote town close to Anloga in the Volta region.
accompanied me to the police headquarters in Ave-Dakpa where I registered myself and provided them with my contact information in case of any emergencies.

After presenting myself to the local authorities, I then had to go through another screening process with the traditional religious leaders of the area to gain approval for my research and to cleanse of all my recording devices. Agbayiza requested that all my recording devices had to undergo ritual and cleansing processes to enable me get perfect recordings and photographs of Yeve activities. For almost a week at Ave-Dakpa I went through these preparations to have the gods, deities or spirits approve of the recording instruments and myself so that I could begin my interviews and also be able to photograph deities and go to other sacred places. To paraphrase Agbayiza:

You are about to get into spiritual realm of the gods and must be emotionally prepared and your mind focused on the rules. This is not easy but the gods confirm you have a good clean heart and they will be with you. When I say do not take photograph or enter a particular site respect my word. You will not videotape or take photographs of everything but I will help you understand everything. As you walk with me the same time, as you walk with me throughout the town everyone knows that you are learning from me. If anyone bothers or threatens you just come talk to me. Did you hear me?” (Agbayiza June 29, 2006 and a similar statement was made again August 20, 2011).

After this initial week of preparations, I was ready to start my research without apprehension. Agbayiza explained to me that all the rituals and sacrifices of preparation allowed spirits and deities to thoroughly check my background and would free me from emotional and spiritual uncertainties. It is important to emphasize that different deities have rules related to the things they like and things they do not like. For instance, it is a taboo to commune with certain deities if you have had a sexual affair with someone’s spouse or have been involved in a high level robbery or a murder. In such cases, deities may reject a person’s sacrifice or not allow that person to kneel in front of a particular
god to make a request or ask for a blessing. It is often said in Ewe: *wo dzime me ko o; woa ‘si fo wu* literally meaning “the person’s heart is not clean”; or “there is stain (preferably blood) on his hand” meaning the person was involved in murder. Among the Yeve, such an offense is believed to result in severe consequences to the person and sometimes to his/her family. Such careful attention to ritual cleansing would not have been required for research into socio-recreational musical types in the area.

The second week of fieldwork started rigorously with interviews about the history of the town. Two elders, Mr. Awunyo and Togbi Kofi Ekpetor (the land chief) consistently told me that in order to understand the traditional religious groups in Ave-Dakpa, including Yeve, I would need to listen to the oral narratives about the migration of the ancestors and how Dakpa was founded. I must honestly say that there was no written record on the history of Ave-Dakpa people.\(^\text{15}\) Elders of the town learned and maintained their history through a variety of oral narratives.

During my fieldwork I arranged and met elders individually in their homes where I listened to their narratives about the town, migration accounts, occupation and their belief systems. Each interview session typically lasted between two and three hours with three follow-ups to check for consistency and accuracy. In the follow-ups I concentrated on parts of the interviews that were not clear and asked for clarification of the meanings of coded phrases and metaphors. Some of the discussion of metaphors and concepts helped me construct new questions. Throughout the interview sections, some leaders would answer my questions with songs. And I would ask, why that song?

\(^{15}\) Mr. Awunyo and I learned of a man whose father had reportedly written on the migration of the Ewe into the local area. Both Awunyo and I searched for this document on more than ten occasions over a period of five years. The man finally told us he could not find the written account.
It was obvious that some of the historical events that had occurred were not easily remembered apart from their inclusion in certain songs recounting historical events. For instance, one song tells how the Ave-Dakpa people were accidentally involved in the battle of Datsutagba in 1865 during their migration. Thus, by singing some of those songs they vividly remembered the event and the people who were involved. This happened many times during the interviews and underscored to me the importance of song for sustaining memory and oral history.

Besides the individual interviews, I also organized two other group interviews for selected elders in the form of a forum at the chief’s palace. The forum gave me an opportunity to gather more information, to ask more questions, and to compare versions of interviews that I had recorded. The forum became one of my greatest research moments. Not only did I learn the interesting histories of Ave-Dakpa but was also able to observe elders as they corrected misconceptions about some of the narratives and forged common agreements on specific narratives that actually justify the history of Ave-Dakpa. It was interesting and rewarding to observe how history was negotiated, revised and documented in such a social occasion. Comparing all the oral narratives, collected in one-on-one and group interviews, is is clear that almost all the elders have similar narratives of the history, migration accounts, settlements and the belief systems of Ave-Dakpa. Togbi Nyamekor IV and elders such as Prosper Awunyo, Togbi Kofi Ekpotor, Agbayiza Agbelifufu, Patrick Ahiabu (Assembly man) have tremendously contributed to the historical discourse and the precision of its reality.

I also conducted rigorous interviews with various traditional religious leaders and ritual experts on the Ave-Dakpa belief systems, deities, gods, ancestors and their roles
in the society as well as Yeve specifically. It is apparent that these interview sections were often wearisome and challenging since most of my questions related to peoples’ beliefs, their faith and their personal encounters. Agbayiza initially cautioned me that some people might not be willing to talk about their faith and personal relationships with their gods. Indeed, most Yeve members were scared to talk with me because of the oath they had sworn with their deities with regards to certain secrets. As such, they believed that disclosing those secrets would subject them to the wrath of the gods. Due to this uncertainty I respected their deeply felt beliefs and only interviewed those individuals who were freely willing to talk about their backgrounds and the consequences leading to becoming Yeve members. I interviewed some of the members in the presence of Agbayiza since he is the high priest of the cult. Other individuals consulted their gods to ask permission to talk with me on religious issues. Those that the deities allowed to be interviewed were interviewed and those that were not allowed were exempted. One of the female initiates, Dashi Logosu, informed me that she was asked to bring me to the shrine so that I could interview her in front of the deity. Therefore, the shrine is where I listened to her story. Basically, interviews with members of the Yeve cult and some religious leaders were partially determined in consultation with their deities. By permission, three Yeve members allowed me to directly document their interviews and report on them in my dissertation in order to give perspective to the readers of the consequences that led them to becoming Yeve members and also to demonstrate the power of the deities in choosing his/her members.

Besides my interviews in Ave-Dakpa, I also interviewed traditional scholars and individuals who have deep knowledge and understanding on Yeve practices in Dzodze,
Keta, Anloga, Whuti, Srogboe, Atorkor and Tegbi towns all located in the southeastern part the Volta region where Yeve is actively practiced. These interviews provided wider knowledge and a broader perspective on the Yeve practices and history. Although my research is not comparative of Yeve practices in different towns, I soon came to realize that Yeve was similar across the Volta region but contained local variations in the performance practices of certain rituals.

In September 2012, I received a travel grant from the Graduate School at the University of Florida that took me to the University of North Texas in Denton to interview Professor Midawo Alorwoyi, a high priest of the Yeve cult, chief drummer and the head Chief of Tsinu people in Afife, Ghana. Professor Midawo gave his perspective since he became a member and a chief drummer of the Yeve cult in Afiadenyigba. His narratives and experience validated the data gathered throughout my field research. I also visited Professor C. K Ladzekpo¹⁶ at University of California at Berkeley. I spent two weeks interviewing him and understanding the nature of traditional history and the concept and organization of religious musics.

**Participant-Observation**

Besides the interviews, participation and observation constitute significant aspects of the ethnographic research for this study. This became extremely important in understanding the practical components of *konuworthworwo* (ritual performances) *yeduduhwo* (types of dancing), *atsiauwo* (gestural movements) and *vufofowo* (drumming styles) practiced in the Yeve cult. Despite my preliminary initiation rituals, anytime I

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¹⁶ C. K. Ladzekpo is one of the Ladzekpo brothers who came to the United States in the early 1960s to introduce and establish Ghanaian traditional dance-drumming and cultural practices. He and his brothers were important personalities in the promotion and the dissemination of the knowledge system in performing dance-drumming of the Ewe speaking people. He is knowledgeable on Ewe traditional religious custom, values, and institutions, especially on those involving Yeve.
participated in a new activity or ritual I had to organize materials for a libation performance to ask permission from the deities so that I would not be denied the opportunity to observe or participate in the activity when it occurred. In reality, while a researcher can interview and gather lots of information, to participate in rituals and partake in what is being performed gives unique insights and experience. To enable me to comprehend the in-depth nature of certain complex rituals I became a *suborvi*, which means a servant. As a *suborvi* I was able to work closely with my principal informant Agbelifufu by helping him carry ritual objects, and bags of ritual materials. This also allowed me to follow him to religious events dressed in my own ritual cloth. Had it not been for the opportunities afforded this position, my understanding of the rituals would have been impossible.

A major distinction between Yeve performance and socio-recreational musical performance is that Yeve performance does not occur spontaneously. The dance-drumming of Yeve is not performed because someone simply wants to see the performance but rather as part of an event such as the funeral of a deceased member, an initiation, a graduation, as part of cleansing ceremonies, and at regular annual events. Therefore it could be frustrating for a researcher interested Yeve to learn that there may be only one performance of a particular ritual that will take place during an entire year. Because of this, one form of my participation was through private lessons I received from talented lead dancers, song leaders and drummers. Since my participation during public performances was not encouraged, I went to rituals to observe the performance and relate it to what I had been learning with the members in the cult house. Dancers and song leaders such as Kora Avudzivi, Dadzengo Logosu,
Avlesi Agbeli, Kora Vivor, Dashi Amenu, Gbeda Dzogblah and Amenutsi Sosoo and lead drummers like Tsale Agbelifufu and Togbinye Agbelifufu have played important roles as my instructors throughout my entire research. They taught me if not all, at least the basic and most important dance movements and gestures together with their meanings and relations to specific rituals. Sometimes the dances are based on the songs and not drum rhythms. Avle and Dashi instructed me with the skills and technical means they had acquired over many years into matters of tempo, free rhythm, strict timing. They also taught me many different songs and their surface and deeper meanings. This included songs that venerate a particular deity, spirit or god and the songs that are sung during specific dance-drumming styles.

From 2006 until the present Tsale and Torgbinye have remained my instructors in Yeve drumming. Tsale especially has instructed me in the various types of drum texts and language performed for each of the seven dance-drumming types of Yeve. Tsale not only enriched my drumming skills but also my knowledge about the organization of Yeve drumming, types of rhythms, techniques, drum texts that praise and provoke deities during specific moments in rituals and dance performances. Tsale also shared his esoteric knowledge about the deities around which he organizes his drum texts and rhythmic phrases closely in connection with a particular ritual event. Participating and observing the ritual forms and how they entwine with dance-drumming was remarkable and has given me new perspective for thinking about the ways people musically perform their rituals as Yeve members.

Restrictions and Ethics

Although certain religious traditions such as afa, brekete, hogbato occasionally allow non-member participation, in the Yeve cult participation is strictly for members and
restricted from ahevi (non-members). However, a Yeve member from another town can participate in a Yeve performance without any question, but out of respect the visitor must present him/herself to the high priests and priestesses before dancing as a means of exchanging greetings. If the priests and the priestesses already know the visiting member, this reinforces and strengthens relationships between the two local cults. It is also important to emphasize that, despite the rituals I underwent that qualified me to participate and observe various activities of the cult, on many occasions I was restricted and even forbidden from certain sites, sacred forests and during magico-spiritual moments. According to the Yeve belief system, this was done for my own safety and wellness. There were also restrictions to certain places I could not go by myself or at specific times of the day and night because those times and locations were reserved for the gods to indulge in certain activities for the benefit of the community. As such, everyone in the town (both Yeve members and non-members) respect that custom. In July 2006, my still photo camera got broken after photographing a deity I was not supposed to photograph. This deity was located in some thick bush almost half a mile from the house where I was staying. In my understanding of the instructions I received, I thought selected locations and a few deities mentioned were the only ones I should not visit at specific times. While on errands I decided to take a photograph of this huge tall deity. I took two photographs but the pictures were blank and the camera became very hot and I started feeling dizzy. I was lucky to see some farmers returning from a farm who realized that I was a stranger in the area. To my surprise, they already knew that I was studying with Agbayiza so they took me to one of their houses. I told Agbayiza what happened and he decided to perform sacrifices and prepare some herbs for me to drink.
My camera literally cracked and I had to buy a new one to continue my research. I will never forget that experience. I do not know what would have happened to me if those farmers had not come to my rescue. They cautioned me not to go there again even in the accompaniment of someone. This was event was clearly interpreted as an example of the consequences for going against Yeve customs.

In addition, Agbayiza and a few other priests discussed what I should and should not publish about Yeve in my dissertation. Agbayiza had me witness certain rituals without allowing them to be video taped just for the benefit of understanding the process. As such, some information that I obtained will not be documented in this dissertation as part of the agreement I made and out of respect for their customs. Scholars such as Agawu (2003) and Barz & Cooley (2009) have discussed the ethical issues that fieldworkers encounter during field research. Based on the contexts of those ethics with regards to the Yeve cult in Ave-Dakpa I agreed not to documents or publish materials I have been asked not to put in my dissertation.

Languages and Dialects

Language is crucial to all of the research I have conducted. Various scholars have emphasized the role of language in conducting field research, especially research conducted in non-native languages (see Agawu 2003). All of my interviews were done in Ewegbe, (Ewe) except for small portion of interviews where a few people unconsciously interrupted with English phrases. The Ave people speak a variant of Ewe that is different from the Anlo-Ewe (my mother tongue) but could be understood by an attentive native listener.\(^\text{17}\) Also, as mentioned earlier, the Yeve cult has its own

\(^{17}\) I will discuss in detail the components of this language in chapter 2 with specific examples.
language spoken by initiates under seclusion. Therefore throughout my field research I was dealing with these three versions of the Ewe language; Anlogbe (Ewe language spoken by the Anlo people), Avegbe (variation of Ewe dialects spoken by the Ave people) and Yevegbe (the cult language). It was not difficult for me to understand the Ave Ewe dialects because most of my friends at college spoke similar dialects except that a few words that were confusing. The cult language however, was very difficult and challenging but I have been taking lessons on the basic phrases, numerals and terminologies since 2006 in addition to those I learned from my relatives when I was younger. Despite the challenges in learning the cult language, there were also similarities in certain names and words in relation to the Ewe language itself. Thanks to the family of Agbayiza who volunteered many hours in instructing me, I was able to interact in that language. However, I sometimes struggled with understanding some of the statements made.

**Research Assistants**

I was lucky to have the services of two great research assistants who played significant roles throughout my field research in Ave-Dakpa. They are Torgbinye Agbelifufu and Fianu Matthew (aka Tomori). Torgbinye is the son of Mr. Fianu and was my student at the University of Ghana and now teaches music and cultural studies at Abor Senior High School. Torgbinye is very powerful physically and spiritually and served as a guard as well as a research assistant. He has contributed tremendously to my understanding of rituals, language (especially the Ave variant of the Ewe language) and guidance through every corner of the town. Through his popularity many people who were reluctant to be interviewed became my best friends.
Mr. Fianu also contributed a lot especially from his language backgrounds and his ability to speak Ave dialect, Anlo Ewe and English. Sometimes, when I thought I understood everything Mr. Fianu would put me back on track if I was thinking about a concept in Anlo terms and not the way Ave people understand. When I am in the United States, Mr. Fianu substitutes and records event in collaboration with Agbayiza and Torgbinye so that I can understand events that I was not personally able to attend. Also, in case of any changes he will explain them to me. Thanks to Internet availability and Skype, I am able to talk one-on-one with Mr. Fianu with detailed explanation of the coverage. These two gentlemen have been a great support in all aspects of this research.

Data Transcription, Transliteration, Analyses and Interpretation

Fieldwork for this study is nearly entirely recorded in Anlogbe (Anlo Ewe) and Avegbe (Ave dialect/language). Thus, audio and video recordings have been transcribed and transliterated from these languages into English. It is very obvious that some words, phrases or sentences - what is known among the Ewe speaking people as adagana (proverbs and metaphors), (see Kwashikuma 1991) – to some extent cannot find an appropriate meaning in English. I have given the closest examples of those phrases and proverbs and cite examples of how they might be thought of in English.

In the case of drumming, I have tried to shift from what most scholars have done with West African drumming by providing descriptive information on the sizes, heights, measurements of sticks and basic techniques of drumming. Locke (1987) discussed the accurate techniques of holding drumming sticks while Pantaleoni (1972) discussed the techniques (what hand is used for a particular tone) in playing sogo and atsimevu in Atsia. It is also evident that traditional drum performance cannot be completely or
accurately transcribed onto paper because the perception of the music in the mind of the master drummer is unknown to the analyst. The transcriptions presented and analyzed in this study concentrate on the principal drum patterns on each dance-drumming and the drum texts that were associated with them. I have not transcribed the entire performances. However, consistent patterns such as the *gakogui* (bell) *axatse* (rattle), *kagan* (fist support drum) have been transcribed. In addition, patterns such as introductory phrases, lead drum patterns and their responses have been notated in a way that it can be played and sung using *vugbe* (drum mnemonics). I have transcribed the drum patterns using common western musical notion because this is the most commonly used in music scholarship and communicates discrete information about the musical structure and performance practices.

With regard to songs, there are songs in free rhythms and strict rhythms. I have transcribed the songs with their indigenous harmonies. I have decided to transcribe all songs in the key of C major to facilitate comparison among the repertoire. All transcribed melodies have their verbal text inserted with the literal and deeper interpretations on the bottom of the pages. Both the songs and the drumming were transcribed and then notated using the software Finale 2009.

With dance, I mainly concentrated on the analyses of movements and the interpretation of certain gestures. I did not employ any Laban analysis in this section. However, I have attempted to interpret the dances based on traditional esoteric knowledge of men and women who have vast experience with these dances and of the Yeve cult. Despite my knowledge in the study of dance, I was cautioned not to use

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18 See Anku (1999)
heavily academic terminologies to interpret the Yeve dances. I have critically been guided and instructed how to study, analyze and interpret each dance piece to represent how the Yeve cult in Ave-Dakpa performs their dances.

**Equipment**

Throughout my entire research I have used different digital equipment for data collection and processing. The equipment used since 2006 until now include: 60x optical zoom DCR-SR68 Sony Handycam (80GB inbuilt hard drive and memory cards), 20x optical zoom DCR-HC26 Handycam (with MiniDV tapes), Sony-MZ-N707-MD audio recorder, MacBook Pro computer (also has an option for recording) and 10MP Nikon Coolpix L100 still camera.

The video and audio recordings facilitated my interviews, songs and analyses of drumming and dancing. The photographs from Nikon 10MP Nikon Coolpix L100 camera have provided evidence of people interviewed, ritual objects, chiefs and elders, musicians, dancers, singers, types of instruments and sections of performances. Besides all these recording devices, I have also carried an external hard drive to transfer all recorded files in case of any emergency or unexpected situation(s).

**Limitations**

One of the major impediments of this study encountered during research was the limited access of audio and video sources for study. The available texts found in the libraries were discussed as literature reviews. It was also difficult to get audio and video recordings of the Yeve musical practices perhaps due to the restrictions of the cult. As part of my field research, I went into the archives and recoding departments of Ghana Broadcasting Cooperation (GBC), Ghana Television (GTV), TV3 station, Metro Television (MetroTV) but was unsuccessful in finding any recordings on Yeve. I further
went to other archives of the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana and local libraries at Keta, Anloga, Ho and including the center for national culture. Unfortunately there were no recordings of Yeve cult and their musical ceremonies. Generally, in all the institutions, libraries and centers I visited there were countless number of social musical events recorded and only a few traditional religious types but no Yeve.

**Chapter Overviews**

Chapter 1 of this study introduces the research context and my own history with this research in my own hometown, Whuti and an unexpected connection with the town Ave-Dakpa, where I ended up. It also presents the methodology used in acquiring the information and how it is presented in this study.

Chapter 2 provides detailed historical accounts on the town of the Ave-Dakpa and its peoples. The chapter traces the historical origin and myth relating to the migration accounts from Glime or Hogbe historically known among the Ewes as Notsie through Bakpa and to their present settlement in Ave-Dakpa. It also discusses Amesikpe Za (festival) as the principal annual festival organized to commemorate the migration and the survival of ancestors and their roles as founders of Ave-Dakpa. The chapter further describes the demographics, economic and agricultural, major occupations, language, religions and different cultural practices of the people. Known for their power and religiosity the chapter examines the belief systems of the people in general and in relation to a variety of traditional religious groups in the town.

Chapter 3 investigates the origin of the Yeve, their cult and the various forms of practices associated with it. It also discusses and argues for Yeve as a form of religion and describes the various components of its cult and transformations. It also gives
detailed descriptive accounts of membership and initiations and critically examines factors that enable victimized non-members to become members. The chapter further describes hierarchies, types of ritual cloths, specific ritual objects, deities and spirits and their functions in and outside the cult.

Chapter 4 discusses principal ritual practices and order in the cult. It explains ritual processes such as tsifodi (libation), alagadzedze (defilement), alagalele (rescue process of defiled members) adzaletsilele (ritual performed for the deceased before he/she is buried) and others that are central and vital to the customs and values of the cult. Besides the ritual forms, the Yeve cult also extends its services to the community by protecting the right of people and eradicating criminals from the society. By that, this chapter discusses the Yeve cult as a powerful force and mechanisms for crime prevention in Ewe societies by the wrath of the thunder god, So.

Chapter 5 begins describes the general organization of Yeve dance-drumming performance. It discusses the significance of drummers and their status, the training of drummers and types of musical instruments used in performance. It also presents transcriptions of different rhythmic patterns and their speech mode through the use of drum texts. There are seven dance-drummings performed as a suite namely husago, adavu, aforvu, ako, sovu, avlevu and davu. This chapter presents and analyzes the meaning of the drum texts performed in this suite and discusses how the drum texts ignite specific rituals and send performers into the realms of the spirits and ancestors. Some of the drummings are specific to particular deities. As such, critical examinations have been given to those pieces together with an in depth discussion on the distinctive themes or rhythmic patterns in context.
Chapter 6 concentrates on dances performed during Yeve events and as such contributes to the understanding of the previous chapter since music and dance are inseparable. Although most of the dances seem to have basic movements of *agbadza* (the oldest social and funeral dance of the Ewes) their energy varies from one dance to the other giving it new meanings and expressions in performance. The chapter further analyzes important gestures and interprets them on physical and spiritual levels and their relationship with the drum patterns.

Finally, chapter 7 explores the ranges of Yeve songs that accompany both drumming and ritual performances. It further examines the song texts and exposes the educational and moral values embedded in its performance for both Yeve members and the community. This chapter also lists and transcribes songs that venerate deities, spirits, ancestors and advises on the ethics of the cult. The chapter finally presents transcriptions of the songs on a western staff with the texts inserted in it to facilitate the understanding of its performance and structure.

Chapter 8 is a conclusion that summarizes and emphasizes the importance of this research and its relevances. It explains the significance of Ave-Dakpa history, religious beliefs and the relationship between the Yeve cult members and the general populace. It also explains the services the Yeve cult provides to the town and individual members irrespective of their religious background. The Chapter concludes with the author’s personal experience with Yeve and how artistic and cultural knowledge contribute to this dissertation.
CHAPTER 2
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF AVE-DAKPA

Location and People

Dakpa is a small town located on the main Aflao-Ho road in the southeastern part of the Volta region in Ghana. It is approximately 40-45 miles north to Ho, the capital city of the Volta region and a little over 50 miles south to Aflao near the Ghana-Togo boarder. The name Dakpa is a shortened form of Dakpalawo meaning “the people who shaved the hair.” The name Dakpalawo came as a form of identity during ancestors’ migration that is discussed below. The “Ave” that precedes Dakpa (Ave-Dakpa) refers to the original nature of the landscape or the environment before the Ewe ancestors inhabited it. In Ewe language Ave literally means “forest.” Thus before the Dakpa ancestors reached this area the entire landscape was a forest. In modern times one can still see lots of forestry areas within the Ave district. Thus, the towns within the district have Ave preceding them. For example other towns within the Ave district are: Ave-Atanve, Ave-Xevi, Ave-Havi, Ave-Alagbe, Ave-Afiadenyigba and Ave-Adzanu among others.

In late 2011, Dakpa became the district headquarters of the Ave-District with a population of roughly two thousand six hundred (2,600) residents based on 2008 national census. The town is grouped in three localities namely Agudza, Avenu and Dzita. These names are assigned to the areas to geographically understand and help others to easily get around the town. There are three main religions practiced in Dakpa: Traditional, Christianity and Islamic religions. On the average, 65% of the populations are traditional religious practitioners, 25% Christians, 0.2% Muslims and 9.8% do not
belong to any of these religions. The religious practices are discussed later in this chapter.

Figure 2-1. Togbi Nyamekor IV – Chief of Ave-Dakpa in regalia at his palace

Figure 2-2. Togbi Ekpetor III (in white cloth) – The land Chief of Ave-Dakpa
Migration Narratives of Ave-Dakpa

The migration of the ancestors of Ave-Dakpa was an intriguing history to learn. Migration narratives are found in oral testimonies collected among groups of Ave-Dakpa elders. These various narratives have been compared thoroughly and approved for accuracy by the elders. Below, I present a synthesized account of the migration derived from the narratives I collected.

The migration account of the people of Ave-Dakpa is similar to that of the Israelites crossing the Red Sea under the leadership of Moses as described in the Bible (see Exodus chapter 14). Similar to all other Ewes, the ancestors of Ave-Dakpa migrated from Glime also known as Notsie, the ancestral home of the Ewes. Several oral accounts in addition to scholars of Ewe history, literature and cultures such as Amenumey (1986; 1989; 1997), Green (2002), Agbodeka (1997), Laumann (2005), Lawrence (2005), Nukunya (1997), Kumassah (2009), Gbolonyo (2009) Gayibor and Aguigah (2005), and Mamattah (1976) among others maintain that the Ewe speaking people migrated from Notsie. Legend has it that the migration was a result of inhuman and unbearable tasks the king Togbi Agorkorli I imposed on the people. For example, it is recounted that he ordered the people to make a rope out of clay mixed with broken glasses and thorns, and relentlessly punished those who did not obey him. Although everyone at Notsie was under the general rule of Togbi Agorkorli I, various groups of people had their own local leaders who plotted an escape. The plan led to the migration of various groups out of Notsie. Unlike the Anlo-Ewe people, this group of people (Ave-Dakpa ancestors) took a different route during the migration under the leadership of four legendary leaders namely Togbi Kutor, Kofi Ekpetor, Atta Kofi and Ashagbor who were known to possess a variety of spiritual powers. Oral history recounts that they stayed
briefly among the Akuamu people who were then ruling part of the Eweland on the boarder of Volta and Eastern regions. Recounting this history, Amenumey cited Sorkpor (1966) about the Akwamu’s domination of the Ewes, especially the Anlo people. He writes: Akwamu succeeded in subjugating not only the Gas and some other tribes West of the Volta but also most of all the Ewe tribes east of the Volta including the Krepis…and the Awunas (Anlo); also there is sufficient evidence particularly the Awuna tradition that at one time the Awuna were under the orbit of Akwamu domination” (1986: 32).

The next place they settled was among a Mafi town called Mafi Kutibolor. The Mafi area is around Adidome in the Volta region close to the Lower Volta Bridge popularly known as Sogakope Bridge. According to Togbi Kofi Ekpetor III Mafi was a twin city and the ancestor of Ave-Dakpa settled in the geographically central part of Mafi Kutibolor. Traditionally, any visitor or stranger who moves into a new town is easily recognized and must establish their relationships by introducing themselves to members of the town and are accompanied by elders who introduce their presence to the chief of the town. As such, Dakpa ancestors and their multitude have established themselves nicely to the community both with the citizens and the royal authorities.

During the stay among the Mafi people, the four ancestors of Ave-Dakpa committed atrocities against one of their neighbors that resulted in fights between the Ave-Dakpa ancestors and the original inhabitants of Mafi people. The four legendary ancestors Togbi Kutor, Kofi Ekpetor, Atta Kofi and Ashagbor met separately to deliberate on issues concerning the groups they were in charge of. These gatherings, according Mr. Awunyo, took place in the bush so that no one overheard their
discussion. Additionally, the four men had different *dzokawo* (charms). For instance, some had *zigi dzo* (a type of charm or magic that can make one vanish or turn in to something else – animal, leaves or some object), *amlima tsisti* (a charm to conjure something up) and *gbogbome nukpolawo* (a charm for perceiving spirituality). These four men regularly tested each other with different charms and magic. One day they were gathered again in their deliberations and saw a pregnant woman slowly walking to her farm on another bush road. The four men started speculating about the gender of the baby in the woman’s womb. Some predicted a boy, others a girl, and another person predicted twin boys based on the size of the woman’s stomach. All of a sudden, there ensued arguments between the four elders that led to a bet about the baby. How would this result be determined? The four men walked to the direction of the pregnant woman. When they got to her they attacked her and operated on the woman and she died. However, they realized the baby in her womb was a boy. When they found out that the baby was a boy they wrapped the dead woman and put her in *hotome.*¹ An old custom practiced before the migration of Ave-Dakpa group from Notsie was that when people die they shave half of their head bald before they bury them. As the pregnant woman died the four men shaved half of her hair before she was hidden. Unfortunately for these Ave-Dakpa leaders, while this operation was going on there was a boy who was scared and hid himself in the bush and witnessed all that happened to the pregnant woman and how her hair was shaved.

Two weeks after the incidence, there were announcements throughout the town of a missing pregnant woman who had left her house and never returned. Struggling

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¹ *Hotome* is Ave word to describe a thick bush are or environment
with this secret, the boy who had witnessed the action of the men went to the chief’s palace and reported all that he saw and described the location where the woman was hidden to the chief and his royal men. According to Togbi Ekpeter III, the boy said, *amedzro siwo va dze mi la, wu funo le agble mota, kpa da afa ne, he tsoe de hotome.* This literally means “the visitors who have come to settle with us in the town, murdered the pregnant woman, shaved half of her hair bald and hid her in the thick bush” (interview with Togbi Ekpeter III, April 15, 2012). On hearing this tragic news the chief gathered his counselors to arrest the four Ave-Dakpa leaders and possibly kill them and take the rest of their people captives. Even before this tragic news was reported to the chief and his council the ancestors of Ave-Dakpa foresaw the consequences of their actions and secretly planned an escape before the town was aware of their evil deed. Deep in the night the Ave-Dakpa migrants escaped in small numbers from Mafi Kutibolor while their four leaders stood guard physically and spiritually.

After a long deliberation the chief of Mafi Kutibolor organized his warriors and brave men to surround the territory where Ave-Dakpa migrants were residing and set part of their property ablaze with the idea of starting a fight. Throughout this operation they consistently referred to the four men as “dakpalawo,” the people who shaved the hair of the woman. Oral accounts maintain that they did not find anyone in their location or compound area. Mafi-Kutibolor warriors started searching every possible route to find the Ave-Dakpa leaders and their groups. Finally, they found a few Ave-Dapka who were already dead from exhaustion and others with severe injuries caused by walking through the dangerous forest. The warriors finally heard their enemies lamenting around the Mafi-Bakpa river where the Ave-Dakpa people had been stranded because there
was no means to cross the river. From a distance, the Ave-Dapka heard the sounds of
the Mafi-Kutibolor warriors pursuing them. As the Ave-Dakpa people were about to
surrender to Mafi-Kutibolor warriors, Togbi Kutor, the most spiritually powerful among
their leaders moved a few distance from the rest of the group to pray to the gods and
deities. According to oral history, Togbi Kutor heard a voice instruct him to put his
walking stick into the river. This was the stick that he often used to protect the group
during difficult and precarious situations. This time all hope seemed to be lost because
Mafi-Kutibolor warriors were close and ready to fight. Acting according to what the gods
commanded Togbi Kutor walked to the river and prayed for the second time and dipped
his walking stick into the Bakpa river. There appeared a huge rock in the river unfolding
to the other end of its shore. With no hesitation, Togbi Kutor led his people across the
rock. As the Ave-Dakpa people walked on the rock the Mafi-Kutibolor warriors chased
them onto that same rock to capture them. Togbi Kutor evoked the gods again and the
rock slowly disappeared thereby causing the entire Mafi-Kutibolor warriors to perish into
the middle of the deep river.

The magical rock on which they walked across the Bakpa river appeared again
and led them safely to their present home named Ave-Dakpa. The rock was named
Amesikpe meaning, “the rescued rock.” This huge rock still exists and is believed to
work mysteriously to protect the entire Ave people anytime it is invoked appropriately.
Amesikpe became a trusted rock and a major god for which Ave people especially Ave-
Dakpa inhabitants.

Several oral accounts of Dakpa chiefs and elders testify that the ancestors who
survived the migration were further instructed by the gods to establish shrines and cults
to protect, intercede and alert Ave-Dakpa in times of danger. The Yeve cult is one among the many shrines that was instituted in Ave-Dakpa for this purpose. This was how the town Ave-Dakpa was formed with strong religious beliefs rooted in the legacy of the ancestors’ spirituality through divine protection of Amesikpe, the rescued stone. Every year a migration festival is celebrated in honor of the ancestors and the significance of Amesikpe in the life of the people.

Also, the name Dakpa derived from how the four legendary leaders shaved the deceased pregnant woman’s hair before she was hidden in hotome. The name became attached to the town based on the history of what happened during the peoples’ migration journey. Therefore, dakpalawo became shortened to Dakpa and the town became known as Ave-Dakpa.

An Invocation of a State Ave-Dakpa

Ave-Dakpa became one of the towns in the southeastern part of the Volta region of Ghana. Like Ave-Dapka, each other town within the southeastern territory of the Anlo State has its own history of origin recounted through oral narratives. For instance, the town Anlo or Anloga was named based on the statement one of the Ewe leaders Togbi Wenya made during the migration journey. Togbi Wenya was the legendary leader who led the Anlo people from Notsie to their present settlement. When he was tired and he could not move further he said, nye la me nlo de afisia meaning “I am shrunk or curl here I could not move further.” Therefore when a person wants to know about Anloga he has to understand it from historical perspective especially how the people migrated from Notsie.

Each town is established on a particular philosophy or on important occurrences. Oral narratives explaining the philosophy and the occurrences primarily express the
hope and aspirations of the people. The philosophies are occasionally invoked to awaken and refresh the memory of the community members. The invocation, which is mostly in the colloquial Ewe language, metaphor or in some coded phrases, reflects the peoples’ philosophy, character and ethics. As such the name of the town is invoked in those phrases. This is also true of the town Ave-Dakpa. The name Ave-Dakpa popularly known as “Dakpa” is invoked based on chronicles of events that happened during the migration and is sometimes played on the *agblovu* (the Ewe talking drum) and sometimes recited orally. It is not however, played or recited for fun or used as a memorized verse during social occasions. It is played or recited at important ceremonial events in the words below.

1. *Dakpa sovi aga* Dakpa, the sufferer (servant/town)
2. *Mina misi blukutu* Let us all unite
3. *Gbo de, gbo tsi* The goat went but has not returned
4. *Ale yi, ale gbo* The sheep went and returned
5. *Dunome mase menya* A town you live in without comprehending its affairs
6. *Eso wo nyidi me* A horse’s groin
7. *Makemake kuo ke* One dares it not
8. *Ekpo le dzi* There is a hill atop it
9. *Ewe le ‘gome* There is a hole beneath it
10. *Ewe le ‘gome na, na, naa* The bottom hole is evermore there

Below is a brief explanation of how the invocation translates practically in the peoples’ custom and way of life. I base this explanation on the deep knowledge and historical understandings of Togbi Ekpetor III and Mr. Awunyo, whose information I translated into English.

1. *Dakpa sovi aga* literally means “Dakpa the sufferer or suffering servant.” This adage primarily makes reference to the four legendary Ave-Dakpa ancestors Togbi Kutor, Togbi Ekpetor, Togbi Ashiagbor and Atta Kofi. It recounts the suffering of these leaders throughout the migration journey as a memory and part of Ave-Dakpa history. It also pays tributes to the group members who died during the journey and those who made to land of Ave-Dakpa but are now ancestors.
2. *Mina misi blukutu* means “let us all unite.” This is a powerful proverb for the people of Ave-Dakpa. Despite individual, family or religious differences that may exist, the people reflect on history of how their forefathers struggled before establishing the town. As such, the town unites one and encourages the youth not to see differences but work together for the development of the town.

3. *Gbo de, gbo tsi* translates “the goat went but never returns.” The “goat” in Ave-Dakpa custom symbolizes a person who thinks they are wise and knows a lot with a self-seeking attitude. The “goat” is also considered coward because he fears for his life and he does not like to make tough decisions among other things. This adage comes into play during the decision-making at Notsie to escape under King Agorkoli’s rule. Oral account has it that a few people among the group did not want to join the escape group and be caught. If they were caught the punishments would have been unbearable and inhuman. Togbi Ekpetor III describes a goat as an inquisitive animal that likes to look critically into something. The people who decided to stay were rather severely punished for the action of the escape group. The phrase therefore categorizes these people as perished ones.

4. *Ale yi, ale gbo* means, the sheep went and returns back.” Unlike the concept of the goat, the sheep symbolizes people who acknowledge life and are ready to make changes. They are open to ideas and advice and are ready to implement the advice with the hope of making a difference. In relation to the goat, the sheep are the people who listened to the advice of their elders and escaped. They understand the situation as one of life and death; where “life” meant not being caught and “death” being caught. Therefore those who listen to the advice of their leaders did not perish and are represented by the sheep that went and returned.

5. *Dunome mase emenya*, meaning, “a town one lives in without comprehending its affairs.” This sentence instantly portrays the nature of the town and can be analyzed in different situations. The sentence is also part of the Anlo State invocation as well (see Kumassah 2009).

6. *Esor wo nyidi me*, meaning “the groin or abdomen of a horse.” This part of a horse is used by the Ave-Dakpa people to reference “authority and ownership.” *Nyidi me* is actually the hidden part between the abdomen and the thighs of a horse. It is believed that when a person places something there it is safe, secure and no one can touch it or steal it. It is only a person who owns something who can place it there and no other person. In context, Ave-Dakpa ancestors according to oral history founded the land on which people reside until now. They therefore believe that no one can take the land from them because they own it. Additionally, *Amesikpe*, the fervent god that rescued Ave-Dakpa ancestors came down through the spiritual leadership of the four legendary ancestors of Ave-Dakpa. The significance of this phrase is to hail Ave-Dakpa as the authorities and owners, more importantly considered the head in all things. Coincidentally, it was this phrase that was considered in review of Ave history why Ave-Dakpa became the district headquarters of the entire Ave district.
7. *Makemake kuo ke* literally translates “no one dares it [the town] not.” This adage can also be translated in many contexts and situations. However, here this invocation relates to the town itself and its people. It is true that Ave-Dakpa is one of the oldest and smallest towns in the Ave district. Ave-Dakpa is also known as a center of peoples’ spirituality. In terms of supernatural powers, charms and incantations the town is spiritually and secretly on alert. For instance, if anyone plots to destroy a certain part of the town the spiritual authorities will foresee the event and cause the person’s arrest. This arrest can be in a form of charming the person into confession or subjecting the person to the wrath of the thunder god. It is a small wonderful town but at the same time precarious. If a person treats the local residents nicely the person will see the good side of them but when a person maltreats them they see the opposite side. As such, no one provokes them.

8, 9. and 10. *Ekpo le dzi, ewe le ‘gome* meaning “there is hill atop it [the town] and a hole beneath it [the town]. This is a metaphor that simply cautions the individuals “to be careful and watch out” in the town. Practically, a person should know how to probe or interfere into the affairs of Ave-Dakpa and its people. This warning is usually given to strangers who like to pass judgments without investigation and to political leaders who use their power to impose their own way without the consideration of citizens. This individual can easily be a victim (of any kind) to the town physically or spiritually. The two phrases are threats and can possibly result to loss of human life. *Na, na, naa* is just an emphasis that what ever is planned will surely happen and also give stress the entire invocation as a description of Ave-Dakpa and its people.

**Belief System and Religious Practices**

There are three main categories of religion practiced in Ave-Dakpa: Christianity, Islam, and African traditional religions. Participation in traditional religion is relatively large and involves a majority of the people. Christianity represents a fairly large community but has fewer members than traditional religious believers. Muslims represent the smallest religious community in Ave-Dakpa. However, during certain ceremonies and events it is difficult to know who actually is a Muslim or traditional believer. As a small town, people tend to support each other within the community. As such an individual may wear the clothing of other religious groups especially in the case of Muslims who wear those clothes to support and perhaps with the purpose to increase the Muslims number during a particular event. For instance, most Christians and
traditional believers do not have specific attire in Ave-Dakpa except for Yeve people who have their own identity through the type of beads and necklaces they wear. Muslims on the other hand, wear long dresses with their women covering their hair or head with scarfs. They do not wear shirts that are front-opened. In Ave-Dakpa a few people wear Muslim clothing although they are not Muslims. In my conversation with a few people in the town it was explain to me that they only do that to support a particular group or religion. Despite the various religious backgrounds represented in Ave-Dakpa, there is a strong feeling of community in the town.

**Christianity**

Similar to other parts of the world, Christianity in Ave-Dakpa is divided into various denominations such as Presbyterian, Catholic and Pentecostal or Charismatic churches. The Christian denominations in the town are the Roman Catholic Church (R.C), Assemblies of God, Church of Pentecost, New Covenant Church, World Mission Church, Sitsofe Church, Brotherhood Church, Christ Apostolic Church, Church of Christ and Global Evangelical Presbyterian Church. All these churches worship the Almighty God through Jesus Christ the savior who intercedes and sends human requests to God, his Father.

It is difficult to get information regarding when the churches were first established. However, from most accounts, the Catholic Church is perhaps the oldest church that was established in Ave-Dakpa. These churches have their own doctrines and schedules of worship. However, during funerals, engagements and wedding ceremonies all Christian churches come together to celebrate as a community of Christians without any of them imposing their doctrines on the other.
The various churches mentioned organize bible studies sessions to teach the members of the congregations the word of God. The bible studies take place twice a week. There are also various groups in the church such as men’s fellowship, women’s fellowship, youth groups, singing bands, church choirs and prayer warriors. Each of these groups within the church has a specific day and times they meet and rehearse for Sunday morning service where they all perform. The duration of the church services last between three to four hours starting from 9:00am or 9:30 am to 1:00pm.

Islam

Islamic religion, according to some, is presumed to have arrived around the mid- or late-1970s. It started with a few Muslim traders who sold cloths or fabrics for sewing shirts, pants and suits. They normally come from Togo, Dzodze Denu, Aflao and other places where these products are relatively cheap and they sell it to others and make more profit. Some of them later rented small stores to serve as warehouses for their supplies and also as a location to pray. As more trade continued with the town, it attracted more Muslims. Although there is no mosque in Ave-Dakpa, local Muslims go to each other’s houses to perform prayers.

The Muslims reside at Zongo, a Ghanaian term referring to a residential area of Muslims. There is only one mosque located in the neighboring town called Ave-Afiadenyigba, three miles away. Muslims in Ave-Dakpa leave for Ave-Afiadenyigba every Friday for communal worship. For the other days of the week, they stay with their house-to-house worship. The Muslims believe in Allah and send requests to Allah through his messenger prophet Mohamed.
Traditional Religion

Traditional religion and its practices started in Dakpa by the Ewe ancestors who founded the town. The traditional worshipers strongly believe in an Almighty God and are knowledgeable about him and his works. They also believe that God is very far from his people and therefore in need intermediaries such as Mohamed and Jesus.

Similar to the other Ewes, there are three major types of traditional worship in Ave-Dapka. These are vodu (deities) tro (spirits) and togbeawo (ancestors). Scholars of African religion have extensively discussed the role of deities, spirits, ancestors and their relationship to man and God. Deities are conceptualized as visible images that are consulted. They can be carved, mounted or exist as a kind of sacred grove (see Blier 1989). Individuals also possess personal deities in the form of clay figures, specific stones or other objects (see Rosenthal 1999). Spirits on the other hand are not normally visible but can pay visits to individuals. Describing the nature of spirits Mbiti says, “spirits are invisible, but make themselves visible to human beings” (1990: 78). As such some of these deities and spirits have shrines and cults in their honor. Examples of the shrines and cult the deities are attached to in Ave-Dakpa are mamiwata shrine, koku cult, amesikpe, adzima, ablode and Yeve cult. There is also an important deity that protects and guides the town known as du-legba – the god of the crossroad. The du-legba is Ave-Dakpa’s community deity that is consulted on regular bases when things are going wrong with the town. For instance, du-legba is consulted when there is an

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3 See Friedson (2009) and many other
epidemic of disease affecting everyone in the community. The *du-legba* gives advice for what should be done to resolve the situations.

Ancestral veneration is also important in Ave-Dakpa. The people believe in the existence of *togbeawo* (ancestors) and consider them as advisors. Ancestors are not considered to be any dead person however, they are those who led a good life and have contributed to impact human beings with work, life, character and spiritual life. For example, murderers, thieves, cruel people, irresponsible people, greedy people and those who badly hurt a community cannot be venerated as ancestors when they die.

The deities, spirits and the ancestors are worshipped through offerings and sacrifices. The sacrifices and offerings are sacred gifts and sometimes it can be a specific animal that is use for the sacrifice. Each morning the individuals pray and commit their daily activities into the hands of these deities and ask of their guidance and blessings. They strongly believe that the deities and ancestors are intermediaries who send their requests to the Almighty God.

It is important to note that people in Ave-Dakpa live as a closely-knit community and treat each other with respect regardless of differing religious background. It is no doubt that the missionary attitude towards other regions especially traditional religion still creates hatred between the two religions and partly weaves into the peoples’ life. For example, in some communities when a traditional religious believer greets a Christian he/she does not respond because the traditional believer is considered ungodly. With these differences that I have personally witnessed in Ghana and in the Volta region my observation is that there is not strong religious discrimination in Ave-Dakpa.
**Occupation**

The major occupation in Ave-Dakpa is farming and trading. Others are fishing, weaving and operation of local restaurants popularly referred to as chop-bar. Some of the community members who were educated and certified at teachers training colleges became school teachers who are employed to teach in Primary, Junior High and Senior High schools in Ave-Dakpa.

There is large scale and small-scale farming in Ave-Dapka. Large-scale farmers grow a variety of crops for profit. They send their products to local food processing companies and then to competitive large markets. The small-scale farmers on the other hand grow specific crops primarily for their own consumption. However, if the crops grow very well and they surprisingly have bumper harvest they sell a small portion in the local Ave-Dakpa market. The money earned from selling crops is invested in buying other types of foodstuffs needed at home or sometimes spent on clothing. Farming in general at Ave-Dakpa starts during raining season: June through October. The common food crops grown are bli (corn), te (yam) agbeli (cassava), nagote (sweet potatoes) akodu (banana), bladzo (plantain), ofonu (sugarcane), tadi (pepper), tomatre (tomatoes), ama/gboma/kontomre (a types of spinach/collard green) and ede-gble (planting of palm trees). Products such as corn, cassava, yam, plantain and sweet potatoes are smoked, boiled or fried and sold at the roadside. Corn and cassava are also preserved and milled into bliwo or amoku and agbelimo (corn-dough and cassava-dough respectively) for preparing banku and akple which are staple food of the Ewe people. Palm trees in Ghana bear lot of fruits. The fruits are processed to become red oil that is used in preparing a variety of stews and soups. When the palm tree is cut down it does not means it is useless or it is the end of the tree. Farmers sell the palm
trees to individuals who distill or tap a special kind of drink from the palm tree called palmwine. This drink cures lots of sicknesses when it is tapped fresh. However, when it is fermented it goes through another process where other spirits are added to it to become strong liquor. The liquor that is derived from this product is generally called dekele, meaning the alcohol derived from the palm.

In the very south of Anlo-land such as Anloga, Woe, Tegbi, and Whuti, farming is mostly a male activity while in Ave-Dakpa farming involves both men and women. The farmers in the community leave for their farms at dawn, usually working from four o’clock in the morning until five or six o’clock in the evening daily. Most farmers in Ave-Dakpa have Agblekofe where they rest during their break times to eat and nap before continuing their work.

Trading is another occupation in Ave-Dakpa and involves women. The concept of trading can be generally translated into what the Ewe people refer to as asitsatsa. Asitsatsa involves buying and selling of products with the hope to make at least a small profit. In Ave-Dakpa women who have lots of money generally do avositsatsa (cloth business). They travel to Accra and buy large quantities of different fabric and then resell it in regional and local markets. These fabrics are cut into several yards, full or half pieces. Sometimes buyers may like particular fabrics but do not have the money at hand to purchase them so they go through a negotiation leading to what is known as agbana. When people buy fabrics on agbana it delays the selling process. However, the system benefits the seller because she adds a particular percentage of interest to the original selling price. For instance, Miss Koliko is selling a cloth/fabric at $100 dollars.

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4 Agbekofe literally means farm hut. It came from to words; agble meaning farm and kofe as excluded inhabitation
Miss Botokoe likes the cloth but do not have the money at hand to pay for it so she decides to go on agbana. Miss Koliko may decide to give Miss Botokoe the fabric for $140 dollars for three weeks. This means that Miss Koliko will make profit of $40 extra dollars. This is how the cloth business operates in Ave-Dakpa as well as other areas in Ghana. In addition to the cloth buying and selling business some women make small stores in front of their houses to sell a variety of products ranging from shoes, fabrics, cooking utensils, oil, lotions, beers, can vegetables, fish and meats.

Fishing is another occupation in Ave-Dakpa and involves only men. Although there is no huge river or lake in Ave-Dakpa there is a dam constructed to provide water for the entire community. This occupation is seasonal because during the dry season the water level goes down and fish are not found in the lake. In rainy season the lake is full and fishermen get a variety of fish such as akpa (Nile perch – but popularly known in Ghana as tilapia) agala (crab), adeye (mudfish) and bolu (shrimp). Since Ave-Dakpa is not near the sea, residents do not get any fish from the sea unless they buy it from fish sellers in market places across the Volta region. The men use fishing tools such as asabu (fishing nets), fu (fishing reel) and akanyi (traps).

Individuals in the area have also learned specific skills to became carpenters, masons, hair stylish/dressers, barbers, local drinking bar and chop bar operators. They render their services to make some money purposely to feed their household.

**Social Events and Celebrations**

Christmas and Easter are two major events in Ave-Dakpa. These events request all Ave-Dakpa citizens, both home and abroad, to participate in the celebration in person. As such, radio and television announcements are made to publicize the events all over Ghana.
Christmas and Easter are memorable occasions celebrated throughout Ghana to remember the birth, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Since it is believed that the resurrection of Jesus Christ brings unity and peace unto mankind, this philosophy has become the basis for setting up family reunions and rectifying disputes between community members. Thus, most annual community and family meetings in Ave-Dakpa are held during Christmas, and Easter festivities. Christmas has less of a focus on reconciliation. During Christmas community members visit their neighbors and exchange various gifts with friends and relatives. In Ave-Dakpa, the children and youth celebrate Christmas more than the adults because the story of the birth of Jesus Christ is more interesting to them. Christmas is the only time when everybody goes to church as part of the community’s thanksgiving ceremony. During the church service, different forms of prayers are said to God. In the traditional system libations are poured to different deities and ancestral spirits for forgiveness of sins and protection for the coming year.

There are also traditional celebrations observed. Amesikpe Za is celebrated primarily to commemorate the migration into the area, to give thanks to the ancestors for their protection and guidance for the past year, and to ask for blessings and good health for the entire community in the coming year. Among the three major festivals, more people attend the Amesikpe festival than Easter and Christmas. Participants make resolutions to gods and ancestral spirits through sacrifices and pouring of libations, and

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During this time, the traditional priests and priestesses, Muslims, Christians with different denominations, and those who do not believe in any gods come together for an interdenominational service for thanksgiving.
sometimes make donations. Singing, drumming, and dancing are integral parts of this celebration irrespective of any religious background.

Other social events in Ave-Dakpa that do not necessarily request those living several hundred of miles from home to attend are individual births, naming ceremonies, initiations, and marriage ceremonies. Unlike in the United States where people need invitations to attend, these events are widely open to the public in Ave-Dakpa. The moment a few people know of the event it spreads very fast among. The events seem to be more communal and in case of weddings, the couples do not necessarily need to know or have any relationship with those in attendance to grace the occasion.

Funerals are other social events where the town comes together to celebrate the life of the deceased. Similar to other Ewe people, Ave-Dakpa community strongly believes in the popular Ewe phrase *ba na ame ye wo bana na* (if one does something for a person, it shall be done to him/her also). With this belief, if one goes to a person’s funeral it is as a seed that he/she is sowing that he/she will reap a day to come. Since every one knows that he/she will die one day they all participate in funeral activities by helping the bereaved family in cooking, fetching water, sweeping and other things such as drumming, dancing, singing to console the soul of the bereaved family. Almost everyone in the Ave-Dakpa town and neighboring towns participates so that the celebration of the deceased’s life is done in a successful manner.

**Social Musical Traditions and Dance Clubs**

Drumming and dancing are important aspect of community life among the Ewe and there are a number of musical and dance-drumming groups in Ave-Dakpa. The dance-drumming groups perform to support social and religious events and occasions in the town. Nketia states that, “a town without music is a dead town” (1975: 25). This
idea is also reinforced by Agordoh who states, “a town without drumming and dancing is a dead town” (1994: 23). In this section I will give a brief description of the dance-drumming groups and explain their importance in the town. However, I will not go into the technical descriptions of musical structures and performances practices since my focus in this study is on Yeve. Dance-drumming traditions in Ave-Dakpa can be categorized into two types: (1) Socio-recreational and (2) religious dance-drumming.

The socio-recreation dance-drumming styles are performed during communal labor, leisure activities, entertainment, marriage events, and other public events involving the community. When two or more people are gathered, they may start to sing and all of a sudden other instruments ranging from cooking utensils to drums are used to accompany the songs. As with the rhythmic participation, individuals begin to dance and draw more people participate. Dance-drumming groups gather once every weekend or once every month to perform for fun to reinforce their communal bonds. The socio-recreational types of dance-drumming in Ave-Dakpa are mekamio, adzida, jama and norvinenyo.

**Mekamio**

*Mekamio* is dance-drumming group composed of both youth and adults. The name *mekamio* derives from an Ewe phrase that reads *me ka mi o* meaning “it does not concern us.” The name of this group is ironic because they do exactly the opposite. They care about each other and come together perform and have fun. The music they play is commonly referred to as borbabor⁶ and is performed among almost all Ewe speaking people. *Mekamio* identifies itself with a group attire that members wear before

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⁶ See Amedzi (1987)
they perform. The performance encourages public participation and a person does not need to be a member or have the group’s attire to dance with them. The drumming is in quadruple time with ample call and response patterns. The dancers perform with white handkerchiefs and perform stylish movements. The performance involves lots of singing.

**Adzida**

This dance-drumming involves the entire Ave-Dakpa community. It is what other Ewe speaking people referred to as *agbadza*. *Adzida* is performed in two tempos; slow and fast. The slow dance is mostly considered *nyayito*, a dance-drumming type whose songs educate and address moral issues such as forgiveness, rivalry, polygamy and respect for humanity. The fast section is considered *ageshe* and is performed with lots of energy. Generally, *adzida* is performed at funerals and other celebrations. The dance involves the contraction and the release of the torso and the expansion of the shoulders. The music performance is in compound triple time.

**Jama**

This consists of young boys and girls who gather spontaneously at an event and sing songs, dance and drum. Sometimes the songs are only accompanied only with clapping. Occasionally, there may be one or two drums accompanied with bells or cooking utensils such as spoons and aluminum cooking pots. The groups sing a broad range of songs such as traditional folk tunes and gospel tunes in both Ewe and pidgin (broken English) in call and response organization. An interesting part of this group is their creativity and ability to compose songs instantly to give advice, rebuke or make

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7 Burns (2005)
jokes at someone, a family or a group of people. For instance, if there is a wealthy family that lives a comfortable life while others are suffering the group may compose a song to sing while passing in front of the rich man’s house so that he can get the message and hopefully support the poor. Other times they sing against leaders, especially politicians, for deceiving nature and excessive promises on the campaign trail. Their music can involve any time signature.

**Novinenyo**

*Norvinenyo* is a group of young men and women who perform during many events and ceremonies in Ave-Dakpa. Novinenyo is an Ewe phrase to indicate “wishing good or the best for a friend.” This is one of the vibrant dance-drumming groups that performs a variety of different types of dance but specialize in the dance called *gadzo*\(^8\). *Gadzo* is a vigorous dance-drumming that recounts the valor of the Ewe ancestors during battles. The group wears a special costume for their performances and may be hired to perform out of town to make profit. They also perform at a funeral when a group member dies or when a member’s family member is dead.

Besides the socio-recreational dance drumming the religious types are performed during events such as stool festivals, sacrifices, welcoming another deity or escorting unwelcome deity. But most of them are performed to honor a particular deity or spirit. They are not performed as frequently as the socio-recreational types. During ritual events or sacrifices for the town any member is free to participate.

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\(^8\) See Younge (2011), Amegago (2011)
Ayisu and Afram

These are traditional religious dance-drummings performed to give thanks to the deities, spirits or to appease the gods in times of trouble. During the performance of these two groups the drums are used during specific segments to evoke the deities and spirits. During ayisu and afram performance the gods induce trance or they may send messages through a spirit medium for the public. The main dance-drumming performance is a style called brekete\(^9\) also known as kunde. Brekete dance-drumming is very popular throughout Volta region and has interesting story of how it got to the Ewe speaking people.

Atrima

Atrima is a special music performed for chiefs and elders when they have to perform a particular sacrifice on behalf of the community or for a variety of royal stools. This music is mainly a twin drum normally called agblovu in Ewe. It is what the Akan-speaking people of Ghana called Atumpan,\(^{10}\) the talking drum. The drum normally evokes the praise names of the chiefs and ancestors and speaks in metaphors. Occasionally it is accompanied with a bell where a chief or an elder to a particular royal stool performs a dance. The dance normally performed with this drumming is nothing like agbadza or borborbor. Instead, the dancer uses gesture to talk about bravery, power, and superiority in close communication with the drummer.

Amesikpe and its Festival

Amesikpeza is an annual festival celebrated to commemorate the migration journey of Ave-Dakpa ancestors. Primarily, the festival is celebrated to reassure the

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\(^{10}\) See Nketia (1967) Our drums and drummers
people of Ave-Dakpa that the god *Amesikpe* who rescued their ancestors and drowned Mafi-Kutibolor warriors and brave men is always with them and will protect generations to come. In addition to its primary theme, the festival is also celebrated to raise funds for Ave-Dakpa town developments. The name *Amesikpe* in the Ewe language is simple but can be misleading depending on how it is pronounced and also due to its polysemic nature. *Amesikpe* can be interpreted in various forms. For instance, *amesikpe* is the shortened form of *amesi fe asi kpe* meaning a person’s heavy hand. It could also be said as *amesi kpe*, meaning “the one who is of greatness.” There are many more interpretations of that same word or phrase. The difference between the several meanings and that of the Ave-Dakpa is indicated in how it is written. The Amesikpe in Ave-Dakpa is written as one word starting with the uppercase A as in *Amesikpe* while the others are written in lowercase and are two words as in *amesi kpe*. Amesikpe therefore is the name of the deity and the expanded form of the word in a sentence is *ekpe si xor mi tso* or *ekpe si ke simi tso*. This means “the rock that delivered us or the rock that rescued us.”

Amesikpe festival is celebrated in the last weekend before Easter. The festival brings visitors, friends and citizens both home and abroad into Ave-Dakpa. To some people the festival is a moment of reunion with parents, families and to meet old friends. Others come to this festival to get to know where they were born for the first time and to be introduced to relatives. But for the majority of participant, the festival becomes an important pilgrimage, an opportunity to climb the Amesikpe rock and make resolutions and promises for the coming year. Many people who know the significance of Amesikpe festival travel a long distance to part of the historic, social and religious ceremony.
As the festival approaches there are some social and religious activities that are observed throughout the town. The first thing that happens is a ritual observance to create a silent atmosphere for the gods. For this, the chiefs and elders place a ban on drumming. This is a very common phenomenon among towns in Ghana. In the southeastern part of the Volta region this is very popular during religious rites and festivals. Agordoh discusses the ban of musical performance in certain parts of Africa as part of societal social control in observance of specific ritual ceremonies. He exemplifies this by citing the Ga speaking people of Ghana. He writes, “among the Ga of Ghana, no form of drumming or excessive noise-making is allowed one month prior to their annual Homowa festival (1994: 31). In Ave-Dakpa the ban on drumming is implemented a week before Amesikpe festival. This is done to have all citizens’ concentrate on a particular ritual that needs to be observed or undertaken. As such, no drum or instrument is allowed to sound. Any pending marriage ceremony or funerals must be postponed until the ban is lifted or the ceremonies can take place but there can be absolutely no music.

The other activity is a cleanup campaign exercise. A few days before the main events the community members undergo a cleanup exercise throughout the town to make the town beautiful and clean for people who are coming. Men and women clear and expand the principal roads leading to Amesikpe so that the multitude can walk freely and safe to where Amesikpe rock is located. The cleaning is also believed to eradicate all kinds of sickness and disease in the town to be gone for another year.
On the main festive day, members of the community leave Ave-Dakpa around eight o’clock in the morning and walk a long distance that takes approximately three (3) hours to get to where the rock is located. The people who cannot walk rent a taxi or take a passenger motorcycles to the location and back. This is also the day that the ban on drumming is lifted. As such various drumming groups carry their instruments and start playing when they get to the rock. At this point, those who can climb the rock will do so and those who cannot remain on the ground. This is the time that individuals make their resolutions and requests to Amesikpe. After that, the priest in charge of Amesikpe shrine goes to the peak of the rock to perform final sacrifice, prayer and ask for blessing for everyone throughout the year.
Figure 2-4. A section of people making their way on top of Amesikpe

Figure 2-5. A section of people who did not make it on top of Amesikpe
Despite individual desire to go on top of Amesikpe to make resolutions and requests, there are many others who do not participate. This is because there are rules and restrictions governing the climbing of Amesikpe. These rules and restrictions are crucial and very significant to observe for individuals well being and safety. According to the customs of Ave-Dakpa, anyone who desires to go on Amesikpe rock must adhere to the following rules. A person must NOT climb Amesikpe if he/she:

- has eaten any leftover food prepared from the previous day
- has eaten anything made with any kind of cooking oil
- has been involved in any kind of robbery unless it has been confessed
- has been involved in murder unless it has been confessed
- has engaged in sexual intercourse with anyone the day prior or the day of climbing
- has caused an abortion
These rules and restrictions are very important to the success of the festival. Anyone who disobeys these customs is severely punished by the gods of the land and Amesikpe. For example, if anyone disobeys this rule she may fall and die while going on top of Amesikpe rock. Other punishments involve terrible sickness leading to instant death. In essence the action of disobedient individuals who try to climb Amesikpe can cease the blessings and protections expected from the gods. Instead the town will experience the anger of the gods. It is with these reasons that people evaluate themselves very well before going to Amesikpe.

**Language/Dialect**

The Ewes who inhabit the Volta region of Ghana speak a language known as Ewegbe. The word Ewegbe derives from the phrase, *Eweawo fe gbe* which translates “the language of the Ewe people.” Written Ewe has been approved and standardized by the educational board and is used in the school system. It is the written style of Ewe in which all Ewe textbooks, novels, poems, articles and fictions are written. Spoken Ewe, however, has lots of regional variations based on geographical location of a particular society or a town. In spoken Ewe a word can be the same in all the dialects, different or affected by speech tonality in other Ewe territories. Atakpa points out the geographical locations where these different Ewe dialects are spoken. He writes, “the dialects (variants) of the Ewe language spoken in the south-eastern corner of the Republic of Ghana are Anlo, Some, Avenor, Tongu and Dzodze. The dialectical difference, as in the case of all languages with dialects, are found in one or more of the following, namely speech sounds used, choice between synonyms and forms of words, pitch/tonal variations and mode of expression” (1997: 28).
The dialect of Ewe spoken in Ave-Dakpa is influenced by the Avenor and Tongu styles. However, one of my informants, Prosper Awunyo, suggests that they speak Avenor more than Tongu style. In my conversation with many of the community members regarding the dialects of Ewe they speak I got a unanimous response that they speak Avegbe. My own linguistic background is Anlo and I speak Anlogbe which is the generally accepted style used in the school system. However, Anlogbe also has stylish way of pronunciation with certain words that is not written but spoken. For example, *ati*, which is a stick or tree, can be pronounced as “*atsi*” and *amesiame* (everyone) as “*ameshiame*.” Besides my background as Anlo native I also speak the Avegbe but not as the Ave native but understand clearly everything they say. Below are a few examples of certain words that are pronounced differently from the standard Ewe language.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Anlogbe</th>
<th>Avegbe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dad/Father</td>
<td>Fofonye or Tonye</td>
<td>Tatanye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Danye or Nonye</td>
<td>Nananye</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are other words that are the same and have the same pitch or tone. For example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Anlogbe</th>
<th>Avegbe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>Efo or Fonye</td>
<td>Fonye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncle</td>
<td>Torga or Tordia</td>
<td>Taganye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aunt</td>
<td>Ete, Daga, Dadia</td>
<td>Tasi/Naga/Narinye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where are you going?</td>
<td>Afika neyi na yina</td>
<td>Ga nee neyi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am coming from there</td>
<td>Me tso afima</td>
<td>Me tso ga ma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am right here</td>
<td>Mele afisia</td>
<td>Mele gi ya</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Education – Schools/Institutions**

Ave-Dakpa has a number of public and private schools established to educate people in the community. The public schools are church affiliated but controlled by the government and their maintenance and school supplies are dependent on the
government and sometimes the community. The private schools are individually owned and their supplies and maintenance depend on the proprietor. It is difficult to find information on when and how these schools were established because there are no reliable records. The Assemble of God School is a day care center for kids and a school through lower primary levels. The Roman Catholic school is composed of primary school that is one (1) to six (6) and continues through junior high school (normally attended for three years). The private schools are Eli School, Nyornarh School and Anbusit. Like the Roman Catholic school, Eli school also goes from primary through to junior high, however, Nyonarh is only from primary one (1) to six (6) classes. Anbusit School has the highest enrollment of students in the area. The school is composed of nursery, primary, junior high, senior high through to pre-university classes.

According to the public educational policy children are required to enroll in to kindergarten between ages five and six. This policy is part of the public or government educational system throughout Ghana. The reason is that the child should be able to express her/himself in case he is hurt, feels pain, has an emergency or if he/she needs something. She should be able to recognize an individual and point him out in case of any violence or be able to say thank you when someone gives her a gift. More importantly, at the age of six the child should be able to walk to school and return home safely. Finally, at that age the child has acquired some basic knowledge and also learns to do some domestic chores like washing dishes and cleaning.

Private schools are expensive and most parents therefore cannot afford to send their children to a private school although they may desire a quality education for their children. Due to this situation there is higher enrollment in public schools than in the
private schools in Ave-Dakpa. Unlike the public school, private schools enroll children in day care, nursery and kindergarten at any age if their parents can afford the cost of tuition. Classroom instruction is in Ewe for lower level classes and in English at higher-level classes. However, the private schools emphasize English so that the children can be conversant with the English language. It is possible to conclude on the average that children who go to private schools speak English better than those who go to public school.

In addition to the schools mentioned above, Ave-Dakpa has one secondary school called AVESCO. AVESCO is an abbreviated name for “Ave-Dakpa Secondary School.” In the past five years somehow between 2007 and 2008 the government has changed the name of all secondary schools in Ghana to Senior High Schools. Therefore the school in this town is now named Ave-Dakpa Senior High School. The senior high school is equivalent to high schools in American educational system. Similar to all high schools AVESCO prepares students to enter college and university based on their field of study. At this level instructions are purely given in English unless the Ewe language class.

The significance of this chapter is to primarily introduce readers to the historical backgrounds and the people of Ave-Dakpa. The unique oral history of the people demonstrates valor, spirituality and power through the encounters during their migration from Notsie and their survival until the finally settled at their present location. The power of the revered god, _Amesikpe_ cannot be underestimated in the history of Ave-Dakpa. _Amesikpe_ played a crucial role in the life of the people during their migration and has since then become a dependable and prestigious god whose festival is celebrated
annually to commemorate the migration and for the younger generation to learn their history. The spiritualities, philosophies, customs and values that lie at the heart of the people and serve as the foundational principles are revealed in the invocation of the State of Ave-Dakpa. The spirituality and veneration of deities led to the establishment of many traditional religious societies, shrines and cults of which Yeve is one. The next chapter focuses on and discusses the background of the Yeve, its cult and selected rituals of the members.
CHAPTER 3
THE YEVE CULT AND ITS RITUALS – PART ONE

Yeve – The Cult and Its Origin

Yeve is one of the most powerful and secretive cults found among the Ewe. From oral history to scholarly works, it is difficult to clearly determine the precise meaning of what Yeve is. Scholars who study certain aspects of Yeve and even native Ewe who knows a little about it describes it by its characteristics. Yeve does not have a synonym to help relate to its nearest meaning. It is also problematic for even a native to ask a yevesi (Yeve member) what Yeve means because of a fear of misunderstanding and retaliation. I was very fortunate that most of my family members are part of the Yeve cult and we have a very close relationship, as I narrated in chapter one. When I asked my aunt what Yeve means she told me, Yevea ye nye mawu.\(^1\) Her answer to my question literally means, “Yeve is God.” I was very confused because I go to church every Sunday and have heard various pastors talk about God, but never reference Yeve. I went to her another time with the same question and got the same answer she had given me earlier. During my field research I asked my principal informant, Agbayiza if it is possible to tell me in a single word or phrase what Yeve means. I was surprised to hear from him the same answer my aunt gave me. His response was Yeve la ye nye tohono, ye nye mawua, meaning “Yeve is the thunderbolt, he is the god.” I continued to ask if he would relate Yeve to the deities normally referred to as mawu or the Almighty God Mawu. He responded Yeve ye nye Yehowa also called Yehova. It means “Yeve is God” (Personal conversation with Agbayiza July 18, 2006).

\(^1\) Mawu with the uppercase “M” reference the Almighty God and the same word with lowercase “m” refers to the deities
Other people, especially elders that I spoke with, described Yeve as a religious cult or a secret society. However, Agbanu,\textsuperscript{2} explained to me that \textit{Yeve 	ext{eya} koe 	ext{nye vodua, he ga 	ext{nye} habobo ha}. This means, “Yeve is the deity at the same time the name of the society” (Interview with Agbanu August 10, 2006). Agbanu’s concept and understanding of the Yeve resonates with Fiagbedzi who writes: “The word Yeve, functions grammatically in two ways: (a) as a substantive meaning the cult as an organization (e.g. \textit{edze/edu Yeve}: he becomes a Yeve cult member) and also the god itself (e.g \textit{Yevee wui}: it is the God Yeve that kills him). It is also used in combinations as an epithet (e.g. \textit{Yevesi}: the wife of Yeve). The etymology of Yeve however, is rather uncertain” (1966: 11).

Kumassah also explains Yeve according to cultural practices and traits of Ewe speaking people who are believed to be Jews. He argues that the Jewish God Yaweh is believed to be Yeve.\textsuperscript{3} After a long time spent tracing cultural practices he ends the paragraph noting that the Ewe people also “adopted some aspects of the worship of the Jewish God, Yaweh, the name they [Ewe] corrupted to sound Yewe [Yeve]” (2009: 22). In an interview with Togbi Midawo Alorwoyie\textsuperscript{4} regarding the concept of Yeve meaning God or Yaweh, his version and understanding of Yeve in the traditional belief system perhaps also validates what other people have conceived of Yeve. He says, \textit{Yeve la eyae 	ext{nye} Mawu. Ebe yee woe. Eye 	ext{nye} nuwo kata worla. Nusianu la yee woe}. This

\textsuperscript{2}Agbanu is a very knowledgeable elder on traditional religion. In January 2009 I received a call that he was sick and was rushed to the hospital but had died.

\textsuperscript{3}Yeve is also written as Yewe.

\textsuperscript{4}Togbi Midawo Alorwoyie is a high priest (Midawo) of the Yeve cult in the Volta region. He is a master drummer of the Yeve cult and a full professor of music at the University of North Texas at Denton. He is also an ordained chief with the title Togbi Foli Amanyo III, Dufia of Tsinu-Afife traditional area.
literally translates, “Yeve is God. It is He who made it. He is the maker of all things. Everything in the world it is He who made it” (Interview with Togbi Alorwoyie September 21, 2012).

It is fascinating to look at the relationship between different concepts and understanding of Yeve. The Ewe word for God, Yehowa or Yehova is similar to that of the Jewish God Yaweh in addition to Togbi Alorwoyie’s explanation of Yeve as He who is the maker of all things, thus, Yee woe. However, as Fiagbedzi states, the etymology of the word Yeve is uncertain. We can at least comprehend based on the above accounts that Yeve is a deity that is believed by the people who venerate him to be a representation of God that oversees and protect his people on earth. It is also clear that Yeve is used to describe the group of people that live and worship together as a society.

Commonly termed a secret society, the Yeve cult is a body of organized religious practices and beliefs involving interaction with various deities, ancestral spirits and supernatural powers. The Yeve is associated with the male thunder god, So. Ladzekpo (1983: 218) describes Yeve as “the god of thunder and lightening.” It also has a female deity that is the royal python, Da who is believed to be the wife of So. So is said to reside in the sky and Da to reside on earth. The Yeve cult has historical ties to the other thunder gods of the Ewe territories in West Africa especially Xevioso (Hevioso) in Dahomey now Republic of Benin and Shango of Yoruba in southwestern Nigeria. Jones emphasizes this point and states, “The Yewe or Tohono cult is the cult of the God of Thunder. It belongs to the Ewe alone, which in this context embraces the Ewe, Fon, Dahomey, and Togo people” (1959: 93). Parrinder also adds, “the Ewe call their thunder
god So, or more frequently Hevioso from the village of Hevie which is the center of the cult" (1961: 31).

Various scholars such as Jones (1959), Parrinder (1961), Fiagbedzi (1966), Avorgbedor (1987) among others agree that the Yeve cult originated in Dahomey and came to Ghana during the migration. Sangode validates this origin. He writes: “Xevioso was brought to Abomey, Dahomey from Xevi. Before he was known by this name he was called So. Xevioso is also known as Agbolesu (ram-great-male) since he and the ram, the symbol of the thunder gods, are held to have the same form” (1996: 55). Sangode’s explanation clarifies Parrinder’s quotation above arguing that the thunder god came from a village called Hevi.

Since colonial times, Dahomey has been an important refuge for the Ewe people and others who practice spiritualism. According to Agbelidaze, a priest of the Yeve cult and a lead drummer of the Koku and Brekete shrine at Kpalime in Togo, “In the days of our forefathers, one can only go to Dahomey if he is a Bokor\(^5\) or a Dzotor\(^6\) and /or has a very special purpose [good or bad] to achieve.” According to what his father told him and from his own experience as a diviner, Agbelidaze says Dahomey comes out of two words as Da, which in both Fon and Ewe languages means snake and ahome, meaning a house or home. Therefore Dahomey denotes “the home of snake” (Personal interview with Agbelidaze, August 14, 2006). Metaphorically, the snake here represents anything that is evil or inhuman.

\(^5\) Bokor is a diviner, sorcerer and a priest of Afa religion. He tells people their destiny and the type of death that awaits them.

\(^6\) Dzotor is another powerful magic and medicine man like the Bokor, but sometimes uses his power and charms for destructive purposes. People commonly refer to him as a Juju man.
Agbelidaze’s contention that the Yeve religious cult originated in Dahomey before reaching other parts of the neighboring countries seems plausible for the following reasons:

1. Oral traditions tell of a westward migration of the Ewe people from Notsie, a town in Benin.

2. The secret cult language is believed by the initiates and other knowledgeable people to be a mixture of Ewe and Fon, a language spoken mainly in the Republic of Benin.

3. Most of the rituals and customs of the Yeve cult described to me in detail by Daenyeametor, a high ranked Yeve priestess, bear striking similarities to the early Dahomean forms, which I had learned about through various sources of oral tradition. These similarities include method of initiation, graduation of members and ways of ensuring or obtaining redress for offence, especially those caused by a non-member, ahe.

4. The characteristics and names given to various priests, priestesses and specific people in the Fon language correspond to similar names used in Yeve worship.

Here are few examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3-1. Similarity between Yeve and Fon words/names</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fon</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azetor (witch or wizard)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahe (non member/outsider)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vodun (deity/god)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vodunsi (devotee of a god)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hevioso (thunder god)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hounsiokpor (neophyte)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hounbonon (high priest)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bokonon (Afa priest)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Yevekpor - The Cult House**

In Ewe territories, every Yeve cult has a cult house associated with it. The same applies to the Yeve cult in Ave-Dakpa. The cult house is commonly referred to as yevekpor, meaning the house of Yeve. It is also shortened as kpor. The plural of the words carries wo at the end of it (such as kporwo or yevkporwo). I will be using these
two words interchangeably. The cult usually has someone in charge of it, referred to as its director. The director is normally a high-ranking priest known as midawo or hugbono. Others call him the hugbonoga. The hugbono or midawo oversees the affairs and the responsibilities of the yevekpor. The midawo or hugbono’s name is normally attached to the kpor. Therefore, the yevekpor in Ave-Dakpa belongs to the priest named Agbelifufu. Hence, the cult’s house is called Agbelifufu-kpor or Agbelifufu-kpormu.

The yevekpowo in general are easily recognized by the members of the town due to their structure, shapes, and sometimes their location in the town. In some communities they are located prominently in the center of the town or close to the market place. Agbelifufu-kpor is located a small distance from where the Ave-Dakpa market is situated. The yevekpor is sometimes identified with ritual pot normally found in front of the house, placed on a stick with three branches to support it or a cement wall stand. The pot is designed with specific color spots such as blue, white or black. Sometimes it can be identified by adodo on a stand in front of the house. Adodo is a small iron object that has multiple, immobile bells on either side of a thin, tubular-shaped piece of metal connecting them.

Figure 3-1. A ritual pot
Figure 3-2. A section within the Yeve cult house also depicting the old style

It can also be recognized with the cult’s flag on top of the building or hanging across the entrance. *Aviatsi* (a type of sturdy tree) and palm fronds are other distinguishing features that surround the *yevekpor*. In recent times *yevekporwo* are being built using cement walls with sometimes images of priests and priestesses or showing certain features of the cult. This is to warn non-members not to enter the cult. If an *ahevi* (a non Yeve member) enters the cult without permission there is a huge fine to be paid or the act can lead to other spiritual problems for the person.

The shape of cult buildings varies from town to town. In Ave-Dakpa they tend to be circular, but elsewhere they may be conical, rectangular or square. Inside, the houses are divided into sections, each with its own entrance. This design ensures privacy during ceremonies that are closed to the public. *Agbelifufu-kpor* also contains
secret rooms referred to as “engine rooms” to denote a sacred room where secret objects are kept.

Figure 3-3. The modern cult houses with images of priests and priestesses to alert and caution non-members.

Within the yevekpor, specific ritual trees are planted both inside and outside the cult house that serve as an alarm and spiritual mechanism to detect infiltrators who send agents using certain birds. For example, native Ewe people do not like the bird known as adzexe (owl). The owl or adzexe literally translates to “witch bird.” Anytime the bird cries over a particular house the people in the house are scared because they believe that the sound signifies a targeted person’s spirit being taken away or imbued with some sickness. Therefore, the function of the special trees in and around the kpor is to cause birds of that nature to fall into the cult house or its surroundings. In addition, any malevolent forces in general that approach the cult house to spy or with the purpose of attacking, are first disabled by the tree. In Ewe belief, force always has an agent, which can be manifest in the form of a human being or an animal. The yevekpor contains the elements described above, but in essence, it is the sacred abode or temple for the Yeve members just as mission compounds and chapels are for Christians.
Yeve Voduwo – Deities of the Yeve Cult

There are two principal deities associated with the Yeve cult throughout the southeastern Ewe land. These are the thunder god, So and the royal python, Da. So has a historical tie to the Yoruba shango and the Dahomean hevioso. His primary symbol is a double-edged axe. So is believed to communicate using emotions, desires and forces of thunder and lightening and is in charge of the sky. He also has praise names that reflect his superior character such as Dadagbe, Totobli, Tohono and Dzidegbe, all of which are terms describing the sounds derived from thunder. Further, he is a god of justice that dislikes evil and strikes dishonest people and criminals in the society. The colors that reflect his qualities are red and white. Parrinder gives a critical description of the nature of the thunder god:

> The god So is believed to strike down the impious and to destroy the trees which witches use for their meeting in the night. Those people who are struck by lightening are not allowed normal burial, ‘the god has taken them,’ and their corpses are appropriated by the priests…So is not only an angry god casting down his axes on wicked people; it is also said that he owns the heavens, sends heat and rain, and gives fertility to men and to do their crops. 1961: 31-32

Besides the thunder god, there is also Voduda, also known as Da. Voduda is considered the wife of So that lives and rules on earth. She symbolizes fertility, rebirth and guardianship of sacred spaces. Her colors are blue or black. Voduda is believed to be primarily responsible for affairs on earth and to report to her husband, So. However, Da is calm in nature and takes walks around certain parts of the town. Agbayiza explained to me that Voduda is a very special deity and they are very proud of her as their mother. In my own experience, I have seen a similar type of da in Togo during a ritual ceremony. When the Da was out of her temple the initiates of Da went around looking for her and finally brought her home. Chapter five and six explains how the Da is
searched for through a special music and dance. Heskovits (1937) has extensively studied the veneration of the Dangbi and notes its significance.

Da can be just as powerful as the thunder god So, and, as a vodu, can be invoked on dishonest people. For instance, Togbinye described a situation in Ave-Dakpa where a woman lied of something she had done against a Da initiate. The dashi (Da initiates) went to sacrifice in her temple and invoke the Voduda to enter the stomach of the person by causing the stomach to blow up as if the person was pregnant. On the third day the stomach of the woman who told the lied had grown so big that she finally had to go tell the truth. When this happened, it was believed that the Da or Voduda entered the person’s stomach and could have lead to death. This story highlights the belief that So and Voduda are very prestigious deities that people in Ave-Dakpa and other Yeve cults.

Besides So and Voduda, there are other deities that are associated with the Yeve cult. Among them are Avleketi, Zakadza and Sakpata. Each of these have their own ritual activities. Fiagbedzi (1966) and Fiawoo (1959) testify to the existence of minor deities and Kumassah (2009) lists the deities and what they inhabit. He states, “the Yeve as Hu cult is made up of different deities namely Xebieso, Agbui, Voduda, Avleketi, Sofeatsi, Zakadza. Xebieso is believed to reside in thunder and lightening, Agbui in the dolphin, Voduda in cobra, Avleketi in a type of shark locally called ‘Nyanyake,’ Sofeatsi in sokpe or So’s stone, and Zakadza in bees” (2009: 22).

**Membership**

As a religious society, membership into the Yeve cult is highly restricted. Generally, there are three main categories of membership into the Yeve cult. These are (a) hudzedze (b) Yevefor and (c) amegigli.
Hudzedze simply translates as “to become yevesi or a Yeve convert.” Hudzedze can further be understood in two parts. The first is when the Yeve deity appoints or calls a person to serve him. For this to happen, the “called” person has some Yeve background in his family. It is possible that a person’s grandfather or great-grandfather or parents have been part of the Yeve. It should be noted that not every child born to a parent practicing Yeve will necessarily become a Yevesi. When a person is “called” to serve Yeve, they become possessed. Possession is induced by the deity himself and the person runs out of his house while singing Yeve songs and heads into the yevekpor that the deity directs him to. The singing of the Yeve song may be compared to the idea of speaking in tongues, since the person has never been taught how to sing Yeve songs before. It is believed that the deity instills him/her with this ability. When the person arrives at the yevekpor, the midawo in charge instantly knows what is going on and directs the new initiate. The second hudzedze part is through amedzodzor or reincarnation. When a person reincarnates an ancestor he is believed to impersonate the ancestor and also to take on the responsibilities the ancestor had before passing away. Sometimes, a person can start having emotional or psychological problems. When the family goes to consult the diviners they are told he has reincarnated someone and that person wants the living individual to do certain things before the problems can be resolved. Sometimes, the “certain things” to be done include a becoming a Yeve member. As such the midawo assists in performing the appropriate rites for the person to become a member, bearing the name of the past ancestor.

The second category is Yevefofor. This means the process of discovering Yeve in a different form. He can disguise himself and appear to a person in the form of
precious objects such as gold, diamond or very expensive beads at an odd place such as in a lake or farm. Finding precious metals in such a situation is highly unusual, and is believed to be a sign from the deities. These objects, according to custom, are taken to diviners who confirm the reason they appeared. The result often heard is: yeve be yele asiwo meaning, “the god, Yeve has chosen to settle with you.” At this moment there is nothing else to do than to become a member. If a person refuses, he or she is imbued with a deadly sickness that can only be cured by the Yeve priests. Another sign from Yeve can come from a kind of fish called takpe that lives in the sea. The Ewe people believe that when someone goes fishing and his net catches takpe then it is Yeve that has come to settle with him. Takpe is a fish that appears to have blinui (scarification) on its face just like the Yeve members. Therefore according to custom, diviners must be consulted for the appropriate rites for the person to become a Yeve member. An example of Yeve settling with a person in my own family is my aunt Daenyeametor. She became a minawo of the Yeve cult after she was weeding in her backyard one Saturday morning and found a piece of gold. She gave the gold to her mother, and the mother (who was a minawo) told her the gold was a sacred Yeve ritual object. She was then required to join the cult and perform all of the necessary rituals.

The third category is amegigli also known as amegbegble meaning “defiling the Yeve member.” From indigenous knowledge among Ewes it is a norm that no one can verbally abuse a Yeve member. Anyone who insults, mocks or gives any form of abuse to Yeve initiates is said to have defiled him or her. More details of the defilement process are given in Chapter 4. If such an insult occurs a heavy fine is given to the

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7 Minawo is a high ranked female priestess who supports midawo or hunor during the initiation rite. Minawo could also be a title for midawo’s wife.
culprit and failure to pay the fine by the due date results in a forced membership. These are the three possible methods by which people become part of the Yeve society. Presented below are three testimonies from individual Yeve members revealing how they become Yeve members. All three informants have given me the permission to document their testimonies in this study. I have done my best to communicate the literal translation and their thoughts into English. The testimonies are from Hutor Sofeda, Tsale Agbelifufu and Agbayiza Agbelifufu.

**Example One- Hutor Sofeda**

Esi medo go Suku la  
*When I completed school*

Meyi Nonye gbo le afe  
*I went to my mother in her hometown*

Bena ma tu xo na Nonye  
*So that I could build a house for her*

Esi men xo tum la, meva dze do  
*In the process I became very sick.*

Ne mede nugodo la  
*Anytime I went to the toilet (defecated)*

Efuna tsitsi abe klala ene  
*It comes as white as calico (white cloth).*

Nonye fe velia kplom yi nukafe  
*One day, my mother’s friend took me to a diviner,*

Afimae meva kpor Yevea le  
*It was there I first encounter Yeve.*

Egblo be, adzetowo lem be  
*The diviner says that the sickness is caused by witches*

Nukatae mele xotum na Nonye?  
*They do not want me to continue building the house for my mother.*

Afima Yevea gblo be
It was there Yeve revealed itself to me and said

Nenye be elo la, madze gbo wo
At my wish, he will settle with me and give me cure

Evo ne egbe la, aku
But if I refused to be with him (Yeve) I will die.

Megblo nebe, melo be madzee
I said, I agreed to be with him.

Tso gbemagbe la, nye lame haya
Since that time until now I have been healed

Nye nugodo ha tro
And also my stool has completely changed to normal.

(Personal testimony with Sofeda August 5, 2006)

Figure 3-4. A photo of Husunu Hutodzehu Sofeda

Sofeda told me that the Yeve directed him to Ashito Agbelifufu (Agbayiza’s father) for a final healing ceremony. Sofeda explained that Ashito Agbelifufu demanded some foods for the ceremony specified by Yeve, such as *dakodu* (a special kind of banana), *atoto* (pineapple), *adiba* (papaya), *ayi* (beans), *azi* (groundnut/peanut) and *ahaviviwo* (soda). Afterwards his name was changed to Husunu Hutodzehu Sofeda
(Sofeda, August 5, 2006). Sofeda was not able to mention his previous name to me because he was afraid something might happen to him.

**Example Two – Tsale Agbelifufu**

This testimony is given by Tsale Agbelifufu one of my principal informants and the lead drummer of the Agbelifufu-kpor. This is what he said:

Nye la, Yeve me wo dzim do  
*For me, I was born into Yeve*

Wo be yevekpor me wo dzim do  
*I was told I was born in the Yeve cult*

Ekpo le ma le gama  
*The cult house is there*

Alesi wo dzoe la, nyeme nya o  
*How it happened, I do not know*

Hafi matenu atso la  
*At the age where should stand and be able to walk*

Metsi anygba kaka  
*I could only crawl for long a time*

Nye me tenu tsotsom o  
*And for real I only remained on the floor*

Tatanye la, azagunoe wonye  
*My father was a chief drummer*

Nusita meva zu azaguno ye nye esi  
*This is how I also became a drummer*

Ne tatanye yina vufofe la  
*Anytime my father is going for events and ceremonies*

Nye kpakpli ye yina  
*He takes me along with him*

Gbedeka, esi wo no vua fom la  
*One day when he was drumming*

Meta he yide vua la gbo
I managed to draw closer to the drum

Esi mele vua fe tsotsiwo la
As I got to his drum, I grabbed the pegs of the drum

Enumake, metsom
Immediately, I got up

Tso gbemaghe dzi la
From that time onwards

Medze zozor gome
I have been walking

Tatanye kplom yi midawo gboe
My father took me to the high priest

Wotso nuawo woman
And they perform all the necessary rites for me

Tso gbemagbe dzi ko la
From that time until now

Meno vu fom le yevekpor me
I have become a Yeve member and have been drumming in the cult house

Nenemae me gede Yeve me ma
This is how I also got into Yeve

(Personal interview with Tsale April 15, 2012)

Figure 3-5. A photo of Tsale Agbelifufu
Example Three – Agbayiza Agbelifufu

This third example is from the hugbono in charge of the Agbelifufu-kpor where I conducted my research. His name is Agbayiza Agbelifufu.

Enye nye Agbayiza Agbelifufu
_I am Agbayiza Agbelifufu_

Fofonye Ashito Agbelifufu la
_My father is Ashito Agbelifufu_

Hugbonoga wo nye
_He was a high priest_

Nye la nye me dze Yeve o
_For me Yeve did not recruit me_

Esi menye devi la
_During my youth age_

Nye kple fofonye koe yina tefe wo
_I go everywhere with my father_

Ne nua wom kola meno kpom
_I critically observe everything he does_

De me sroe gbo
_I learned it from him_

Elabe do si fofo wo wona la
_Because what your father does_

Eya wo ha ne sosroge le egbo
_It is what you will also learn from him_

Fofonye fiam nuawo hafi metsi
_My father taught me lots of things before I grew up_

Evu la nye me fone o
_For drumming, I do not know it_

Hafi tonye nava kula
_Before my father died_

Eva bia nu ta
_He went to consult from diviners_
Vodua be mano nuawo gbo
_The deity pointed me to be in charge_

Evazu afeme nu,
_{It also becomes a family lineage and practices}_

Eko va lem
_{I have to continue it because it was my turn}_

Fofonye va fiam nu mamleawo
_{My father taught me the rest of the rites}_

Wova tso agbo wu
_{Then the ram killing ceremony was held}_

Kple konu mamleawo wo
_{With the rest of the rituals}_

Meva le nuawo nu
_{Since then I became in charge}_

Va de asi ne egba
_{Until this present days}_

Nenemae meva zu hugbono le
_{This is how I became a high priest}_

(Personal interview with Agbelifufu August 28, 2011)
Initiation Rites of Yeve Members

After the deity Yeve has appointed the selected members they have to go through various initiation processes. Before these are done the people chosen are called *husi*, a convert while *hu* means a god. The initiation is essential for the neophyte to become a legitimate member of the cult.

As the neophytes are accepted into the *yevekpor* they do not choose the deity they will be linked to. A particular deity may decide to settle with the person during *hudzedze*, *yevefofor* or as a result of curing a sickness. In absence of these the method used to determine what deity a particular person is initiated into is the performance of spiritually intense dance-drumming where the neophytes can get into a trance and fall. The way and manner the neophyte falls determines the deity into which he/she will be initiated. Hudzengo explains how the process of knowing one’s deity usually occurs through a trance. She narrates:

In Ave-Dakpa before the initiation rituals begin, the novice dances until he or she goes into a trance and falls flat on the ground. The manner in which the initiate falls will determine the type of deity to which he or she will be assigned. When the neophyte falls on his or her back then he/she is the child of *Tohono*, the thunder god. As such he/she will go through the rituals and be initiated into the thunder god known as *so* or *Xebieso*. When the neophyte falls flat on his/her stomach or face down he/she is a child of the royal python, Da. Therefore the necessary rituals will be done as such. Then the high priest sprinkles a kind of ritualized water on the initiate and the general area to appease the spirit and then take the individual into the sacred (Personal conversation with Hudzengo, August 10, 2006).

Emphasizing Hudzengo’s explanation of choosing a deity Fiagbedzi (1966) also observes the same process for the neophytes at Dzelukope in the Keta districts.

After this rite the neophytes go with the high priests and priestesses to take a kind of spiritual bath, after which they are given the cloth that identifies them. At this time the neophytes are now known as *kpokpor* or *husikpokpor* and through *avodede*
**nuti. Avode nuti** is a process where sanctified ritual cloths are presented to the *kpokpor* as his/her daily clothing until a graduation period. The *kpokpor* associated with the *So* are clad in *klala* (white cloth) while those who are initiated into the *Da* normally use blue cloth. At times when the blue cloth cannot be found, the *kpokpor* can use a black cloth instead.

**Figure: 3-7. Kpokpowo (dashi-behind and Soshi- in front) in their clothes working to makes some money for their graduation.**

**Figure: 3-8. Husikpokpo making a hand gesture signifying supplication as she walks**
When the *kpokpor* finished the *avodede nuti* process there are other initiation activities that continue. These can be divided into four categories: the oath of secrecy and baptism; languages, ethics, songs and dances; scarification; and renaming ceremony. While the initiates are going through these categories they are often described as being in seclusion. While in seclusion the initiates live within the *yevekpor* and cannot venture out into the community.

Before taking the oath of secrecy, the *kpokpor’s* head is shaved bald by an appointed priest. The *kpokpor* then swears an oath to all the deities involved in the cult, especially the ones he/she is initiated into. The *kpokpor* also promise to respect the ethics and leaders of the cult, and to keep all commandments of the cult sacred. Failure to adhere to this oath is believed to result in punishment and the wrath of the deities. The *kpokpor* is given prepared herbs to commune with the deities that are believed to protect and strengthen him/her as he/she goes through a confinement process. Sometimes, a white fowl is slaughtered and the blood is used to baptize the *kpokpor*, symbolizing the covenant between him/her and the deities. This sacred baptism is referred to as *yevedetame*.

Another activity that takes place during seclusion is devoted to learning the secret cult dialect called Yevegbe. This is a type of dialect that the *kpokpor* will be expected to use when he/she interacts with people. The people he/she interacts with are not only the *Yevesiwo* (Yeve members), but the *aheviwo* (non-members) as well. For example, before the *kpokpor* "graduates" from the initiation activities he/she has a few weeks to work in order to acquire money to buy colorful fabrics that will be used for
their graduation ceremony. As she goes out to work she will speak Yevege, but will use gestures so that they can understand her.

In addition to the learning of the Yevege, kpokpor also learn the significance of each deity and the particular rites associated with their veneration. Kpokpor also learn various types of songs and dances that accompany specific drumming during Yeve ceremonies. In reality, it takes a long time for the kpokpor to master all the rituals, songs, dances and ethics. As such, graduation of the kpokpor depends on how fast he/she is able to learn and pass the tests.

The third initiation activity produces a visual identity for Yeve members. It is called blinuisisi, meaning the process of scarification. The kpokpor at this time is identified by scarification that is normally visible on the face, shoulders and back of their body. The initiate receives three vertical marks on the forehead, three on the left cheek, and three on the right cheek (see figure 3-6 below). On both shoulders are given three horizontal row bearing seven marks in each row. At the back of the body the number of scarification marks given does not have a specific number. It depends on the initiate’s height. The scarification marks start from the beginning of the shoulder blades close to the spinal cord going down in a diagonal motion close to reaching the waist. Members of the cult are also characterized by a unique style of necklace that indicates the deity to which they belong. Initiates who belong to So and Da wear necklaces made out of special threads. Cowry shells are similarly worn on a long chain with one or two bells attached (see figure 3-10). Females wear two types of beaded cowries called dakpla across both shoulders and down the side to their hips, while males wear only one across their left shoulder down to their right hip.
The fourth part of becoming a recognized Yevesi is to have a change of name. Since the husikpokpo is baptized and converted, he or she must be given a divine name that reveals his or her destiny in relation to his or her deity. This name will remain with the kpokpor or the yevesi until death. The names are selected from names of deceased members and are bestowed on them by the midawo. The adopted names are often followed either by the characteristics or title\(^8\) of the deities. Here are some examples of names with their literal interpretations:

- Hudzengo  
  god takes the lead
- Huenyefia  
  god is king
- Hudolo  
  god is parable
- Huenyeame  
  god is the embodiment of human

\(^8\) The names of the deities typically refer to ideas of belief or their destructive nature.
• Sonyametor  thunder god is to be trusted and owned
• Sodoke    thunder god is rooted in earth
• Sodoahoe  thunder god is secret and hidden
• Sofeda    thunder god has destroyed the snake god
• Solafe    thunder god is at home
• Dashi     the one who owns the snake god
• Davide    the reward of the snake (daughter of Dashi)
• Datoledzi the snake god’s reward is in heaven
• Danyeku   the snake god is a threat and a death trap
• Dadogbe   the snake god is run in to the bush
• Dangoe    he who comes before the snake god
• Daenyefia Snake is the queen
• Dadzengo  the snake takes the lead
• Daenyametor the snake is what I own

The *kpokpowo* are then ceremonially bathed and presented to the priests and priestesses who present them to the public for the first time. It is important to note that this presentation ceremony is open to the public to observe. During this moment the *kpokporwo* are led into the dance arena outside the cult house for the first time since their seclusion to display some of the dances and songs they have learned. At the end of the dance performance the *kpokpowo* are permitted to visit their families. They are given a seven months pre-graduation period to raise funds towards their graduation ceremony. During their graduation the *kpokpowo* will be called *yevesi* and after their graduation they will replace their old clothing to adorn themselves with any printed cloth. In their full regalia they joyfully celebrate their graduation with the community through various dance-drumming.

**Categories of Initiates and Hierarchy in the Yeve Cult**

In all social groups there are titles given to people as they take on specific positions. The position requires specific responsibilities so that the members of the group know to go to them whenever there is something that needs to be fixed related to those responsibilities. In traditional dance clubs those names are very important. For
example, there is a *kada* (disciplinarian), *azaguno* (lead drummer), *heno* (song leader/composer), *hamevi* (a member) and *aforgedola* (organizer) among others. In the religious dance-drumming clubs the same division of titles to determine member roles exists. For instance, in the Ewe indigenous knowledge system a *bokor* is known by the all to be a diviner in the Afa religious society.\(^9\) *Sofo* is known to be the priest of the Brekete shrine.\(^10\)

In the same manner there are names that Yeve cult members adopt and that identify to the entire community their role in the Yeve cult. Here I try to describe a few of the names and their meaning.

**Kpakpor**

*Kpakpor* is considered a neophyte in the Yevekpor (the cult house). It is the first name a new comer under training adopts. There are two types of these people thus, *yevesi* and *dashi*. Yevesi is a person who is initiated into the thunder god, So. The name Yeve is commonly linked to the thunder god and that is why the initiates are called *yevesi*. This type of *kpokpor* is clad in *klala* (white cloth) as seen in figure 3-2. The *dashi* on the other hand is initiated into the Da, the royal python. *Dashi* is clad in *blor* or *bishi* (blue or black cloth). The general features of *kpokpor* as a trainee is to under-study people to enable him/her learn about the cult and its practices. They walk with one of their hands behind them resting on their waist, a gesture that symbolizes humility. They walk bare footed everywhere, no matter how hot the sand is or how wet the ground.

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\(^9\) See Swwor (2008) and Bascom (1953)

\(^10\) See Friedson (2009) and Hill (1981)
There is another category of *kpokpor* called *sonokporme*. Their system of learning and their responsibilities are more intense than the ordinary *kpokpor* and their confinement to the cult house can last as long as three to five years or more, during which time they may receive no visitors. They only come out around midnight to get some fresh air and go back into the *yevekpor*.

**Vodusi**

*Vodusi* is basically a generic name used among the Ewe speaking people to refer to anyone who worships a particular kind of deity. This should not be confused with *trosi*. Trosi is a devotee of a *tro*, which falls under the category of spirits and not a deity. That is why Yeve is not *tro* but *vodu*. Despite the generic use of the term *vodusi*, in the Yeve cult someone who graduated from being a *kpokpor* becomes a *vodusi*. According to Agbayiza, graduating from *kpokpor* to become *vodusi* can be considered a kind of promotion into a new rank. However, in its simplistic term, *vodusi* is a regular member of the Yeve cult. It is important to also emphasize that people use *vodusi* interchangeably with *yevesi*. For the sake of simplicity I often refer to them as *yevesi* in this paper. But we also need to understand that *yevesi* can also be used as a term for *So* initiates since Yeve is understood to be *So*.

**Avle**

*Avle* is a category of *kpokpor* who has an affiliation with the *avleketi* and has undergone *avleketi* rite. *Avleketi* is also one of the deities that constitute the entire deities of the Yeve cult. It is important that this initiate graduates from *kpokpor* before becoming *avle*. The *avle* initiates are popularly referred to as *avlesi*. In the Yeve cult the

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11 See Fiawoo (1959)
avlesi have some privileges and freedom over the rest of the vodusi or yevesi. There is no specific reason why it should be that way except that it is allowed according to the ethics, principles and doctrines of the Yeve cult. For instance, an avlesi has the right to wear sandals, shoes, shirts, and spectacles and can be playful with the cult members. This freedom is not given to any other yevesi other than the avlesi. On the other hand, the avlesi are considered the “comedians” of the Yeve cult. They make jokes and have a special dance they perform for comic relief to loosen the intense emotional states of the yevesiwo. It is convincing to conclude that it is their role as comedians that give them the freedom to behave in certain ways and wear any type of dress within the cult. It is also important to emphasize that only females become avlesi and not male initiates.

Figure 3-11. A section of Vodusiwo/Yevesiwo and avlesiwo
**Husunu**

*Husunu* is a male initiate of the Yeve cult. To become a husunu a person has to fulfill all requirements and graduate from being a *kpokpor*. Thus, the husunu is the next rank a male initiate attains after *kpokpor*. *Husunu* has a special responsibility in the Yevekpor. He is a unique messenger for his leader or master, the *midawo*. For instance, if a *midawo* is summoned to attend a meeting at a particular cult or gathering and for some pressing reasons he cannot attend; the only person who can represent him is the *husunu*. The *Midawo* can fervently count on *husunu* without disappointment. All *husunu* under-study the *midawo* and learn from him because the next rank of the *husunu* will be *midawo*. If the *husunu* acquires enough knowledge then he can also impact the person who will also learn from him.

The *husunuwo* also have special clothing known as *awlaya*. *Awlaya* is a kind of voluminous knee-length skirts containing so many yards of different colorful fabrics. Avorgbedor describes *awlaya* as “a type of skirt made up of several layers of cloth (with different designs). Due to the large number of cloth involved, the skirt attains a height which allows the wearer’s arm to rest on the top of the skirt making an angle of almost 90 degrees with the body” (1987: 12). Fixing the *awlaya* is a gradual process involving three to four members helping to fix just one. Before the *husunu* wraps the *awlaya* around him he secures the *agbadza*\(^\text{12}\) also known as *tunubbla* (see figure 3-12) to his waist. The *agbadza* contains several medicines, ritual herbs and other mystical amulets that serve as a powerful protection. He then wears the *awlaya* on top of the agbadza in

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\(^\text{12}\) *Agbadza* in this context is not the Ewe social and funeral dance-drumming of the Ewe people. It is referred to as “gun belt,” a belt for powerful and spiritual men. In the Yeve cult, the belt is made up of combinations of secret and powerful mystical elements that protect the *husunu* from other spiritual attacks.
addition to other smaller pieces of cloths. The *husunu* continues to add various layers of cloths onto the *agbadza* until he becomes satisfied with the volume that he likes. He seals the upper part of the cloth with a number of scarves to make it look good. After the *awlaya* is fixed, the *husunu* adorns a woven rope with several raffia-looking objects attached. The rope is tied around his torso with the raffias appearing to be hanging on his chest. The *husunuwo* sway them around during a dance performance in order to project the elegance of the costume and his authority. In addition to the *awlaya*, he uses three parrot feathers that are fixed into his headband. The parrot feathers are called *ese* which symbolizes the seriousness of the Yeve cult (see figure 3-14). Some people use two or three while others choose to use as many as they can.

Figure 3-12. Husunu with the *agbadza*
Figure 3-13. A section of Husunuwo in their regalia dancing

Figure 3-14. The front view of husunu with the raffia and *Ese*
Figure 3-15. The back view of the *husunu* in regalia

**Minawo**

*Minawo* is the high priestess of the Yeve cult. In terms of earning a degree or status this is the highest degree or status a female initiate can attain in the Yeve cult. They are considered primarily as mothers and the most experienced females in the Yeve cult. Also, through their experience they are known to have gained skills. In collaboration with their counterpart *midawo* they can ordain another *minawo*. Their responsibilities in the cult include teaching all the *kpokpor* to strictly adhere to the ethics of the cult, honor code and master all performative aspects of the rituals and the dance-drumming.

*A minawo* is easily identified with a white scarf around her head, white beads and white cloth wrapped over other clothing she is wearing. It is also possible that she may
tie her head with blue cloth if she was initiated into the Da before becoming a minawo. Unlike the kpokpor, minawo is allowed to wear sandals but not during dance-drumming performances.

Figure 3-16. A minawo in her white head scarf

**Midawo**

Like the minawo, midawo are the high priests of the Yeve cult. There are two levels of midawo commonly found in the Yeve cult and so it is at Ave-Dakpa. There is an ordinary ranked midawo and there is also a head midawo in charge of the Yevekpor. The number of midawo in each Yevekpor depends on the size and the activities of the cult. The head midawo, who is considered the high ranked priest, is responsible for the successful maintenance of the Yevekpor. He may also be interested in making sure his cult is attractive, organized and disciplined to add to his prestige among other cults. He also makes sure that his musicians, dancers, and song leaders do everything that is expected of them accurately and appropriately. The other midawo work hand-in-hand with the lead midawo to make sure these goals are achieved.
Like the minawo, the midawo are also characterized with a white scarf around their head. Sometimes, they can choose to dress as husunu. All midawo collaborate with minawo to train Yeve cult members and exhibit good and responsible leadership so that they serve as role models for others.

**Hugbono**

It is sometimes difficult to differentiate between the head midawo and hugbono. In fact, sometimes the head midawo can also be called hugbono. Hugbono however, is ranked higher than an ordinary midawo. Hugbono can also be considered as an experienced leader, elder and adviser of the cult. He dresses just as the head midawo but mostly focuses on maintaining appropriate behaviors of cult members in the Yevekpor. During events and ceremonies organized the hugbono or midawo can decide to dress as husunu without any question.

![A midawo in his usual white head scarf](image.png)

Figure 3-17. A midawo in his usual white head scarf
Yeve Colors and Symbolism

Yeve cults throughout the southeastern Eweland are identified by specific colors. The colors constitute the flag of the society that alerts the people in a particular community that there is Yeve cult in the town. The flags may also have so Midawome differences depending on the number of deities and the totality of rituals performed. In Ave-Dakpa, the colors of the Yeve cult flags include their main colors of nyagadzi (red), aklala (white) blor (blue). However, Agbayiza explains that sometimes bishi (black) can be used in place of blor (blue). The colors of the Yeve flag have their significance based on the mood of the deities, or specific cult activities.

The red color in the Yeve flag symbolizes accident, danger and destruction. It is important that the significance of this color is understood in relation to the context of the Yeve cult. Although there are some similarities, it cannot be analyzed in general Ghanaian or Ewe terms. The red color is used when the deity So causes destruction.
Using the emotions and forces of So can bring his wrath upon evildoers. Someone under the wrath of So cannot escape. They may try to hide in a house, tree or other object but a lightning-bolt will strike the escapee through any barrier. After So strikes it is only the Yeve priest who can go to the scene to cleanse the area before anyone can touch the victim. If the area is not cleansed and someone goes there the second person will fall victim as well. This ability to cause utter destruction is symbolized by the color red. In addition, the red symbolizes the spiritual nature and the seriousness of the cult. The red classifies the people as having unique spiritual forces. Yevesi dress in red more often than any other color. It visually demonstrates their unique spiritual force.

The white color is not used very much during Yeve ceremonies in comparison to the red. However, it is used when there are celebrations, promotions and annual thanksgiving ceremonies. It also symbolizes victory. For instance, when there is a disagreement between two Yeve members or a Yeve member and non-member, the case is judged at the traditional court of chiefs and elders. When the Yeve member wins the case he/she is fully dressed in purely white clothing with powder sprinkled on him/her. Sometimes a group of Yeve initiates will dress in the white cloth to join the celebration. This happens after the victorious person goes to the midawo’s house to alert him of his/her victory. The midawo sends for a number of Yeve members to accompany him to go sacrifice to the deities. As Agbayiza explains, “it is believed that the initiate’s deity has helped him/her win the case. Therefore we [they] all dress in white with white scarfs around our [their] heads to go sacrifice to the deities” (Personal conversation with Agbayiza April 18, 2012). As a native Ewe I am also aware of such
cases occurring. As can be seen above, the white in the Yeve flag at Ave-Dakpa signifies victory.

The blue color in the Yeve flag symbolizes sad moments and pain. The sad moment does not mean death or mourning. It deals with personal issues and other social issues concerning the cult. Personally, members may have issues relating to poverty or some kind of lament where a solution is needed outright but cannot be solved. The fact that the cult is spiritually powerful does not imply that its members do not have social problems. As such, when problems of this nature are beyond the bearing of the cult most people use the blue so that together they can lament and feel the pain together.

It is also important to note that individual members can decide to use a color code that indicates his/her particular situation at any given moment. When the other cult members see that person they immediately identify his/her situation even if the person does not want to voice it out.

In this Chapter various explanations on the concepts, origin and possible meanings of Yeve have been discussed. It is still uncertain the exact origin of Yeve but a significant part of Ewe history, oral tradition has it that it is a religious system that has been practiced from time immemorial even before the arrival of Christianity. The Ewe ancestors who practiced Yeve and other related voduwo (deities) brought it to Ghana during the migration and establish it to protect the people and the entire community. The cult house, colors of the flag and ritual objects in front of the cult house are indications for ahe (non-members) to alert them of that there is Yeve cult in the area. As a secret society there are categories of members in hierarchy that have specific responsibilities.
It is also important to emphasize that membership and various intensities of initiations as a spiritual rebirth are very crucial to becoming a legitimate member of the Yeve cult. Chapter 4 continues with some of the important rites that are performed during specific events and ceremonies in the Yeve cult at Ave-Dakpa.
CHAPTER 4
YEVE CULT AND ITS RITUALS – PART TWO

This chapter continues with a description of selected rites performed in the Yeve cult as started in the previous chapter. There are several rites associated with the Yeve cult that cannot be discussed in this study. However, as stated in chapter one this study describes just a few to give insights into some of the rites that are performed, the reasons of performing them, and the significance of their performance. This chapter now discusses adadada, adzaletsi lele, alagadzedze, alagalele and tsifodi rites as important ceremonies of the Yeve cult in Ave-Dakpa.

Adadada

This is one of the principal rituals performed when a Yeve member dies and is buried. Adadada comes from two words: ada and dada. It is difficult to explain the word ada however, the nearest in meaning is perhaps a state of seriousness or fury. It is not necessarily anger within a person but a deep emotion that is physically visible in the face. Dada is “the act of cooking something as in the Ewe phrase, nudada meaning, “cooking something” mostly on the fire. In comparison, adadada is intense and more serious than adzaletsi lele. The significance of adadada is primarily as a kind of rite believed to help plea for the deceased soul to journey into the afterlife and reunite with other Yeve ancestors.

Adadada Process

Before death, a person often cautions family members as to the type of rituals to be organized when she dies. Sometimes, a person will make provisions for those materials that need to be used so that there is no burden on the family members. The specific items needed for the adadada rite are agbotsu (ram), koklo (chicken), amidze
(red oil), bliwor (corn dough), nake (firewood), akpeteshie (local gin) and deha (palm wine).

Adadada according to the Yeve custom in Ave-Dakpa starts in the evening or sometimes at night. The midawo or hugbono in charge of the cult (in addition to other midawo and husiwo) goes to the sacred ground with all the purchased items. The ritual starts with the head midawo performing tsifodi to invoke the deceased spirit, alerting him/her that the Yeve cult and its members are about to perform the adadada for her. The deceased spirit, which according to Mbiti (1990) is referred to as “living-dead,” is believed to hang around for this rite so that she can find a comfortable place with his/her Yeve ancestors. The midawo then slaughters the agbotsu and spreads its blood around the ritual space. However, part of the blood is saved to mix with the bliwor and other items to make the food. After slaughtering the agbotsu its skin is carefully taken off and given to the head midawo.

From then, a big hole is dug in a cross-like shape and a huge ritual pot is place in the center of where the holes connect. There is a particular kind of ritual wood\(^1\) that is broken into seven small pieces according to the Yeve customs and carefully placed in the big hole under the pot. The midawo lights those small seven pieces of wood and leaves them to burn for sometime before everyone carefully adds the rest of the regular firewood through the four holes. With this fire some of the members do the cooking and others surround it and sing, dance and drum. The same pot is used for every activity during adadada rites. After the preparation of the food the amidze (red oil) is poured into

\(^{1}\) This wood is taken from a particular tree that I was not allowed to visit. It is believed to by a kind of mystical tree under which ancestors congregate. The midawo who normally pick part of the tree that is used for this ritual perform sacrifice by asking the ancestors permission before he picks a small portion of it.
the pot. This is a significant aspect of the *adadada* rite. When the head *midawo* pours the *amidze* into the pot the rest of the *midawo* and those who have specific charms start to chant and invoke different deities and ancestor. This sometimes turns to be chaos because everyone transcends into a spiritual realm with the chanting, charming and summoning until the *amidze* starts to catch fire. As the charming, chanting and incantations are in progress the priests also mention the name of the deceased several times. The various incantations make it possible for the fire under the pot to penetrate through the bottom and light the *amidze*. The pot does not burn and the surrounding people do not feel it as if they were by a fire. It is believed that at the moment the fire penetrates through the bottom of the pot to lite the red oil the deceased spirit has accepted and united with the ancestors. The belief is that the ancestors’ presence is what causes the fire to burn in this way. Several people close to this ritual ground can see the flames of the fire very high and the heat it causes them but the people by the fire do not feel the same. That is the ritualistic aspects of the rite. As the fire burns *midawo* who are very mystical or spiritually equipped get closer to the fire, dip their hands into the burning pot and rub the *amidze* against their body. Yeve members or other priests or priestesses who are not spiritually strong do not do this because they will end up falling victim to the fire. I must emphasize that it is when an individual witnesses this rite that the person knows the seriousness and the spirituality involved in the rite.

Drumming is an important aspect of adadada. As with singing, the drumming that accompanies the *adadada* rite is a means of reaching the divine and experiencing the presence of the deities. The principal drumming associated with *adadada* is *adavu*. It is
a dance-drumming with a heightened spiritual moment. The drumming is normally at its heightened pace in tempo and also very intense. The details of *adavu* are discussed in the drumming and dance chapters. Thus, by performing the *adadada* alongside different intensities of invocation, the deceased experiences the divine atmosphere of the spirits and the deceased is believed to finally reunite with the deities and ancestors. This rite is possible to start around 6:00pm and last until almost 3:00am the next day.

**Consequences**

This ritual is believed to be very demanding on the deceased as he/she unites with the Yeve ancestors. If the deceased family members refuse to perform the *adadada* ritual it may result in other threats or even death of another person in the family. Mbiti explains that, “the living-dead may give instructions, or enquire about the family, or make requests to be given something, and may even threaten to punish members of the family for not carrying out particular instruction or for not carrying out sufficiently for the living-dead” (1990: 158). If the spirit of the deceased does not reach the ancestors, it is believed that the spirit does not have any place to reside and therefore it continues to hunt and traumatize the family until the *adadada* rite is performed.

**Adzaletsi Lele - Final Funeral Rites**

*Adzaletsi lele* is one of the important rituals performed as part of the final funeral rite for the Yeve cult members. *Adzaletsi lele* is a phrase that can be broken down to help the reader understand the literal and the deeper meaning. In Ewe language *adzale* means soap. *Tsi* means water and *lele* is the act of washing something or bathing. For example, *me tsi lem* means “I am bathing” and *tsi lele* means “water for bathing.” Also, *adzaletsi* normally refers to foamy water. For instance, when people wash their clothing...
they sometimes make *adzaletsi* (foamy or soapy water) before soaking their clothing in it to wash. Therefore *adzaletsi lele* literally means “bathing with foamy or lathered water.” It is very common worldwide that individual like to use soaps (of any kind) on their body or their head in the shower. The purpose of using soap is to be very clean from dirt or sweat by washing them off the body. Translating this into the context of a Yeve funeral, the final funeral rite is a time when the deceased is “cleaned” of all debts. By performing *adzaketsi lele*, it is believed that the bereaved family is being cleaned from all debts or settled all expenses incurred during the organization of the deceased funeral rite.

When a Yeve cult member dies there are lots of rituals performances that take place. The number of rituals to be performed depends on the deity into which the Yeve member was initiated. Most of the rituals must be done before the Yeve member is finally buried. However, there are a few rituals that can only be performed a few days after the deceased is buried. *Adzaletsi lele* is one of them. *Adzaletsi lele* as a ritual is not organized by the Yeve cult. It is the bereaved family that organizes it. Basically, when a person dies individuals invest or loan money to the deceased family to help organize the funeral. The expenses incurred include buying a coffin, food to feed people traveling from far distances and buying the deceased a funeral dress (funerals are usually “open casket” in Ghana). After the burial the bereaved family keeps accepting donations from friends, love ones, welfare groups and immediate and extended family members to settle the loans and other debts that were taken. When the debts and the loans are finally settled, *adzaletsi lele* is performed signifying the complete end of the funeral activities. It is at the same time a form of celebration. During my field research I
asked what happens if the bereaved family does not want to perform *adzaletsi lele*. Agbayiza responded by saying that it is a custom that must be observed but did not say anything regarding the consequence for not performing it. It is popularly known and performed with all Yeve members and everyone is on watch to see it performed when a Yeve member is buried. It appears as though there is some kind of stigma attached to any family that is not able to perform it.

**The Organization**

The moment the deceased family is ready to perform *adzaletsi lele* a delegation is sent to the *hugbonoga* or head *midawo* (high priest in charge) to discuss and plan the time and date that is convenient for everyone. Approaching the *hugbono* or the *midawo* is done through a process called *dzadodo*. *Dzadodo* with specific regards to *adzaletsi lele* is a type of commitment fee that is paid to the priest in-charge to confirm the readiness of the family to undertake the ritual. When the *dza* (money) is accepted the priest then informs the members of the cult to note the date and time.

Since *adzaletsi* is a celebration, food and drinks are involved. The items normally required for *adzaletsi lele* are *gbor* (goat), *koklo* (chicken), *tomela* (fish), *bliwor* (corn dough) and *molu* (rice). The goat, chicken and fish are used to prepare a variety of soup and stews such as *amadetsi* (spinach soup), *ewodetsi* (light soup), *dedetsi* (palmnut soup), *azidetsi* (groundnut/peanut butter soup), *fetridetsi* (okro soup) and *molutadi* (stew for rice). These foods are sent to the midawo’s house. The food is normally labeled in three containers belonging to the *midawo*, *azagunowo* and *husiwo*. The *midawo* is given a variety of the food but more importantly he is given the legs of the goats and the chicken. This has a symbolic meaning. The *midawo* is expected to inform the members of the Yeve cult regarding this event. As such he needs to have strong feet and legs to
enable him do on his errands. Therefore, the legs of the goat and chicken are given to him as a symbol to add to the strength of his feet and legs. As he eats the food he is reminded of the significance. In the same manner, the drummers are given the arm of the goat and the wing of the chicken. As they eat the arms and the wings it reminds them that they will be investing their own arms in drumming and cannot get tired. In addition to the drummers food they are also given approximately 400 to 500 Ghana cedi, which is equivalent to 35 or 40 dollars. The husiwo are given any other part of the goat and chicken. Their food does not have any symbolic meaning to it.

As part of the ritual some of the food is placed in a bowl and taken to the graveside of the deceased. Similar to other Ewe people, the members of the Yeve cult believe that when a person dies he/she is not completely gone. The person’s spirit is still in the midst of the people. As such, the deceased’s favorite food is placed at the head of the grave with the belief that he/she will eat it. At the graveside, tsifodi is performed for the ancestors to accept the deceased and to ask the deceased to prepare a better place for the living who will eventually die. Mbiti explains, “human beings keep the relationship going between them and the living-dead, chiefly through libation, offering of food and other items, prayers and the observation of proper rites towards the departed or instructions from them” (1990: 158).

The Performance

Another important aspect of adzaletsi lele is the dance-drumming performance. This is what almost everyone anticipates in the community. Although the deceased was part of the Yeve cult it is not all the Yeve repertoire that is performed at this event. The midawo in charge of the cult chooses the dance-drumming that should be performed.
They are mostly the less spiritual types such as *husago* and *ako* from the Yeve repertoire and usually the popular *agbadza* dance-drumming.

The audience participates freely in any of the dances, but on condition that they do not wear shoes or shirts or blouses. The men must wrap a cloth around their waist and dance with a bare chest, as is typical of *agbadza* dancing. The women use a second cloth or fabric to wrap over their chest. They can also wrap it around their neck and tie a knot at the back of their neck.

During the dance-drumming, drummers take short breaks to rest their arms while individuals or family members give testimonies of the deceased’s life. Others make jokes and tell stories to transition from the sadness of the person’s death to a celebration of life. In case there are some disputes within the family it is during this rite that every misunderstanding and anger is resolved. I must emphasize that the *adzaletsi lele* rite is a powerful and a unifying moment for the Yeve members, the bereaved family and the community at large.

**Alagadzedze - Defilement**

There are numerous dance clubs or dance-drumming groups across the southeastern corner of the Volta region. Each dance club has a constitution that defines the rules and regulations to govern and create discipline among the people. There are times when the community is summoned to come out and listen to the rules and regulations of a newly “outdoored” dance club. This is done to create mutual respect and understanding between the dance club members and non-members. As the rules have been publicly announced, anyone who may go contrary to any of the ethic codes will receive an appropriate punishment.
The Yeve cults in southeastern Ewe towns also have sets of rules for members that are shared with the community at large. The Yeve cult’s rules and regulations are some of the most sophisticated and rigorous due to its religious nature. The Yeve cult in Ave-Dakpa is no exception. The rules governing the Yeve cult and its members are well known to the community members. For instance, it is widely known in Ave-Dakpa that a non-Yeve cult member cannot enter the cult. They cannot insult a Yeve initiate. They cannot gossip about the doctrines of the cult and they cannot make mockery of them. As such, the Yeve members also know their responsibilities, especially how to relate to non-members and the kind of conversations they can have together.

The consequences for going against these rules can be dire. For example, the moment a person insults a Yeve cult member it is believed that his/her life will be full of misery and regrets. It is said in Ewe, *egble amea*, meaning “the person has been spoilt or defiled.” The defiled person in this case is referred to as *alaga*. Defiling a Yeve cult member is one of the most serious offences according to Yeve codes of conduct. The defiled member is said to *gli* “turn wild” and behaves in a somewhat abnormal manner, such as screaming without inhibition regardless of place or situation, even in the presence of a high-ranking chief. With this action the *husi* (Yeve member) takes advantage of *alagadzedze*, a redress mechanism for defilement.

There are a few people who have seen *alaga* on the streets, farms or in some locations and wonder why that term is used to describe such a situation. My uncle Sofeda explained this to me when I was in secondary school and Agbanu, an elder in my hometown, confirmed his explanation. Agbanu says:

*Alagadzedze* is derived from three different words as *ela*, *ga*, and *dzedze*. *Ela* among Ewe speaking people generally refers to a fish or animal. But
in this context, it signifies an animal. It refers to those animals laworde (wild animal) that growl searching for food or out of discomfort. And ga means “big” and dzedze is a process of imitating or impersonating something. Therefore alagadzedze literally means “to impersonate a big wild animal” (Personal conversation with Agbanu, August 13, 2006)

C.K Ladzekpo\(^2\) also refers to alaga or alagadzedze as “a lunatic state of a person” (Personal conversation with Ladzekpo January 09, 2010). Explaining this terminology further, Amuzu Kokoroko gave an example of when people tell us in Ewe, *enyе лα nυtυr or eлαtоe ne nyε, тαgбо mεlε аσιwо о.* This translates as, “you truly behave as animal” or “you are an animal, you do not reason well” (Interview with Kokoroko April 10, 2012).

**Causes of Defiling a Yeve Member**

There are three possible ways that a person may defile a Yeve cult member. These are a bit difficult to explain but I will try to do so one after the other. The gods into which the members are initiated forbid certain words. As members are initiated the sacred and ritual substances that link them and their gods do not permit such insults. Aspects of these ritual substances may be imbued in them during scarification process to trigger a situation of this kind.

A very serious and offensive abuse is to say *avу* or *avу nαwо* or *avу yαkα.* This is a common insult given during an altercation. When a disagreement or a fight ensues between a Yeve member and non-member it is possible that both tempers will rise and may lead to some kind of insult. That is particularly common among women in Eweland as men tend to engage in physical fights instead. During an exchange of abusive words the non-member may loose her temper and insult the Yeve initiate using the word or

\(^2\) C.K Ladzekpo is a master drummer and a professor at University of California at Berkeley, San Francisco.
phrase *avu, avu yaka* or *avu nawo*, meaning “dog, hopeless dog or you are a dog.”

Obviously the weight this insult carries using the Ewe language is nowhere near the English interpretation of it. It is such a terrible insult that is against the ethics of the Yeve cult therefore no one can use it on them.

-An even worse insult is to say *menye mi de nuwo me*, literally meaning, “I shit or poop in your mouth.” It is just so wrong to use a phrase of this nature against the Yeve cult members. In fact, it is nothing close to raising the middle finger to someone in the United State. The effect of saying this is as if they were to put the Yeve member in a heap of thorns. It sets them to a torture, which is why it can affect them to the extent that they become *alaga* or defiled.

-Another thing that can also cause a Yeve member to become *alaga* is to call his or her day name. For example, a female born on Monday is named *Adzo*, a male Saturday born is *Kwame*, male born on Tuesday is *Kobla*, and a female born on Friday is *Afi*. These names are very common outside of the Yeve cult. However, after a person becomes initiated into the Yeve cult not even his/her own parents can call him/her by their day name. Swwor emphasizes that, “as Christians who have their names changed from the African names, the members of the Yeve are given the Yeve names. The names given to them would be announced at their graduation performance to inform the community and forbids the public from calling the member by his or her old name” (2008: 11). This is the rule of the cult and it must be observed as such. If a non-member mistakenly or intentionally mentions the day name instead of their religious name, they must turn “wild” according to the Yeve customs.
The third insult comes in the form of degrading the status and the personality of Yeve initiates. For instance, a rich man referencing by pointing a finger directly to the Yeve initiates calling him/her *ame de ahe* (a poorest or a good for nothing person) or spit right behind the initiates as he/she walks by. It is a gesture meaning, “a person smells and is undesirable, inhuman and possibly deserves to be on in trash.” To teach this rich person a life lesson the Yeve initiates make sure it takes that person a lifetime to pay for his/her gesture and attitude. Thus, the Yeve initiate goes to report the person’s attitude to the leader of the cult. It is no doubt that the *husi* and the *husunu* are relatively poor. But it does not also mean that rich or wealthy citizens should take advantage of their situation instead of assisting them and the community at large. As such, when this happens the punishment for a person with this attitude can take variety of forms. The culprit can be imbued with some spiritual sickness such that he/she will spend all of his/her money without being cured. Eventually the money runs out and he/she becomes poor and experiences what it is to be poor. In addition, the *midawo* or the Yeve cult leaders are capable of torturing someone spiritually. They can perform a kind of sacrifice or libation that can affect the culprit leading the culprit to become a member of the cult. The libation is discussed at the end of this chapter.

I must emphasize that the punishment for the culprit sounds very cruel however, its purpose is to teach the entire community to be respectful to each other and be each other’s keepers. It is through some of these cruel punishments that other people learn their own lessons.

**The (Re)Action**

In all three instances of defilement, the aggrieved *husi* takes charge by running wild through the principal streets of the town exclaiming what happened and then
entering the cult house to narrate the incident to the head priest. The head priest performs specific rituals to settle the Yeve member as he investigates the case at the earliest possible time, preferably within a day. Even if the non-Yeve member wins the case they, he/she will still have to buy a few items to cleanse the Yeve member. However, the Yeve members almost always win their cases. If the Yeve member is right then he/she runs wild into the bush. The *alaga* then leaves the public sphere for a maximum of two weeks before undergoing a cleansing ceremony.

At this point the defiled Yeve member does not wear his/her ordinary clothing. But goes with his godparents into the forest to cut leaves and branches to create a special costume. In the forest, special plants and leaves associated with the cult are used as a garment for the *alaga*, which is believed to help sustain him while in the wilderness. The *alaga* also carries two pieces of ritual sticks (like the handle of a tennis racket) for protection and also use them to accompany him/herself when singing. He comes out of the bush on some afternoons to declare his/her innocence in song:

*Ao lao! ao, Aboboboboe!*
*Mele aho dzi lo!*
*Devie menye nye me nya o lo!*
*Kwakue dom loo!*
*Ao! ao! ao, Aboboboe! (screaming)*

I am in the wilderness.
I am very innocent and know nothing.
It is Kweku who caused me to this.
I am in the wilderness because of him.

The *alaga* sings these phrases repeatedly and other songs as well. The *alaga* remains in the bush until the one who defiled him has enough money to purchase the necessary items for the cleansing rituals. Daenyeametor, my aunt, told me that “the
alaga goes home at a time when nobody will see him, preferably midnight, and eats very heavily, has some rest and quickly goes back into the bush around three o’clock in the morning” (Personal conversation with Daenyeametor, August 12, 2006). Although there are costumes for husikpokpo that identify him as being new in the Yeve religion, the defiled initiates also have a unique garment for use in the bush.

**Alagalele – The Arrest and Cleansing**

*Alagalele* is the process of arresting the *alaga* and performing the cleansing rituals. The timing of *alagalele* depends on the culprit’s ability to gather the funds and buy the items before the arrest. If the culprit does not have money the *alaga* will remain in the wilderness and the bush for a long time. Even when the funding is available it sometimes it takes a few days or a week. The moment the culprit is ready with the items for the cleansing ceremony, he reports to the head priest and his counsel. Selected members of the Yeve cult dress up with their singing instruments *adodo* (multiple bells), organize a search party to look for the *alaga* and bring him/her into the cult house. The compulsory items needed for the cleansing rite are *amidze* (red oil), *kokloyibo* (black chicken), *koklotsu yi* (white rooster), *todziha* (gin), *akpeteshi* (local gin) and two hundred (200) Ghana cedi. In addition, there are a few other things that may be required. The cleansing ritual performance begins by examining the items brought by the offender in the presence of the victim. The victim is taken into a secret ritual room by both *midawo* and *minawo* to be bathed for purification with sacred herbs. Only the authorities from the cult witness the cleansing ceremonies. When the cleansing is completed, the initiate dresses in the expensive clothes the offender provided as part of the punishment. The cleansed initiate is then processed to the dancing arena to dance with the rest of the members.
The significance of the *alagalele* is to reinstate the defile person back to his/her normal life. It also means that the culprit is free from all the charges billed to him/her. It also teaches a lesson to the entire community to be respectful and do what is right by law according to the customs and values, which are at the heart of the people.

**Tsifodi – Libation**

There are countless traditional religions and ritual forms practiced amongst diverse ethnicities throughout the continent of Africa. Although these religions are considered as paganism, fetishism, superstition, and mystical among people who are unfamiliar with them, scholars of African religion such as Idowu (1973), Parrinder (1974), Ray (1976), Mbiti (1990) among others, have argued that they are a vital part of life. One of the many important practices of African religion is the poring of libation. Libation is a means of interacting with one’s ancestors as well as God, the Supreme Being. Prior to the advent of missionaries and the acceptance of Christianity, the only appropriate means of communicating, offering and honoring the Supreme God, ancestral spirits and other divinities was through libation. In Ghana, libation is performed during national events, marriage ceremonies, festivals, when moving into new homes or new jobs, royal stool ceremonies, rites of passage, reception of important delegations, success in important enterprises and during accidents, death or funeral events.

A variety of ethnic groups use local terminologies or languages and dialects to describe the libation ritual. For example, the Akans refers to it as *nsaguo*; the Ga people living in the capital of Ghana, Accra call it *shitswaa*; the Dagomba or Dagbamba people residing in the northern part of Ghana call it *suhugu*; and the Ewe people in the Volta region located in the southeastern Ghana refer to it as *tsifodi*. 
Tsifodi comes from two words: tsi (water) and foedi (act of pouring [liquid] on the ground). The Ewe people conceive of tsifodi as a form of veneration, a religious practice established from time immemorial to remember and honor the Supreme God, deities and ancestors. They strongly hold to the view that the establishment of tsifodi is from God Omnipresent and has been practiced by their ancestors recorded in His holy book, the Bible. Sometimes, it is also referred to as a drink offering. Kumassah traces and reaffirms the institution of libation in the bible. He writes: “The art of libation is an order given to the Jews by God as recorded in the book of Exodus…In fact, the word libation occurs five times, the plural libations ten times, drink offering thirty times and drink offerings twenty-two times in the Bible” (2009: 21). As a result of the belief that this practice is an order from God, the Ewes hold it in a very high esteem. Through the encouragement from tsifodi ancestors and deities support and protect the lives of humans. The practice of tsifodi is therefore ever-present in the lives of the Ewe people. For example, it is a norm that if a family member or a visitor comes to your house water is the first thing that is given whether the visitor is thirsty or not. This is a sign of welcoming and acceptance into a person’s house. The visitor, thirsty or not, drinks the water and drops a little of it on the floor to inform the ancestors of his safe arrival (no matter how short or long the distance) and acceptance into the house. Some serious practitioners, especially priests and religious leaders, go to the extent of leaving the room to go to the compound of the house where they call out all the family ancestors and deities to inform them of the person’s safe arrival. This is the first step before anyone can begin to exchange greetings.
In the Yeve cult at Ave-Dakpa, *tsifodi* is a potent link between deities, spirits, ancestors and human beings. It is considered a powerful and sacred form of prayer in the cult. Agbayiza performed *tsifodi* (which I will discuss later) upon my arrival at Ave-Dakpa and I asked him to tell me what *tsifodi* was about. He explained that *tsifodi* is *nufofo kple togbeawo* (communication with ancestors) and *gbedododa toxe* (a special prayer). To paraphrase him, *tsifodi* is a *dekornu* (customary rite) performed as a link to communicate with the *togbeawo* (ancestors); it is *gbedododa* (an essential prayer), a request depending on the situation (pressing or calming), a sacrifice to *mawowo* (gods) to achieve a particular purpose (Agbayiza August 12, 2010). Like Agbayiza, Gbokpa Adrianyi also described *tsifodi* as “*gbedoda* (prayer) to gods and ancestors marking an event of the community anytime they are gathered together” (Adrianyi August 14, 2010).

Various scholars also discuss libation as a prayer. For example, Ampene describes libation as “a form of prayer that is sometimes referred to as *mpae* (prayer) or by the general reference *nsaguo* (literally, the pouring of drink)” (2005: 127). Fisher also adds that with libation, “pouring a liquid or dropping some food on the ground accompanied with a prayer is common” (1998: 36). Discussing the context and significance of prayer in traditional religion Shorter explains, “prayer is to express the faith, life, work and ruling motive of the religious believer. It is a sign of religion wherever it is alive – religion in action – and through it differing cultural identities are revealed” (1975: 1). For the priests in the Yeve cult in Ave-Dakpa, it is evident from various oral accounts that the only effective way to be in touch with Supreme God and deities is through *tsifodi* or *dzatsi*. Hutor Sofeda, one of the priests in the Yeve cult states that, “if Christians consider prayer as an effective communication between them and their creator then it is
also true for what we do here in the Yeve cult because God and the deities respond to our prayers for what we ask them even for the community here in Ave-Dakpa (Personal conversation Sofeda August July15, 2006). Sofeda’s argument is affirmed and validated in the work of Mbiti, which translate well to the context of the Yeve cult. He writes: “For the community at large, libation as a form of prayer may request for rain, peace, the cessation of epidemics and dangers to the nation, success in war or raids, the acceptance of sacrifice and offering, and fertility for people, animals and crops” (1991: 62). He further elucidates the contexts and forms of individual and communal essence of prayer in the libation process and explains:

African traditional prayer generally includes praise, thanksgiving, a declaration of the state of affairs in which the prayers are offered, and requests. Such prayers always have concrete intentions, and people do not ‘beat about the bush’ when saying their prayers. They request such things as: good health, healing, protection from danger, safety in traveling or some other undertaking, security, prosperity, preservation of life, peace, and various benefits for individuals (1991: 61).

There is enough evidence in the scholarly works reference above and the native Ewe perspective. I agree from personal experience growing in the house of my grandfather, a chief and a religious leader who performs tsifodi several times a day depending on various needs for himself, family, clan and the territory that he ruled.

The Officiating Priest

In Ghanaian custom generally, tsifodi is performed by an elderly person, a family head or a priest of a particular shrine. According to Sarpong libation [tsifodi] “is usually done by men or linguists or official spokesmen rather than by a woman…Generally, the head of the family or the clan performs the ceremony for the family or clan. The most
senior of the male members of the royal family does it at the stool ceremony” (1996: 22).

In the Yeve cult in Ave-Dakpa, it is the head *midawo* or *hugbono* who officiates *tsifodi*. No female initiate does it. It is important that the selected priest who officiates the *tsifodi* must possess the necessary spiritual forces to open the doors for spiritual communication. Stressing this reality Elebuibon adds that, the officiates or the priests are the “custodians of wisdom and knowledge. He must have consecrated himself and abstained from all forms of impurities” (2000: 23).

During *tsifodi* the officiating priest is required to remove his shoes or sandals, hat, cap and watch (if any) to show a sign of respect for mother earth deities and the ancestors. As Yeve custom demands, the *midawo* officiating that particular ceremony must bare his chest and only wrap a piece of cloth around his waist (without shirt) to signify supplication and humility. It also gives the signal that the priest has a clear mind and thoughts. As such, he is of no evil and ready to intercede for those who are in any predicament. Additionally, it is required that the officiating priest is knowledgeable in the oral literature, chronicles of ancestors and deities, their by-names and praise names to evoke them in the rightful manner. Fisher explains that, “the officiant of the libation memorizes the recently living dead in prayer, and he recites a list of genealogy from the past. Failure to remember the dead may bring host disasters on the community” (1998:36). He is the master of ceremony and the one who discharges the peoples’ petition.

**Elements of Tsifodi and their Significance**

The items used for *tsifodi* performance varies depending on each situation. In the Yeve cult at Ave-Dakpa there are four items that constitute the *tsifodi* performance.
These are *tsi* (water), *bliwo* (corn flour), *tre* (calabash) and *akpeteshi* (distilled local liquor).

Water is an important element in *tsifodi* rituals. It is believed that ancestors are at work all the time directing the affairs of mankind. The water is believed to cool the heart of the ancestors and deities. The priest stirs the water in a clockwise direction, symbolizing the continuity of life and genuine relationship between the ancestral spirits, deities and the living.

*Bliwo* is corn flour that is thoroughly mixed with the water. This unique mixture is also known generally among the Ewes as *dzatsi.*³ The officiating priest stirs the *dzatsi* with his right hand as he declares his mission of the gathering and the reason for the ritual. The Yeve members believe that food, shelter, and water are basic necessities for human comfort. Therefore, during the *tsifodi* ceremony the priest provides these needs for the ancestors who are believed to exist in the spiritual realm on earth. The *bliwo* that is used to make the *dzatsi* represents the food that deities and ancestors are believed to consume. Sarpong emphasizes this point and states that, “the [tsifodi] purpose is to feed the spirits so that they would be pleased with the living” (1996: 23). Among the Ewe people food in general is important is an important gesture and a means of establishing a cordial relationship with people and friends. Therefore the *dzatsi*, which is believed to be the food, is poured on the ground for the ancestors to reinforce the links between them and human beings. In addition, water is also poured on sometimes the side or on the *dzatsi* with the belief that it will helps digest the *dzatsi* and quench the ancestor’s thirst.

³ See Gaba (1996)
Etre, the calabash, is an important ritual vessel for tsifodi performance. There is an Ewe proverb that says, amesi ṇoli nya la, eyae ṇoli wuna, meaning, “the person that a ghost knows, is that person he attacks.” How does this proverb translate and situate the significance of the calabash as a vessel during tsifodi rite? In the past, the calabash was the most important instrument used in place of plates and cups. Ancestors used the calabash to fetch water and also to drink and eat from. In short, it served many purposes and the ancestors identified themselves with the calabash. It is also believed to be natural unlike cups and glasses that are made using sharp materials or some sort of chemical to mix the elements in their creation.

Alcohol or liquor is not used in all tsifodi in the Yeve cult. There are deities who accept sodas depending on the situation and others take alcohol to have their responsibilities fulfilled in a timely manner. The priests in the Yeve cult know the likes and dislikes of their deities as well as what aggravates or appeases them. As such akpeteshi is used when there is an emergency or a pressing situation that needs immediate reaction such as an armed-robbery. Akpeteshi in its ritual context is considered a stimulant and a driving force that activates and arouses the interest of human thought for the deities or ancestors to accomplish a particular obligation. It is believed to intoxicate the deities who then bring their wrath upon any perpetrators.

Purpose of Tsifodi

Tsifodi is performed for various reasons and events. When people wake up from bed they can perform tsifodi to thank the ancestors or God for his protection through the night. It is performed to discharge information, petition, forgiveness and thanksgiving to the deities and ancestors. An important role of tsifodi is to invoke the wrath of the
deities. In certain parts of Africa, including within the Yeve cult, malevolent forces are believed to surround humans and act upon them in good and bad ways. When a force acts in ways that have a negative effect on a human being, the person must seek help from the deities. As such *tsifodi* and sometimes sacrifices are the only ways to remedy the situation. Elebuibon explains some of these factors. He writes:

> It is believed that there was order, peace and tranquility in the beginning of the universe. Disorder with its accompanying problems and hardships set in as a result of man’s self-created problems. Man is therefore considered as the architect of his own fortunes. This, in part, has to do with the type of destiny he chooses. Another reason being the mishaps posed by the malevolent agents like the witches and comrades of heaven” (2000: 37)

In Yeve cult at Ave-Dakpa there are two types of *tsifodi* performed. They relate to the discussion above in that the first in done in more general, good contexts while the other is more of a threat and considered bad.

The first category considered the good *tsifodi* is performed to give thanks and praise to the Supreme Being, ancestors, spirits and deities for their guidance, protection and strengthening powers. This type of *tsifodi* is accompanied sometimes with sacrifice to show appreciation. For instance, surviving a car accident; return from a long trip or for a person’s health recovery. Another example of this category of tsifodi rite can be found below.

The second category is less frequently performed because of its destructive nature. *Tsifodi* in this category is perform against evil people such as murders, armed robbers, rapists, thieves and people who are a threat to the community in some way. The ancestors with the collaboration of the deities and spirits send their wrath upon such people according to the type of petition discharged to them. In fact, it can even result in the loss of human life. For example, I asked Tsale in an interview why he thinks
the Yeve cult should give a severe punishment to such people. This is how he explains it:

Those evil people are not tolerated in the community so they are quickly subjected to the god of thunder or the snake god for action. If someone is hunting or does something to ruin my life, I will mention their names to the etro or the vodu that I worship, and with the etro’s favorite gift and drink, narrate the story and put the etro into action by spitting the drink or liquor into his face. Believe me, the thunder will strike the person dead or the snake will coil into the person’s stomach in less than ten minutes, I swear! (Personal conversation with Tsale, August 11, 2006).

Tsifodi in this category becomes a mechanism for crime prevention because people do not want to loose their life or go through the moments of torture that can come. For instance, towns such as Anloga, Woe, Tegbi, Denu, Adina, Blekusu, Afiadenyigba, Dzodze, Dzita, Nogokpo, and Klikor among many others have experienced less criminal activities in present day than in the past due to the quick intervention of the so, invoked through tsifodi.

Figure 4-1. Agbayiza performing tsifodi with Yevesiwo supporting
Structural Organization and Examples of Tsifodi

*Tsifodi*, be it good or a threat, has a simple but detailed organizational structure that the officiating priest normally adheres to. The structure includes a call for attention, invocation of ancestors/deities/spirits, declaration of purpose, contract/agreement (based on the situation), the specific petition being made, prayer for general blessing and favor, and conclusion. Agbayiza, my principal informant, performs this *tsifodi* stated and labeled below:

A

Agoo!  Agoo!!
Medo Agoo, zigbo zieto!

Attention! Attention!
* I call everybody’s attention the third time.

B

Oh! Togbeawo, meyo mi
Meyo mi Ashito Agbelifufu⁴, mikata ken
Azeafe, meyo wo kenken
Eye meyo Gakpleadzi, meyo
Eye meyo Sofia, meyo wo
Sodzide, meyo wo, Logosu, meyo wo
Eye meyo ametsia Dzido, meyo wo
Meyo Agbogbla⁵,
Ebe ye dze keto fe me,
Meyo wo kenken.

Oh! Ancestral spirits I call you
Ashito Agbelifufu, I call you
Azeafe, come and witness
Gakpleadzi, I call you
Sofia, I call you
Sodzide (deity). I call you
Ancestor Dzido. I call you

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⁴ Agbelifufu is my informant Agbayiza’s surname name, which he inherited from his grandfather.

⁵ Agbogbla is a name of one of the wealthy deities, which is used as a metaphor in this context. This metaphor is to make the deity angry so that he leaves his home and rushes to wherever he operates. That is why it goes this way: “Agbogbla the rich one has fallen or is now seen in a poor home, which is a tease.”
Agbogbla, I call you
The one who arrived in the home of the poor
I call you now for sure.

C
Ashito Agbelifufu, woe tso Yeve 've
Eye newoe nami kenken
Nyatefe, egba mieva kpe.
Wonu dewo li vasede fifia
Mie yom, mie medem vivi nada si dedzi
Dewo wonua, newo koe yia, ameta noa dzi,
Esia me ko gbeto a to ako ayi abe alesi Hodzi,
Hodzi woe tututu eye Atanve dua nyo la
Medi be afesia me ha nanyo nenema
Amesi va nua wofe la, nana efe susu na vu
Nusiwo kata lem wole la, ne dze eye eme na ko
Ne wotsoe yia, woava kplo togbeaviwo ha
Atso yi deafotome, abe alesi afetovia va ene
Ne meku etso megbela, nye nuko nano anyi.

Ashito Gbelifufu, you brought Yeve
And we also took over from you.
Truly, we have gathered here today
We need your assistance and support.
Like Hodzi at Atanve
I want my home also to be bright and prosper.
So give him(me) a retentive memory
That every coverage and recoding will come very clearly.
If there is a success, our children will also benefit and travel abroad
So that when I die, my name and legacy will not be lost.

D
Evo ne ameade le afiade be ye nye Hugbono
Be yea te gbeto kpo la, ah!
Nee xo aha sia eye meda tua amea o la,
Ke mega nye kpoge o, enye gbloe na wo!
Ne ameade medi be mano agbe o la
Nu atiko na eya nuto!

But if someone claims to be a Hugbono
to challenge my spirit or tempt me, alas!
if you take this drink without striking.
I promise you will never see me again.
If someone plots or wishes for my death,
the person will rather run into his grave.
May this project be a success
So that more researchers will come back
And learn about our practices and you.
Finally, it will be your disgrace if you do not compromise

This is a type of tsifodi performed mainly for protection. Agbayiza performed this as a response to a particular confrontation that started after I became very popular in Ave-Dakpa and participated in all activities with them. One afternoon, another Yeve priest saw me coming from church and did not like the idea. He confronted Agbayiza for teaching me aspects of Yeve rituals and thought I was sharing the Yeve knowledge system with church members. Agbayiza felt threatened and also wanted to protect my safety. As we can read from this tsifodi, Agbayiza evoked the deities, gave thanks for my life and summoned the deities to protect him and me during the course of the research.

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6 The wife here refers to the snake god, the Da, which is a wife to the god of thunder, So. It is believed that if you are a Hunor or Hugbonor who is initiated into these two deities then the female deity could be addressed as your wife and the male as your father.

7 Sofia is the sacred medicine placed in a bottle for life and death.
The A section of the *tsifodi* is a call for the attention of the audience or the individuals around and to the spirits believed to be in the atmosphere. The B section evokes deities of the town and universe as well as ancestral spirits, some of whose names are mentioned such as Agbogbla, Ashito Agbelifufu, Gakpleadzi and Zeafe. The C delivers the purpose of the *tsifodi* and reveals some benefits that might come from my research such as documenting a history for the town and the Yeve cult. In the D section Agbayiza requests that we should both be protected. Besides this, he also swore to the deities that in case they allowed any misfortune to occur, he would use his own powers to defend me. He made it clear that he would no longer be a link between them and the cult members if they disappointed him. After all these petitions, in section E he also requested that the deities should bless my project and my stay in the town. In the final section F, however, he offers drink and food to the deities and reminds them again to be active in their works.

*Agbayiza performed the *tsifodi* below when a group of thieves went to rob Gbeda’s house. They took her television, money, expensive jewelries and many other things. Gbeda is part of the Yeve cult and went to report the incident to Agbayiza, the head priest of the cult so that he may seek revenge.*

A
Agoo! Agoo! Agoo!
Medo agoo zi eto

*Attention, attention attention!*  
*I call for three times*

B
Hodzie do  
Ho do ta  
Ho yi xo
The rising sun, I call
The mid-day sun
The sun that sets, I called

C
Togbeawo me yo mi kata
Ashito Agbelifufu, me yowo
Tohono, me yowo he
Voduda meyo wo
Afedo me trowo pete meyo mi
Dakpa voduwo meyo mi kekeken
Mele fefle le mia nku me
All the ancestors, I call
Ashito Agbelifufu, I call
The thunder god, I invoke you
The royal python, I invoke you
All family spirits, I honor you
All Dakpa deities, I invoke you
I naked myself here before you

D
Tohono, enya de vadi
Fiafiwo va gbe afe na Gbeda
Gbeda viwoe ntonto wo nye
Gbeda fe dzie vudzo gbagbagba
Edzi be na de amea afia

Tohono, a case had happened
Thieves broke into Gbeda’s house
And Gbeda is your own daughter
Her heart is burning and angry
She wants an instant revenge

E
Dadagbe kple miano voduda
Nenye be mie de amea de go o
Ke mienyae be nuse mele miasi o
Miayi abia hlo le vodu bubugbo
Ne mie fo dzatsia name fia ko
Afo netso nami kabakaba
Dadagbe, etua ne no didim

Thunder god and the royal python
If you do not expose or revenge
I bet, then you have no powers
We will seek refuge from others

168
When I pour down this libation
Be quick and get on your feet
Thunder god, keep shooting

F
Tohono, ewoe tua dage
Wo aha nye yi,
Ne enoe la mui de wo nu
Voduawo kple trow kata
Mia toe nye yi, noe de wo nu
Sofia, ewo li, meli
Etefe mega didi o
Nye me tsi koge name o
Ne miede amea de go la
Me maxe nuxe name
Mixo aha mia no looo

Tohono, you are known for firing
Here is your special drink
Drink it against the culprit
All the deities and spirits
Here is yours for the same purpose
Sofia, I live because of you
Please, no time to waste at all
I will not offer any of you water
I will not offer any of you water
When you find the culprits
I will make a big sacrifice for you
Here is the alcohol drink all of it.

As usual, the A section here calls attention of the spirits and the people around.
The B section acknowledges the sun god that is believed to link to the worship of the
Egyptian sun god Ra. The C also acknowledges the deities in the Yeve cult such as the
thunder god normally referred to as tohono dadagbe. It also acknowledges the wife of
the thunder god, voduda, the royal python that is also part of the Yeve cult. In addition,
all the family deities, spirits and ancestors including those of the town in Ave-Dakpa are
called to be a witness and to help in this endeavor. The D section declares the purpose

8 See Kumassah 2009
for this rite and E is the agreement or contract being established between them. Finally, instead of a blessing in the F section, there is a threat made and also a promise that when the job is done sacrifices will be given.

It is very obvious that tsifodi is a powerful form of prayer in the Yeve cult and can be performed for both good and bad reasons. In addition to tsifodi, all the ritual forms discussed in this chapter are rites are compulsory and must be performed respectively for the Yeve member during the appropriate events. Music is an important factor that is entwined with ritual performance to reach the divine atmosphere of the deities. The next chapter discusses different the types of drum music performed during Yeve events and ceremonies. It also points out the roles of drummers, instruments and drum text that enable drummers to perform effectively.
Drumming in African communities is frequently described as a way of life and drummers are viewed as highly respected and necessary individuals within a community. Many scholarly works have sought to describe the organization of drumming among different ethnic groups in Africa. Major scholars who have written of the drumming traditions of Africa include Jones (1959), Nketia (1968; 1975), Ladzekpo (1971), Ladzekpo and Ladzekpo (1983), Pantaleoni (1972), Locke (1978; 1980; 1989; 1990; 1992), Chernoff (1979), Charry (2000), Euba (1990), Anku (1999), Tang (2000), Burns (2005; 2009), Younge (2010) and Amegago (2011). This literature covers the structural organization, techniques and significant functions of drumming and the people who play the drums. Many oral accounts reported in these works state some version of the idea that a village without drumming is said to be dead.¹ It is therefore concluded that drumming is frequently conceptualized as an important life force and energy across the continent of Africa. Explaining the significance of drumming as an essential aspect of African life, Nketia writes: “We in Africa are very fond of drumming. We drum when we are merry. We drum when we are mourning the dead. We drum when there is a durbar. We drum when we go to war. We drum when there is victory” (1968: 3). This characterization is especially true of the drumming traditions of Nketia’s home country of Ghana. In Ghana, drums are important among all ethnic groups and dance-drumming is a means of bringing communities, families or individuals together to celebrate human life in all of its forms. Nowhere are drums more important than among the Ewe speaking people of Ghana where there exist countless types of drumming groups. Practically all

events, activities, and gatherings of Ewe people are accompanied by drumming. Drumming is so entwined with the peoples’ daily life that if there is a ban on drumming (which occasionally occurs due to certain ritual observances), the Ewe will use cupboards, wooden boxes or anything that can produce a variety of quality sounds as a drum.

Ewe drum performances are organized within the context of various events. Some are based on ceremonies marking important events in human life cycles such as birth, puberty, engagements, marriage/wedding and funerals. Other drum performances take place during the enstoolment and destoolment ceremonies of chiefs and leaders.² Additionally, drum performance prepares the warriors for battle. Agawu, another musical scholar from Ghana says, “drumming is sometimes used to prepare soldiers (psychologically) for war; and finally, Muslims frequently use drums to wake worshippers up during Ramadan” (2003: 18). Drumming and the events in which it occurs can be categorized into three broad types: socio-recreational, ceremonial, and religious drumming types.

Socio-recreational drumming types among the Ewe are referred to as plasevuwo or ahiavuwo. Plase is derived from the English word for pleasure. Thus, plasevuwo denotes pleasured drumming types while the ahiavu describes romantic or romanticized drumming types. There are also socio-recreational drumming types known as nuxlomevuwo that are performed in order to educate and advise the community.³ Drums also frequently accompany songs that impart moral values and educate

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² See Nketia (1968) and Agordoh (1994)
³ See Amegago (2011)
audiences. Here, the drumming accompaniment helps the singers articulate and disseminate the message accurately and with perfection. Among the Ewe, social and recreational drumming includes and number of individual genres known as borbabor, akpese, tuidzi, egbanegba, agbadza, kpoka, gahu, kinka, adzomanyi, gota, kpatsa, babashiko, dunekpoe/adzro, Anlo-kete, nyayito/dekolenyanu, atsiafuledi, takara, atsia, viedono and gabada among many others. These styles may be performed during a variety of social occasions.

Ceremonial or occasional drumming identifies styles that are attached to specific ceremonies and festivals and performed only on those occasions. Drumming, most often including dance is frequently linked to a particular festival, the marking of historical events, and to ceremonies. Also, some of these drumming types are performed when specific people such as warriors, chiefs or elders die. In recent times, however, the rapid emergence and spread of amateur dance companies has led to the performance of some of these occasional drumming types to be more frequent. Examples of these drumming types are gadzo, agbekor or atsiagbekor, atrikpi, kpegisu, atsokla, misego, afl, adogbo/adzogbo/adzohu and adevu to mention a few.

Religious drumming, as the name implies, are types of drumming connected to the religious events and ceremonies of a particular community, shrine or cult. In addition, religious drumming types are also performed to honor or dispell spirits and deities and to eradicate the diseases believed to be punishment from the gods or spirits. Specific religious drumming styles are also associated with specific deities, spirits, and cults. Traditional religious drumming can be grouped broadly into three types: (a) participatory public drumming, (b) public medicinal drumming, and (c) restricted or
sacred drumming. One example of the participatory public religious dance-drumming in which people may freely participate is *afa* drumming and dance performance. Another performance that is sometimes participated by the public and also affiliated to medicinal shrines are *atigari, brekete*\(^4\) also known as *gorovodu*,\(^5\) *hogbato, kodjo, mamiwota* and *fofui* also known as *krachi dente*. Sacred drumming is restricted from public participation and may be part of a secret cult or society whose participation is open to the initiates only. The two main examples of this kind of religious drumming are linked to *koku* and *Yeve* cults. Agordoh. writes: “In the southeastern part of the Volta region of Ghana, there are numerous religious groups, cults and secret societies whose music making is appreciated by the larger community. But actual participation in the music making is restricted to those who have received initiation” (1994: 39). Although *koku* and *Yeve* are both secret cults among the Ewe, their practices, doctrines, and music organization, specifically drum performances, are quite different. In this chapter I will describe and analyze *Yeve* drumming as performed in Ave-Dakpa. In subsequent chapters I will describe the elements of dance and song that coexist with drumming to animate and give deep meaning to *Yeve* performance.

**Yeve Drum Performance**

While communal drumming and dance involves the entire community, *Yeve* drumming is restricted to the members only. The drumming as with the dance is organized around specific rituals and ceremonies such as funerals of *Yeve* initiates, annual thanksgivings, defilements, cleansings, purifications, graduation and other rituals.

\(^4\) Hill (1980) and Friedson (2009)
discussed in chapters three and four. In Ave-Dakpa, almost all ritual performances are accompanied by intensive drumming. During my field research in Ave-Dakpa, I often thought about Agawu’s (1995) discussion of rhythm as being paramount in the lives and activities of people in the northern Volta region. In Ave-Dapoke, drummers perform in the town almost every day. Drumming generally starts in the morning and continues through the night or into the next day depending on the events and occasions that it accompanies. Sometimes, it may last for a few days or for the entire week. During ritual events, drummers commonly take short breaks for about one to two hours to eat and drink or go to their various homes to see families before returning to the event. Also, to release fatigue drummers take turns or switch positions on various instruments. For example, a lead drummer may switch to a response drum while the bell player moves to the lead drum or the response drummer completely rests for another drummer to take over his instrument or position. Switching also allows the other drummers to experience multiple drum rhythms and styles of playing.

There are a few social celebrations during which the Yeve cult performs publicly to entertain themselves and the community in general. Like other social dance-drumming groups in Ave-Dakpa, the Yeve cult also observes and celebrates special community-wide occasions such as Christmas, Easter and fetatotro (an end of year’s thanksgiving celebration feast for gods, spirits, and ancestors).

Christmas and Easter are two main celebrations in every town across Ghana. In Ave-Dakpa the two events call for community reunion through participatory dancing and drumming. Each dance-drumming group in Ave-Dakpa, including the Yeve group, is afforded a special day to perform when community participation is allowed and
encouraged. At times, two to four different drumming groups may be performing in different parts of the town. During these annual events, drumming events continue for the entire week and are divided into two sections. The first section of drumming always starts around five o’clock in the morning with a procession across the town through its principal streets. Different groups select a street on which they sing songs and drum in a procession until they arrive at the cult house or another area designated for the second section of their performance. Agbayiza refers to this particular type of procession as *gbedziyiyi* (personal interview with Agbayiza August 14, 2006). Other names for the procession include *dunyonyor* or *gbefadede* (waking up the town or dawn broadcasting – mostly about Jesus). I must emphasize that although Christmas and Easter are events in the Christian calendar, in Ave-Dakpa these two events are not celebrated by Christians and non-Christians. Throughout my interviews and conversations, most individuals in Ave-Dakpa, expressed the idea that Christmas and Easter celebrations were occasions where religious backgrounds and differences are set-aside for the community to celebrate its values and renew the bonds that bind its citizens together.

Like Christmas and Easter, *fetatotro* is another event that is celebrated by the Yeve cult, but this feast does not involve the entire community. *Fetatotro* may be considered as a thanksgiving ceremony for the gods, deities and spirit who are believed

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6 Agbayiza explains *gbedziyiyi* on two levels; physical and spiritual. The physical is a regular procession that takes place with singing and drumming as happen with other groups in Ave-Dakpa during Easter and Christmas. The songs accompanying the drumming are common social songs known to almost everyone who participates in community dance-drumming. On the spiritual level priests, priestesses and selected elders of the Yeve cult go to the sacred groves and forests between midnight and three o’clock in the morning where they sacrifice, consult, communicate with different deities, request supernatural counsel and possible intervention. Group and personal requests are narrated by the *hugbono* (head priest) on behalf of everyone. The rest of the group members meet the elders at a designated spot and bring them to the shrine. This time the songs sung to accompany the drumming are in honor of various deities.
to safe guard and protect the cult members throughout the year. Other religious and social groups may also decide to celebrate *fetototro*, however, in such cases those celebrations are unconnected to the Yeve celebration. The Yeve cult organizes this event to pray, sacrifice and makes new resolutions for the coming year. During this event, Yeve dance-drumming is performed; during only one specific piece will interested individuals from the community be allowed to participate by clapping and performing selected dances. *Fetototro* normally takes place near the end of the year, preferably during the last week of December and into the first week of January in the New Year.

Yeve dance-drumming repertoires vary from one *kpornu* (shrine) to another depending on the degree of rituals involved in a particular Yeve shrine and cult. For instance, some Yeve cults of the Ewe have five dance-drumming types while others may have seven, nine, twelve, or sometimes thirteen. The Yeve cult in Ave-Dakpa has seven dance-drumming types performed as a suite of dances.⁷ These are *husago*, *adavu*, *aforu*, *sov*, *akor*, *avlevu* and *davu*. These seven dance-drumming genres are performed in sequence during most Yeve ceremonies but the sequence can change during particular rituals or ceremonies.

**Drummers in the Yeve Cult**

According to Nketia, the success of musical events depends to large extent on good musical leadership (1975: 56). Yeve drummers, like many other drummers, are musical leaders during social and religious community events. Their roles cannot be underestimated. Drummers, in most African ethnic groups, are considered custodians of

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⁷ Jones (1959) was the first to describe or use the phrase "suite of dances" to describe the various dance-drumming of the Yeve cult.
tradition based on their vast knowledge of social, historical and esoteric knowledge. It is
often said that when a drummer dies, history is lost; and when history is lost there is no
tradition. Considering this common saying in Ghana, Nketia explains, “the drummer is a
very important person. Without him many of our traditional ceremonies would be dull
and uninteresting” (1968: 3). He continues that “drummers always have a lot to say to
us with their drums. They can call us one by one. They can summon all of us to the
chief’s court. They can tell us when fire breaks out. They can warn us when enemies
are coming to attack us. They can greet us. They can praise or blame us” (1968: 41).

Among the Ewe, drummers normally come from within “drumming families.” Euba
writes, “a drumming family includes not only a drummer and his children but also his
brothers and their children, all of whom usually live in the same compound, or at least in
the same neighborhood. The drumming family may also include drummers who are
distant relations” (1990: 89). In my own experience as a drummer in Ghana, I have
frequently been told: Ee! Devia, etso togbiwo do. This literally means “wow! You this
boy, you have met your grandfather.” In context, this means that I (the boy) has musical
knowledge and skills and can expertly play the drum just as my grandfather did. It is
very obvious that the majority of drummers inherit their drumming skills and knowledge
or perhaps training from their parents or another family member. Others may learn to
become drummers because they play with musicians and develop the interest and
talent. Euba suggests three criteria that must be satisfied for a person to belong to a
drumming family. He writes, “(i) they must have blood relationship (ii) they must live in
the same compound or fairly close to one another (iii) they must usually perform
together (1990: 89). Although Euba’s criteria are in reference to Yoruba dundun
drummers in southwestern Nigeria, from my experiences this is applicable to the Ewe drummers as well.

The drummers in the Yeve cult throughout the Volta region and specifically in Ave-Dakpa have this background. However, unlike other drummers in the area, Yeve drummers in Ave-Dakpa go through a series of specific initiations prior to becoming legitimate and recognized drummers of the Yeve cult. I must emphasize that I cannot vouch for all other traditional religious drummers going through initiation of any sort before qualifying to play drum in their respective shrines or cults. But in the case of Ave-Dakpa, I know from several years of my research there that drummers in the Yeve cult are required to go through or be initiated before they are qualified to perform. The initiation process, as Agbayiza explains, is very important for acquiring the esoteric knowledge about all the rituals around which the drumming is organized (Personal conversation with Agbayiza, April 20, 2012). It is very important for the drummers in the Yeve cult to know and understand the praise names of all the deities and to be able to honor them appropriately. The acquisition of linguistic knowledge is of paramount importance for a drummers training. Let me give two examples from the scholarly literature about the importance of training among drummers in Ghana. Nketia discusses three qualifications of drummers among the Dagomba society of northern Ghana. Out of the three I will use the first one to explain and validate my arguments. He writes, “a lead drummer must know the Dagomba oral literature of his people and the traditional history of the area, the chronicles of chiefs, and the by-names and praise names of each of them” (1975: 54). Like Nketia, Locke gives a testimony of his drumming lessons with his teacher Abubakari Luna while learning to play the luna (lead drum) of the Dagomba
drumming tradition Nketia was referencing. Locke’s writes, “my teacher did not encourage me to learn the lead luna because I did not know how to speak Dagbani. As we will see, for Abubakari, the luna player is not a performer of crafted sound – that is, a musician – but a musical story-teller, an historian, a keeper of the social register, and a philosopher (1990: 7). Initiation is seen as very important among the dundun drummers in southwestern Nigeria and other African derived religious musical cultures in the diaspora for the same reasons.\(^8\) Acting as a drummer in the Yeve cult requires a vast amount of knowledge pertaining to deity names and characteristics, cult history, means of evocation, praise, trance and so on. As such, the drummers in the Yeve cult must go through a formalized initiation process to acquire the knowledge they will need.

Yeve drummers are also considered the most accomplished drummers in Ave-Dakpa. The vugbe (drum text), rhythm and structure of Yeve drum performances are especially complex compared to other social drumming among the Ewe speaking countries.\(^9\) In my personal experience as a drummer, most of the drummers who inspired me from childhood until now have been Yeve drummers or drummers whose backgrounds are closely affiliated with Yeve cults. The respect for Yeve drummers can be understood in the fact that while ordinary drummers are not allowed to drum during Yeve events, Yeve drummers in Ave-Dapka are allowed take part in other types of drumming without question.


\(^9\) Jones (1959) and Avorgbedor (1987)
Figure 5-1. A section of Yeve drummers in Ave-Dakpa

Figure 5-2. Sections of Yeve drummers in Ave-Dakpa,

**Instruments of the Drum Ensemble**

Musical instruments used in particular ceremonies are very important in African societies and particularly in Ghana among the Ewe people. There are several instruments that function within the context of particular festivals and ceremonies. For
example, there are instruments used when a baby is born and also during initiation and circumscisions. Other instruments are also used during royal processions and festival. Among the Ewe people there is no specific word that explains instruments in a broader context. However, each instrument has a particular name and use at appropriate events. For readers to understand the type of instruments generally used in events and ceremonies in the Volta region I will employ the Hornbostel-Sach’s instrument classification system.\textsuperscript{10} The Hornbostel-Sach classification system involves four basic categories of musical sound producers: idiophones, membranophones, chordophones and aerophones. Despite the use of instruments in all four categories among the Ewe people, I will concentrate on the two categories that are most relevant to this study: idiophones and membranophones.

The instruments of the Yeve drum ensemble can be categorized as idiophones and membranophones. Idiophones are “self sounding” instruments that may produce sounds without the addition of stretched membranes or vibrating strings. Basically idiophones produce sounds from the solid materials (often metal, wood, or vegetable) that comprise their own bodies, for example, bells, rattles, jingles, and clappers. Membranophones on the other hand, are instruments with parchment heads made from animal hides, skins, and other stretchable membrane materials. Membranophones are most commonly called drums - be it single or double headed - and come in various shapes and sizes and are performed using various techniques involving sticks and/or hands. The instruments involved in the Yeve cult performances are identical in size and shape to the Ewe \textit{agbadza} instruments. The \textit{agbadza} drum ensemble comprises the

\footnote{Sach (1940)}
following instruments: *gakogui* or *gatingo* (double bell), *toke* (boat-shaped bell), *axatse* (gourd rattle), *akpe* (clappers), *kagan* (first support drum), *kpetsi, asivui or kidi* (response drum) *sogo* or *agbobli* (lead/response drum) and *atsimevu* (main lead or master drum). Depending on the type of music being played, for instance in *kinka*, a *gboba* or *gudugba* (response barrel shape drum) is added.

In the Yeve cult the same *agbadza* instruments are used with exception of two instruments: *atsimevu* and *gboba*. Although Jones (1959) and Agordoh (1994) made generalizations in their writing describing the instruments of the Yeve cult involving the master drum *atsimevu*, it is actually uncommon for Yeve drumming to include the *atsimevu*. This is true for Yeve drumming in Ave-Dakpa. The instruments that constitute the drum ensemble in Ave-Dakpa are *gakogui, kagan, kpetsi* and *sogo* or *agbobli*. The details on the construction, size and measurements of these instruments can be found in Pantaleoni (1972) Jones (1959), Hartigan (1996) and Burns (2010).

![Gakogui](image)

Figure 5-3. *Gakogui*
Gakogui

The *gakogui* also known as *gatingo* is an iron idiophone and provides an important rhythmic foundation in all Ewe drum ensembles and similar instruments are featured in many other drum ensembles across Western Africa and Central Africa. The *gakogui* is made of two iron bells that are welded together and provides the timeline upon which the drum music is established. As observed in most drum ensembles, the *gakogui* plays a consistent and recurring pattern that regulates tempo and the individual patterns of other instruments in the ensemble. Although the Yeve drum ensemble plays a variety of drumming types in different tempos, each dance-drumming type has a unique *gakogui* pattern that governs and directs the ensemble. Describing the importance of the *gakogui* Pantaleoni writes, “the pattern of the bell molds time like a relief map so that every moment stands in unique relation to the rest of the span” (1972: 72). Chernoff also mentions that, “the bell is like the heartbeat which keeps things steady” (1979: 43). Hence, the *gakogui* is very crucial in Yeve drumming.

Figure 5-4. Axatse
Axatse

The axatse is a calabash (gourd) idiophone covered with beaded netting. It is also called akaya. Similar to the gakagui, axatse sometimes plays the timeline pattern or reinforces the pattern of the gakogui. In the Yeve cult in Ave-Dakpa there are numerous axatse players who perform a particular rhythm but have the ability to embellish some of the patterns to enrich the musical sounds of the ensemble.

Figure 5-5. Adodo

Adodo

Adodo is a special non-melodic musical instruments used among Yeve initiates. It is an idiophone, a double-ended two constellation of small solid iron bells. It is used during all Yeve events and ceremonies to accompany songs and dance-drumming. Unlike gakogui, adodo does not keep the timeline of dance-drumming instead it is shaken to give metallic rattling sounds believed to attract Yeve deities and to respond quickly when they are invoked. In its construction, adodo has a small pointed metal at
both ends around which the sturdy iron bells circled that symbolize the deities of the Yeve cult. At one end, the pointed metal is sculpted in a double-edged axe design representing the symbol of the thunder god, So while the other end is twisted or curl to symbolized the contraction and retraction movements of the royal python, Da.

In performance, the sculpted part that represents So is pointed up since So is believed to operate in the sky and that of the Da points down because she lives and rules on earth. The Yeve cult members are the only religious group that uses adodo. It can also serve as a signal when it is mounted on another iron rod and place in front of a house to alert visitors that Yeve priests is in that house. Adodo is played by holding the middle rod that connects the two cluster bells and the player shakes it. It is best used to accompany songs in free rhythms especially in adavu dance-drumming.

Figure 5-6. Kagan
Kagan

The *kagan* is the smallest drum in the group and functions as the first support drum in the Yeve ensemble. It is also known as *adzida*. It has the highest pitch among other drums and plays a consistent rhythmic pattern. Its pattern usually interlocks with the *gakogui* part and occasionally is permitted to vary its patterns. Similar to the rest of the drums in the ensemble, the kagan’s drum shell is constructed out of wood. In the past the drums were constructed of wood slats bundled with light iron-metal rings (see Figure 5-7). Drum makers also construct the drum from one solid piece of wood as seen in kagan. An animal skin, most often an antelope hide, is used to cover the drum and is tensioned with ropes and pegs that are driven at an angle into the drum frame.

Figure 5-7. Kpetsi
Kpetsi

Kpetsi is the second support drum known that functions as a response drum. It is also popularly known as kidi or asivui. Like the kagan, kpetsi also has a basic rhythmic pattern according to the specific drum piece being performed. Unlike kagan, it engages in a dialogue by responding to the call of the lead drum. It is one of the difficult drums to master because during the dialogue the kpetsi player must be able to understand the prescribed drum text and be able to effectively respond to the lead drum without hesitation. In most dance-drumming performances among the Ewes, lead drummers have their favorite kpetsi players with whom they can have an effective dialogue. In the Yeve cult in Ave-Dakpa two kpetsi(s) are used. They are tuned to low and high pitches that typically form an interval of a third or fourth. The two kpetsi perform distinct drum patterns that together articulate the response to the lead drum. Also, the different pitches are used to enrich the sound, texture and harmony of the entire ensemble.

Figure 5-8. Sogo/agbobli
Sogo

Also known as agbobli, sogo usually serves as the lead drum but can be used in a supporting role when an atsimevu drum is available. It is also called the agbobli. The sogo’s primary function is to lead and direct the entire dance-drumming performance. It prescribes vugbe (drum texts) to engage the response drums in a conversation. The interactive engagement of the Ewe drum ensemble is noted in Locke. He explains that, “the percussion ensemble is interactive, a feedback network in which instruments ‘talk’ to each other in all combinations” (1987: 7). The sogo fulfills many important roles in the ritual events including motivating movements among performers, directing dances, and perhaps most significantly, summoning the presence of ancestors and deities. In the course of the performance the azaguno (title for the sogo player) decides on the types of variations to play and the duration the performance depending on the participation of the performers. Explaining the role of the azaguno during a performance Locke says, “the lead drummer also has the input into the flow of the performance and has the prerogative to extend or shorten a performance segment (1992: 116). Locke also notes that the success of a particular dance-drumming depends on the azaguno and his relationship with the supporting instruments. These important qualities are exactly what the Yeve drummers engage in during their performance. Locke writes:

Two features of the lead drummer’s communication with dancers seem especially significant. First, his depth of musical understanding, creativity, and inner feeling should put everyone in the mood to dance. An event can go on despite weak singing, but if the drumming is shabby a performance can never be a success. Second, he should loosely align the sections in his improvisation with dance. When people are up and ready to dance, it shows respect if the lead drummer acknowledges them with a new passage of improvisation (1992: 116).
The role of the sogo in the *azaguno*’s hands cannot be underestimated because without it the rituals cannot reach the ancestors or deities, and the dancers’ modes of expression will not reflect and communicate to others. In such cases, an entire ceremony can lead to a disastrous end.

**Notation and Playing Techniques**

Many scholars writing on African music have developed various systems of notation to preserve and represent music of diverse cultures (see Agawu 2003). It is important to emphasize that it is impossible for a researcher to capture an entire Yeve performance with graphic notation. There are various reasons for this including the fact that no one understands the lead drummer’s mind with regards to what he intends to play (see Anku 1999). Therefore it is only possible to transcribe certain elements of a dance-drumming performance such as the foundational rhythms that constitute a particular piece. Locke identifies a key problem in notating African drumming when he writes, “notation never conveys the full musical reality but only provides a surface picture, a means for patient study. This is precisely why audio and video programs are available to supplement these materials” (1992: 24). In addition, Locke explains a variety of contributions of scholars in trying to find common grounds to notate or standardize the best way to rhythmically describe African drumming. In his description, he explains:

The analyses of Jones and Waterman laid the groundwork for a comprehensive theory of drumming rhythm. African scholars such as Nketia, Euba, Sowada, Cudjoe, Gbeho, and Gadzekpo made significant contributions from the point of view of culture bearers also versed in Western musical analysis. More recently Pantaleoni, Kubik, and Koetting have added valuable insights. But although West African drumming has been so relatively well studied, a coherent system of rhythmic principles which can account for the musical phenomena has yet to be developed.
Indeed, even the most basic concepts are still the subject of dispute” (1979: 299).

Jones and Locke transcribe their drumming on the Western staff (five lines) making it accessible for many and providing the possibility of identifying the various pitches produced on the drum and the drumming techniques employed (see Jones 1959 and Locke 1979; 1987; 1990; 1992). Other scholars of African drumming have also been interested in the question of appropriate (Chernoff 1979; Pressing 1983; and Anku 1992, 1997, 2000). Locke’s transcriptions in particular not only give clear analytical interpretations, but also could be used to practice and performed the rhythms using vocables and mnemonic syllables, as an orientation to the understanding of the various techniques and structures of the music.

For my transcription of Yeve drumming, I shifted from the TUB system (developed by Koetting) and the use of the common five-line staff to just one or two lines based on the range of instruments involved and the repertoire they perform. I do not personally think the TUB system provides clarity for people who want to learn to perform the Yeve patterns. Also, based on the various tones of the instruments, transcribing onto the five-line western staff makes the reading of the notes difficult. By using a single horizontal line, I can transcribe each supporting instrument below, on or above the line as seen in the notation keys below. Each instrument has its own line and has indication of the tone by using the drum tone key.

Figure 5-9. Gankogui and Axatse notation key
The *gakogui* (double iron bell) has both a high and low pitch. The lower note is notated below the line and the high notes above the line (Figure 5-9). The *axatse* gourd rattle can also be transcribed using a single-line staff but has a different technique when played. Its sounds are “*pa*” and “*ti.*” The “*pa,*” made by a drop of the *axatse* on the thigh, will be notated below the line and the “*ti,*” made when *axatse* hits the palm is notated above the line.

![Notation Key](image)

Figure 5-10. Supporting drums notation key

*Kagan* however, is played with two thin sticks at a rim-shot and will be notated directly on the line. *Kpetsi* I and II have both open and muted sounds. I notate the open sounds above the line and the muted sounds below the line. Sometimes *kpetsi* I has open sounds throughout. In that situation I transcribe it on the line just as *kagan*.

*Sogo* (lead drum) has the most tones or pitches so I use a staff with two horizontal lines for transcribing this instrument. The *sogo* as shown in the notation key has many sounds but the ones represented on the keys below are the sounds most commonly produced when playing Yeve drumming and will be used for the purpose of this study. This does not mean that playing Yeve drumming is limited in its tonal variety to the sounds that I have transcribed. The tonal range of Yeve drumming is much more complex than what can be derived from playing other lead drums (see Locke 1979; 1981; 1987). I am using just a few of the tones or nonsense syllable that Kwami (1998) refers to as “mnemonics” for the examples that I have transcribed for the various
drumming types in this work. A number of scholars on Southern Ewe drumming already
discuss in great detail these techniques and their applications to drumming therefore I
will not go in-depth into this matter (see Jones 1959; Pantaleoni 1972; Kwame 1998;
and Locke 1992). The strokes performed on the sogo represented by their associated
standardized vocables are as follows:

- **ga/dza**
  
  a bounce stroke in the center of the drum using the palm. This is the
  lowest note one can attain on the sogo.

- **de, ge, ze**
  
  a bounce stroke in the center of the drum using sticks. Also, the syllables
  are open bounce strokes to the edge of the drum not the center as in
  ga/dza. The sounds can also be attained using the stick and the hand in
  alternation.

- **gi or dzi**
  
  a pressed stroke at the edge of the drum skin with the hands. This
  sounds relatively higher than “de.”

- **to**
  
  a bounce stroke in the center of the drum with a stick while pressing the
  hide with the other hand. This is the relatively highest tone one can attain
  on the sogo.

![Sogo lead drum notation key](image)

Figure 5-11. *Sogo* lead drum notation key

With this simple notation system I transcribe not the entire lead drum but only the
calls or introductory phrases of the *sogo* and the essential recurring drum patterns that
define particular rhythms. In addition to the drum notation, I insert the Ewe drum texts
so that the reader can understand the deeper meaning of the drumming and its relation
to the dance and the songs. I strongly believe that with this transcription individuals can
easily play understand and even perform the rhythms by memorizing the position of the
key given above.
Husago Drumming

In Yeve drumming across the Volta region husago is understood as a simple introductory drum piece performed slowly in 6/8 meter to begin all Yeve rituals and ceremonies. Individuals who are not well acquainted with the organizational structure of the drumming might easily conceive of it as in 2/4 or 4/4. This music was very problematic for Jones (1959) to understand. In his second volume, Jones transcribes husago in a 4/4 time signature from measures 9 to 19. In measure 20, he transcribes the gakogui, axatse, and the handclapping in 12/8 [6/8] time signature. Jones repeated the same mistake for atsimevu and the response drum (kidi), which he transcribes in 4/4 and sometimes in 3/4, noting only the kagan pattern in 6/8. This kind of mistake happens when a researcher focuses only on the drumming and neglects other performance aspects that constitute the entire performance. It is only when a researcher observes the dance of husago that he/she gets to understand the actual structure and the time signature for the drumming. For one particular drum piece to be assigned multiple time signatures in one performance it is very problematic. Anku citing Koetting (1970) explains how sometimes researchers focus on a particular aspect or instrument but not considering the holistic nature of the performance to better understand the drumming. He writes:

To analyze the patterns of a drum ensemble piece individually is to miss the main characteristic of the music, which is the totality of sound produced by the interrelation of the various parts. This is particularly true in viewing the relation between the master drum and the rest of the ensemble.... What is needed is a comprehensive analysis that can encompass similarities and differences as components of the whole .... A deeper probe of the music involving such detail as the precise beginnings of master drum patterns, possible verbal meanings in subgroup or

11 See Jones (1959: 45-75)
individual supporting patterns, and dance associations would have to be made before any trustworthy conclusions could be reached (1997: 212).

In some instances this confusion may be due to the presence of polyrhythms and cross rhythms in addition to irregular drum patterns creating staggered and interpolated phrases. However, it is important to note that each pattern adheres to a strict time.

Below is the transcription of how husago is organized in Ave-Dakpa.

![Transcription of husago drumming](image)

**Figure 5-12. Husago call and response patterns**

As shown in Figure 5-12, husago drumming starts with an introduction or a call from the lead drummer. The lead drummer calls the supporting instruments in the second-half of measure 1 into the first-half of measure 3. The supporting instruments respond in unison from the second-half of measure 3 through to the first-half of measure 5. The response is simply a rhythmic imitation of what the lead drummer plays. The lead drummer calls two times and the third call ends the entire introduction as seen starting from the second-half of measure 5 and ending finally in measure 9. This introduction is very consistent in husago drumming. Anyone who dances or is part of the Yeve cult
identifies this call the moment it is played and can tell you what drumming the drummers are about to perform.

According to the lead drummer Tsale, this introduction is liturgically important because it asks permission from the deities associated with the Yeve cult to inform the members about the events that are about to take place and ask of their support and blessings throughout the performance. There is therefore a specific drum text or language associated with this call and response. The lead drummer’s text for the call is: *medo ago, medo ago* and the response instruments answer ‘*me ne va, ame ne va* or *gbe neva gbe ne va*. The third call that ends the introduction is simply a reinforcement of the first-two calls that goes this way: *medo ago ago ago* and the response instruments answer *ame ne gede me*. In translation, *medo ago* simply means, “I am knocking” or “I am at the (your) door” and the response instruments text, *ame neva* means “the person should come in.” This gesture is practiced as a regular daily phenomenon among Ewe people. Whenever a person approaches a house or at the door the first thing they do to alert those living in the house is to say *ago*.

Figure 5-13. *Husago* support patterns and drum texts
The immediate response from those living in the house is *ame or ame ne gede me*. In the Yeve cult, this alerts the deities that drummers are calling upon them to seek their support and blessings for the entire performance. It is after this introduction that all the instruments in the drum ensemble now join in with their respective basic rhythmic patterns as seen in Figure 5-13.

The *gakogui* and *axatse* rhythmic patterns in *husago* drumming do not change. The *axatse* reinforces the bell with the same rhythm. Likewise, the *kagan* drum pattern is consistent but can be varied based on the player’s experience. However, it has a basic drum text pattern that is standard to *husago* performance in Ave-Dakpa. The drum text is *miva* and is repeated throughout the performance. *Miva* is a type of call that invites people to come and watch or witness a particular thing or event going on. It is basically to gather people. In Tsale’s own description of the *kagan* pattern he says *kagan la afa koe wodo na lelele*, literally meaning “as for the *kagan* it is always yelling” (personal conversation with Tsale, August 7, 2011). But in this context the *kagan*’s role is to draw peoples’ attention by yelling with its pattern *miva*, implying that the meaning should be interpreted as “come” or “come and see.”

*Kpetsi* also has drum text associated with its rhythmic pattern. The two *kpetsi* perform the same text but one reinforces the other to emphasize the words. The basic drum text for the first *kpetsi* is, *wo le ge* meaning “he/she will be caught or captured” and the second *kpetsi* plays *wo li* meaning “he/she is caught or captured.” These two rhythms are performed alternatively in a call and response mode as demonstrated in the transcription.
The lead drum *sogo*, also plays lots of rhythmic patterns to make the performance exciting and inviting more people to dance. However, as stated earlier, my purpose is not to transcribe the entire drumming events but to point out the basic or foundation patterns that identify a particular drum piece. As such, in *husago* drumming the lead has a basic drum pattern that is the main and identifiable rhythm that characterizes the *husago* drumming. The drum text of that rhythmic pattern is, *mi sa dzi*. This simple phrase means “endure” or “have heart” or “preserver, it is a matter of the heart” or “take it easy and you shall survive.”

![Figure 5-14. Husago - main drum text and recurring pattern](image)

Tsake, also explained the meaning of the drum texts that *kagan*, *kpetsi* and *sogo* play in *husago* and how they signify when the gods are about to appoint someone or recruit a person they are interested in becoming a member of the cult. This is how he explains it. The introductory call and response between the lead drum and other instruments symbolizes the god’s call or interest in someone. The gods try to touch someone’s heart or reach out to somebody. If the gods have their eyes on a particular person, even if it takes months or a year they will eventually get what they want and that person will become a Yeve cult member and go through the initiation processes. Hence, the call and response *me do ago, ame ne va gede me*, is an invitation and a call from the god’s who are knocking at someone’s door to let them become part of their lives. The *kagan’s* drum text, *miva* invites people to gather so that the gods can choose or their favorite candidate the two *kpetsi* drum texts, *wo le ge, wo li* is a phrase that
interprets when someone is captured due to a possession by the gods and is taken into
the shrine or the cult house for rituals and initiation. Then the lead drum sogo consoles
and encourages the person in trance with the phrase, *mi sa dzi*. This text means that
the person in trance should take all ritual situations easy and to heart because the
initiation and the ritual processes take a long time. Thus, the individual needs patience
to go through all the activities and additionally need endurance to live with the cult until
they die.

In a performance, the lead drummer uses a simple technique in his drumming
since he has limited drum vocabularies. He employs some techniques that can be
described as masking, interpolation and staggering the rhythm so that he has much to
play. As indicated on top of the main drum text of the *sogo*, *misa dzi* practically is
divided in to A (*misa*) and B (*dzi*). Therefore the so go player can dwell on A section for
a while and then move to B. He uses the techniques mentioned to play with this simple
pattern.

An example of how he might manipulate the order of sections is as follows:

\[
A \rightarrow B, \ A \rightarrow B, \ B \rightarrow B, \ B \rightarrow B; \ B \rightarrow A, \ B \rightarrow A; \ A \rightarrow A, \ A \rightarrow A, \ A \rightarrow B, \ B \rightarrow A \rightarrow B.
\]

Figure 5-15. Formula for drumming

Therefore this is how the drummer manipulates and crafts the drum text pattern
into a meaningful conversation to make the drumming more interesting and meaningful
to the participants. With the A and B formula, it is easy to synchronize the drum text
*misa – dzi* in to it. This is the background of the *husago* drumming in context as
performed in Ave-Dakpa.
Adavu Drumming

Adavu is the most sophisticated drumming in the Yeve cult throughout southeastern Ewe territory. This is also true with the Yeve cult in Ave-Dakpa. This is a special and spiritual type of drumming also performed to welcome other Yeve groups coming from out of town. Adavu is also the main drumming performed during agbowugbe, ram sacrifice events for cleansing and also when a new member will be dedicated or take an oath to become accepted as a Yeve member.

All Ewe drummers, be they Yeve or any social drummers, recognize the complexity in adavu drumming. Due to its multifaceted structure some researchers’ describe it as the fastest drumming style. For instance, Jones describes adavu as “the fastest dance of all” (1959: 98). In my opinion and from my own experience as a drummer this is not accurate as there are other types of drumming such as gota and gahu\(^\text{12}\) that are fast but simple and easy to understand their organizational structure. However, a drumming such as adavu due to what Anku (1997) called “perception norm” is difficult to understand if an individual does not know the context in which the drumming is organized.

The name adavu is derived from the manner in which the dance is performed. There is no exact English translation for this word. However, the closest translation would be a “fury.” When the Ewes say, edo ada, this describes an intense emotional mood with a heightened concentration. At this state the individual does not smile, laugh, wink or get distracted with anything. The dance that accompanies the drumming explains the exact emotion for this drumming. For instance, it is during this dance-

\(^{12}\) Gota and gahu are part of socio-recreational dance-drumming types among the Ewes of southeastern Ghana. For Gahu, see Locke (1987).
drumming where the *husunu* sometimes display their spiritual powers and when gods can possess anyone. So it is not a celebrated moment but rather a spiritually challenged moment that deserves and demands concentration. The drumming plays an essential role to propel and intensify the mood of the *husunu* and the other priests in the performance. The details of the dance are described in the next chapter.

Adavu drumming is in two parts with a bridge or a transition into the second part. The first part is in 2/4 simple duple meter while the second part is in 6/8. In Ave-Dakpa, the first part is also referred to as the introductory section. It is a long introduction compared to all other introductory passages but should not last more than three minutes. Structurally, the first part starts with two calls from the lead drum and the instruments respond in unison.

![Figure 5-16. Adavu slow supporting patterns](image)

The lead drummer introduces the third call, however, this time the various instruments in the ensemble start to play their assigned basic rhythms (Figure 5-14). As the supporting drums perform their various patterns the lead drummer varies his single drum pattern employing techniques such as syncopating, staggering, interpolating,
masking and any technique that can make the drum pattern exciting and invigorating.

Below is the transcription of basic drum pattern of the first section in *adavu*.

Figure 5-17. *Adavu* lead drum- Introduction (slow section)

The bridge or transition into the second part (Figure 5-16) is a regular drumming stroke passage that the lead drummer introduces and everyone mimics. This transition establishes the speed or the tempo of the second part, however, the lead drummer determines the final tempo. The lead drummer starts his transition drum strokes with the tempo of the first section and gradually increases the tempo to the most complicated level where an unfamiliar ear describes the drumming at this point chaotic.

Figure 5-18. *Adavu* transition pattern from slow to fast
The second section is sometimes confusing in its metric organization. There are lots of arguments as to what time signature should be notated. I personally think it all depends on where it is performed. The drum’s meter could be notated as 3/4, 4/4, 6/8, 9/8 or 12/8 depending on the recording. For instance, Locke’s (2010) recording as he explained was from his teacher Agbeli who may perhaps have heard this music several times at a particular shrine. In my interview with Togbi Midawo Alorwoyie, he said that everyone performs the rhythm differently. He used the phrase, *edu sia du kple ete koklo kokoe* meaning, “every town has its way of killing a chicken.” (Personal conversation with Togbi Alorwoyie September 20, 2012). Each Yeve shrine has its own style for drumming or performing a common set of rituals. The style is likely to affect the time signature of the music or the drum language being played. Togbi Midawo Alorwoyie is right, for instance, the way Yeve drummers play at Nogokpo shrines is not the same way a shrine in towns such as Anyako, Afiadenyigba, Dzelukope or Dzita will do it. That being said, the second part of *adavu* as performed in Ave-Dakpa is in 3/4 time in the transcription below.

![Figure 5-19. Adavu fast lead drum pattern](image)

This is the main drum pattern that keeps recurring in *adavu* fast drumming in Ave-Dakpa. Similar to the techniques employ for the lead drummer in *husago*. The same can be use to perform *adavu* drumming. Each section has a repeated pattern that can be played several times before moving to the next repeated phrase. A creative
drummer can also pull rhythmic fragments from different sections but must make sure that his playing stays in good harmony with the rest of the supporting instruments.

**Aforvu Drumming**

*Aforvu* is an important and invigorating drumming style performed during Yeve ceremonies. It is by far the fastest drumming in the entire Yeve drum repertoire, contrary to Jones (1959) claims that *adavu* is the fastest. The drumming derives its name from two words; *Afor* meaning “foot or feet” and *vu* meaning “performance.” Hence, Aforvu literally means a drum performance of the foot or feet. This is also pointed out in Locke. He refers to *aforvu* as the “foot drum” (2010: 16). One of the primary functions of *aforvu* drumming is to be consistent and fast in tempo so that dancers have the ability to display their skills. The structure and foundational rhythmic patterns of *aforvu* drumming are not different from scholarly researches on Ewe social and funeral drumming called *agbadza*. The timeline is in 12/8 with a faster tempo than *agbadza* but almost the same as *ageshe*,¹³ a somehow faster version of *agbadza*.

During *aforvu* drumming the *gakogui*, *axatse* and the *kagan* consistently maintain their respective rhythmic patterns. Unlike *adavu*, where the two *kpetsi* play the same drum pattern, *aforvu* *kpetsi* drums perform different drum patterns in a call and response manner. The call and response is distinguished not only with the pattern being played but how the two drums are tuned, with low and high pitches. In addition to the response drums basic question and answer patterns there are times the two drums together respond to *sogo*, the lead drum.

¹³ See Burns (2005)
When *sogo* introduces new drum texts the response drums answer to make a meaningful conversation between the instruments, which then enhance and add energy to the drumming. The dialogue between *kpetsi* and *sogo* continues until the lead drum is back again to the basic. Then the two *kpetsi* also go back to their basic rhythms. Figure 5-20 presents the basic *aforvu* drum patterns.

For *aforvu* drumming to be invigorating the lead drummer must execute his expertise to keep the drummers and dancers to a task. Considering the tempo of this drumming, it is very important to note that the moment the tempo slows down the entire performance will be ruined. When supporting drummers loose interest and excitement they cause *aforvu* as a dance to eventually loose its aesthetics and not be pleasing to people. Thus, *aforvu* requires experienced drummers who are knowledgeable and able to keep the performance at a very high level of energy. It is no surprise that *Aforvu* is one of the drumming pieces where drummers switch often.

In *aforvu* the lead drummer starts the drumming without any introduction or call and response. The lead drummer starts his drumming by introducing his main rhythm,
which is quickly responded to by the supporting drums. In addition, the *gakogui*, *axatse* and *kagan* patterns also immediately respond to the first drum text of the *sogo* (Figure 5-21).

![Drum Pattern Diagram](image)

**Figure 5-21. Aforvu- lead drum pattern**

The main drum text for *aforvu* that recurs over and over again is *egbe miedo go* or *egba mie kpe vo* meaning “today we have finally met.” This drum text works on two levels; physical and spiritual. In the next chapter, description of the *aforvu* dance will allow us to understand these two dimensions. Nonetheless, I must emphasize that drum texts in *aforvu* are very significant in understanding a spiritual dimension of holistic *Aforvu* dance-drumming. It is important for us to understand the rhythm and then to apply it to the dance in the next chapter.

**Ako Drumming**

*Ako* drumming is a popular Yeve genre performed for relaxation and entertainment and is the only drumming that non-members of the Yeve cult are allowed to participate in freely. In Ave-Dakpa, cult members sometimes invite audience members or bring interested people into the dancing arena and dance with them. The
drumming is the same as the popular agbadza\textsuperscript{14} of the Ewe speaking people. The structure has been discussed in the scholarly works of Locke (1979; 1981; 1992), Pantaleoni (1972), Jones (1959) and Agordoh (1994) among others. The fascinating aspect of this drumming is that although it has the same structure as agbadza, the manner in which the drum is performed has a feel of atrikpui,\textsuperscript{15} a traditional dance-drumming performed to prepare brave men and warriors before they depart for battle. Additionally, the tempo of ako drumming is moderate and not fast in comparison to aforvu.

![Diagram of rhythmic patterns]

Figure 5-22. Ako supporting rhythmic patterns

In the transcription in Figure 5-22 the gakogui, axatse and kagan maintain their unique patterns as seen in other drumming styles in the Yeve cult. The playing techniques are also the same. Like husago and aforvu, the kpetsi’s basic rhythm is in a call and response. As we can analyze from the transcription in measures 1-3 anytime kpetsi I is playing an open bounce strokes kpetsi II is playing a mute stroke and vice

\textsuperscript{14} See Amegago (2011)

\textsuperscript{15} see Amegago (2011)
versa. However, the moment the lead drummer introduces a new drum pattern the two response drums quickly shift and respond to the lead drum’s call. This happens until the lead drum goes back to his basic pattern and then the two response drums also start to play their respective basic call and response patterns.

Figure 5-23. *Ako* lead drum patterns

As with all lead drums, the drummer has a basic drum patterns that every instrument in harmony clings to in the performance. The transcription above (Figure 5-23) shows the relationship between the *sogo* (lead drum) and the *gakogui*. The lead
drum starts the drum performance by calling all the instruments from the last note of measure 1 through the first note in measure 3 where all instruments begin with their respective rhythmic patterns. The main drum pattern of ako that Yeve members identify themselves with is transcribed in measure 4 with the repetition sign.

The drum text to the rhythm in measure 4 is *ke de me*. It can also be said *ŋie de me*. According to the phrase the main rhythm starts on the second beat starting with the sixteenth note. However, for the drummer to be with time he must start from the end of the phrase that is on the third beat. The note of the third beat is the same note transcribed on the first beat beginning with the *gakogui* pattern. The phrase *ke de me* or *ŋie de me*, is a common phrase normally heard among the Ewe people in two contexts. The first is when people, especially men, meet each other and they chant their *ahano nko* (drinking names) one person says this phrase *ke de me* (also *koe de me*) or *ŋie de me* (also *ŋi de me*) and both give a really loud handshake and laugh. This often happens when people have not seen each other for a long time. Secondly, the same phrase plays an important role during dance-drumming performances and it is in this context that this phrase is being used. In this context the phrase serves as a command for the individual to start dancing. It calls that person to dance until he/she is tired. Also, *ke de me* or *ŋie de me* is not only asking a person to just start dancing, it requires a high amount of energy to be exerted into the dance. In a simplistic way it will mean, “break it down” or “boogie.” At this point those who are waiting for this rhythm start to dance vigorously. Sometimes others get up from their seats and start dancing by themselves because the lead drummer has announced that rhythm. Therefore the function of the drum rhythm in measure 4 cannot be underestimated in ako drumming.
Ako is one of a few drumming patterns that the lead drummer normally brings to a formalized ending. In other drumming such as adavu the drumming does not end. The drummer randomly introduces aforvu. In the transcription above the drummer introduces the transition into the end phrase in measure 5 and 6 then the end drum pattern itself comes in measures 7-9. Moreover, the drummer can decide to prolong at his own will the rhythm in measure 6 for a long time before playing the end pattern. The moment the drummer introduces this rhythm there is no doubt to see all the dancers leaving the dancing arena because they understand the rhythm and what will come thereafter. Hence, the rhythm in measure 6 becomes an important signal for both the drummers and the dancers in ako dance-drumming.

Sovu Drumming

Sovu, also known as sohu is so far the most exciting drumming performed in all Yeve cult throughout southeastern Ewe territories including Ave-Dakpa. It is performed as a rite of consecration. The drumming is also performed to honor the thunder god, So or Tohono for protection for his children (members of the cult). According to Locke sovu is also performed “when a congregation of worshippers travels out from its home shrine to participate in a ceremony in another location” (2010: 10). The drumming is in 4/4 meter. Like adavu there is still misunderstanding about the specific signature to be assigned for this drum music. Researchers who have listened to sovu drumming may argue that the drumming is in 2/4 and others say it is in 4/4. In my opinion, I think it depends on how an individual analyzes the drumming. I have personally spoken with a few practitioners regarding this drumming including Togbi Midawo Alorwoyi and C. K Ladzekpo. Although they are both from different towns in the Volta region they confirm that the music is in 4/4 meter. Jones (1959) also notated sohu drumming in 4/4. Here is
the confusing aspect of this drum music. When one listens to the *gakogui* pattern it is convincing to state that it is in 2/4 due to the recurring rhythmic phrase of the *gakogui*. In some shrines, drummers play the short *gankogui* pattern using the high and low pitches that make it sound as 2/4. For instance, the *gakogui* in some places plays the vocables or nonsense syllables *ti ko ko* which is two dotted eighth notes and a regular eighth note. The first dotted eighth note is the down pitch of the *gakogui* and the rest are played on the higher pitch. Hearing this repeated pattern it is convincing to say it is in 2/4 time. Locke (2010) notated *sohu* that he learned from his instructor Godwin Agbeli in 2/4. This does not mean that Locke notated the music wrongly. It is we, the scholars who impose the time signatures on the musical types we encounter so that we can understand it and be able to talk about it. Nonetheless, it is important to analyze or relate the music to how the dance is performed to have a broader understanding of the entire performance. The *sovu* performance in Ave-Dakpa as stated earlier is in 4/4 because this explains how the dancers relate to the drumming. The next chapter explains the *sovu* dance.

![Figure 5-24. Sovu supporting rhythmic patterns](image-url)
In the above transcription (Figure 5-24) *gakogui* and *axatse* as usual are playing the same rhythm except that *axatse* reinforces the pattern with some extra notes to make it more exciting.

Figure 5-25. *Sovu* lead drum pattern
The *kagan* is playing a simple pattern that is offbeat from the regular *gakogui* pattern. In Ave-Dakpa, sometimes the *kagan* player is allowed to vary the pattern to create more excitement but does so carefully in relation to the ongoing rhythms. The response drums, *kpetsi* I and II are also playing in a question and answer format but agree with each other in the second and the forth beat in each measure. The only difference in their playing technique is that while *kpetsi* I plays open strokes throughout, *kpetsi* II manipulates between open and mute strokes and plays more notes than *kpetsi* I.

In the transcription above (Figure 5-25) the *sovu* lead drum starts with an introduction to establish the *gakogui* then bring all other instruments to join in the performance. According to Tsale, he has been playing this drumming style for a long time but never had the chance to ask his uncle about the meaning and context of the drum text. This is a situation he regretted and lamented on several days during our interview sessions. Paraphrasing Tsale, he did not ask because no one needs any detail on a drumming that seems easy, fun and exciting but others that are challenging and require esoteric knowledge make sense to inquire into. Sadly, Tsale missed this opportunity because his uncle passed away and there is no one who can explain the details of *sovu* drum text for him. The good thing is that he remembers the drum rhythms and plays them accordingly. However, I decided to still lay out the main and distinct basic and recurring drum patterns that constitute *sovu* drumming in Ave-Dakpa although there is no drum text to understand the deeper meaning of it.

I label the activities of the lead drummer in three letters A, B and C (Figure 5-25). The A constitutes measures 1-3 as the introduction or the call from the lead to bring all
instruments into the performance. The B section starts from the second beat of measure 4 through measure 12. Within the B section, there are two rhythms that the lead drummer plays. The first one is from the second beat of the B section to the first note in measure 7. In a performance, the drummer is free to repeat measures 4b- 7a. He can also take a small fragment of that section or divide it into two separate parts within that section. However, the drum pattern that repeats most often in sovu performance is the one from measures 7b – 12a, but particularly the one in measure 8 with the repletion sign. Finally, the drummer ends sovu with the rhythmic pattern in measures 13 – 15a. In my conversation with Togbi Midawo Alorwoyie, he attested that sovu is one of the drum types of the Yeve cult that has its own patterns but there is room for improvisation due to the organization of the music. He also added that any Yeve drummer can play sovu at any Yeve shrine anytime because it is a fun drumming where other drummers experience new drum rhythms from each other (Personal conversation with Alorwoyie September 21, 2012).

It is important to note that sovu and sometimes husago are the two main Yeve dance-drumming types that have been choreographed for the stage and have become popular among professional and amateur dance companies especially in Accra, the capital of Ghana. In my own experience playing sovu, both in the dance companies and in my local areas, I have not encountered the wonderful supporting and response drums I learned in Ave-Dakpa.

**Avlevu Drumming**

Avlevu is a type of Yeve drumming performed for comic relief. Togbi Alorwoyie describes avlevu as “comedy dance-drumming.” Avlevu comes from two words thus avle and vu. Avle is a name attached to a category of female Yeve initiates or members
called *avlesi* (see chapter 3 on *avlesi*) who are allowed to wear sandals or shoes or and even dress as a man. Vu as we have seen from previous chapters is a drum and dance performance. So it is basically a dance-drumming of the *avle* people in the Yeve cult.

The drumming is in 6/8 meter and divided in two sections, slow and fast. Like *ako*, the first section of *avlevu* has the same rhythmic patterns for the *gakogui* and *axatse*. Kagan however plays three notes instead of the usual two notes played in *ako* as we can see in the transcription below starting on the third beat of measure 1-3 (Figure 5-26). Also, unlike other response drums, for instance in *husago* or *aforvu* that play their basic rhythm patterns in a call and response manner, *avlevu* response drums all play the same rhythmic patterns. In addition to playing the same pattern the lead drummer in this drumming does not change his drum text to engage them in a further dialogue. They maintain their basic pattern throughout the entire slow section from the third beat of measures 1-3. See the transcription below:

![Transcription of Avlevu rhythms](image)

**Figure 5-26. Avlevu supporting rhythmic patterns**
As always with the lead drum, the drummer announces the presence of the *avle* through an introductory call transcribed above in measure 1 to the first note in measure 6. Also, it is the beginning of measure 6 that all instruments join in the performance.

During *avlevu* the role of the *avlesi* is to behave as a male looking for another female initiate to dance with. So the moment the lead drum announces this drum rhythm people start to run away because no one knows whom the *avlesi* may attack. So paying attention to the drum texts attentively explains why audience or people who are not *avle* try to leave the dance scene or run away. In the transcription above the supporting drums the *kpetsi* I and II says *woa wo de gamea su*. This literally means, “where are they (the people) the time has come (no running away).” The lead drum part says, *nude dzodzom, ‘vlesiawo le dodom mi te va mi dui*, meaning “something is happening, the *avle* initiates are getting ready (or coming or about to start their show) everyone come and dance with them.” In the slow section the lead drum does not also play any other rhythm apart from this introduction and the rhythm from measure 6b – 8a. In a
wonderful conversation the lead drum calls the people who have run away or leave the
dance scene in measures 6b-7a and 7b-8a (te va mi dui; va mi dui) then the kpetsi
response drum will answer in with the first three open notes in the last beat of measure
1 and the first note of measure 2 that says woa wo de. In performance the lead
drummer can play between the te va mi dui and va mi dui while the kpetsi respond to
each phrase.

Figure 5-28. Avlevu fast supporting rhythmic patterns

In the fast section the supporting instruments do not change except that the
kagan now plays two open strokes instead of the three strokes in the slow section. The
tempo of the fast section starts slowly and gradually increases to reinforce the action of
the women who are trying to dramatize an act of sexual intercourse.
The rhythms that are repeated with varying degrees of tempo can be seen in the transcription above in measures 2 – 6 with the repetition sign (Figure 5-29). Also, the transcription gives a picture of the relationship between the lead drummer’s call and the open stroke response of the kpetsi in the same measure 2-6. Finally measures 7 and 8 feature the drum pattern the lead drummer plays to separate the two people in the drama. The ending drum pattern is not played strictly in time. It is introduced randomly at the liberty of the lead drummer. It is also important to emphasize that the length of avlevu drumming is determined by the lead drummer who decides to prolong the performance or shortened it.
Davu Drumming

As the name implies, Davu is drumming associated with the veneration of the Da, the royal python. The drumming is organized in two parts: (a) a search drumming and (b) a celebratory drumming. I label the transcriptions as davu I for the search drumming and davu II for the celebration drumming.

Davu I is performed any time a Yeve ceremony or event is organized. However, in context this drumming is performed only when the Da is out of her temple and does not return after several days. From oral history and indigenous knowledge translated into written records, deities are not only venerated but are also guardians who protect a particular town or community. They alert elders and priests of any possible mishaps and epidemics of deadly diseases. Herskovits' (1937) extensive study on Dangbi (the royal python) at Dahomey in Benin reveals that Dangbi goes in and out of her temple and is sometimes found on the road or resting under a tree. When people see Dangbi, they bring her home. This is true of the Yeve cult in Ave-Dakpa. Sometimes, Da leaves her temple and does not return for days because she is perhaps upset. If this situation persists, the priest of the cult performs sacrifices and the search music is organized and performed to find the Da.

In the kagan pattern transcribed below, the kagan player uses only one stick and his fingers to perform the drum pattern. Therefore the note transcribed below, for the sake of this davu is an “open stroke” on the kagan. The notes above the line are performed by pressing the fingers (or a finger) on the drum at the same time hitting it with the stick to give a high pitch tone (see the notation key).
The gakogui and axatse play their usual identical patterns consistently. This time the kagan player performs just two notes (open and mute strokes) on his drum. This is a complete change of style for kagan in comparison to all other patterns performed in Yeve drumming.

In Davu I, sogo does not serve as the lead drum, instead the two kpetsi drums are put together and played as the lead drum. The lead drummer plays the two kpetsi without sticks. Its role is to give signals to the dancers. Any note in the middle of the two lines is an open tone. The notes transcribed on the second line above are for the right
hand and those on the bottom first lines are for the left hand. In the end phrase the last note-beat (dotted quarter note) is an open bounce base note played in the center of both drum. The final tied dotted half notes are open strokes of the two hands performed at the edge of the two drums.

The second part of Davu dance-drumming is to celebrate the success of the search by bringing the Da into her temple. It is performed just like the agbadza dance of the Ewe people but in a much faster tempo. The supporting drums keep their basic drum patterns until the lead drummer engages them in some kind of dialogue.

Figure 5-32. Davu II support rhythmic patterns

Unlike aforvu, the drum text of the lead drummer has no spiritual significance. It presents social themes that create excitement and competition among dancers as part of the celebration of the Da. The main and recurring drum text is in this section:

Nto nto nto woli
Nto nto nto woli
Nto wolw da gboe

Real, real, for sure it has been captured
Real, for sure the Da has been captured
Sure, the Da is coming home
There is also a variation on these drum text that says: *mi tugui deme*. This is simply a call from the lead drummer commanding dancers to exert more energy and dance vigorously. The drum text with both social and religious themes is therefore a significant text and language that the divine drummer prescribes to people who understand the language of the drum and interpret appropriately through dancing.

Figure 5-33. *Davu II* lead drum patterns and drum texts
It is important to emphasize that drumming (as with dance) is an essential part and a backbone of the Yeve cult and its ceremonies. The drumming becomes a network through which communication between the living or ritual authorities and the gods as well as other spirits are achieved. The power of drum text cannot be underestimated in Yeve drumming. It is crucial and significant in evoking rituals practices embedded in the drumming performance. It is right to argue that rituals cannot be accomplished without the knowledge and the skills of the drummer. Drummers in the Yeve cult in Ave-Dakpa understand when and how to evoke the gods, which gods to evoke and how to manipulate them through the type of rhythms and drum texts performed. As we will see in the next chapter dance is an integral factor that plays a significant role during Yeve ceremonies and effective means of communicating messages through movements gestures.
CHAPTER 6
YEVE DANCE FORMS AND GESTURES

According to Ajayi, dance is a composite form of body attitude through which ordinary daily actions have been spatially re-arranged and encoded to convey new sets of information (1998: 18). To a native African, dance is a dramatic, moving metaphor for life. Dancing creates satisfaction for the soul and without it survival is meaningless. Snipe puts it this way: “Dancing is an expression of a physical, psychological and spiritual state of being that enables people to give meaning and context to their greatest joys, hopes, frustrations, fear or sorrows. This expression contributes to a sense of wholeness” (1996: 63). Green also contributes that, “African dance translates everyday experience into movement” (1996: 14). Primus also added that, “dance in Africa is not a separate art, but part of the whole complex of living” (1996: 4). Many dances as practiced in traditional settings across the continent of Africa mark the various events of the life cycle, such as birth, death, and marriage. In addition to the life cycle events, most gatherings are accompanied with music and dance. There are also dances that are centered on religious, historical, political and other festive and ceremonial occasions. Warren explains that, “there are some occasions when dance is optional, but on most occasions it is mandatory. Each dance has its own music, movements, and costumes, and most fundamental of all, each dance has a function and motivation that is understood by all members of that society” (1972: 2).

Dance has often been neglected in the scholarship of ethnomusicology, undermining the understanding of the music and the culture in which it operates. This is certainly the case with African cultures. Warren further explains that, “if a people’s culture is its mirror, we must turn to African art in order to know Africa’s peoples. And to
study Africa and neglect its dance is like studying Greece without its architecture” (1972: Forward).

This chapter highlights the importance of Ghanaian dance traditions with a special focus on the Yeve cult dance forms performed in Ave-Dakpa. Although there are differences in all the traditional Ghanaian dance forms due to the variety of ethnic backgrounds, these dances serve the same primary goal of promoting and upholding the values and norms of various traditions within the ethnic cultures. Traditional dance is performed as a communal activity and serves as a unifying force binding the entire community together. Every dance has its own origin and myths. Most dances have been passed down from one generation to another. Investigating the origin of traditional dances, Nii Kwei Sowah explains that, “the beginning of traditional dance is hard to determine because it is believed that ancestors have passed on the traditions from time immemorial” (Personal conversation with Sowah July 29, 2006). The dances, as with drumming, are organized in specific categories to achieve a particular purpose. Explaining the various categories of and the uses of traditional dance Adinku states:

In order to distinguish the use of traditional dance forms within the cultural context, discussion centers on three different areas, i.e. ritual, social and recreational. The ritual area links dance to the expression of cosmic principles and helps the medium in attunement; the social area dwells on the place of movements in expressing role differentiations as well as traditional norms, while recreational type is restricted to the entertainment needs of the users (1994: 16).

The three aspects of traditional dances Adinku explains also have their occasions and events for which they are organized. There is no traditional dance that is performed outside of a specific context. Kwakwa discusses the organization of African dance forms and the context of their performance. She writes: “Traditional African dances do not occur in isolation. They often have a specific role within an event or a
complex of events organized for specific occasions. Many have value as entertainment, but entertainment is not their most important function: dancers perform for socio-cultural, historical, political and religious purposes” (2000: 43). She continues to describe dancers and musicians as important assets to the community, countering some critics who argue that dancers are not valuable. She says, “the degree of respect accorded them [dancers and drummers] reflect the role dance itself plays within a community. If dance functions primarily as entertainment, and participants are people whom a community considers inferior, dancers will get little or no recognition from the community” (2000: 49-50). Beside the social dances there are also ritual or religious dances that are performed to venerate the deities or are associated with particular ritual events or ceremonies. Within traditional religious shrines, cult dances are performed as a form of worship. Defining traditional religious dance Begho writes, “the dances that are relevant in the commemorative worship and invocation of the gods as well as the near-god heroes and ancestors are here referred to as traditional religious dance” (1996: 165).

In the Yeve cult at Ave-Dakpa worship is embodied in rituals and dance performance. The dances are not open to the community but performed only by initiated members who understand the rituals around which the dances are organized. Begho describes the elements of dances belonging to secret societies, which is applicable to Yeve. He writes:

Cult-dances are those dances performed only by the initiates of those secret societies that once utilized the more or less sacred arts of music, dance, and chants (or incantation) in the execution of their self appointed duty as the conscience of the community and its protective ‘secret police’ organization or government. These dances form an integral part of the societies’ sacred ceremony” (1996: 166).
Before a major dance-drumming event starts in Ave-Dakpa the yevesiwo (initiates) take ritual calabashes and fetch water for the drummers to pour libation to the gods so that the gods may grant them the strength to be able to perform. Once granted the strength, the drummers can invoke the deities, which then bestow their spiritual anointing. During this time, the introductory dance drumming starts to alert and warm the members to get ready. By invoking the powers and the presence of the deities during this worship, healing and possession sometimes take place depending on the response of the deities. Kwakwa writes: “In worship and ritual healing, dances serve as a medium for characterizing and impersonating communal spirits, enabling them to converse with living persons. When the spirits come they may cure illnesses they or others have caused, and may join in merrymaking as people give thanks for blessings the spirits have sent” (2000: 44).

In religious performance, dance engenders communion with powerful and intangible forces and dancers move from one stage, the earthly/physical, to another, the spiritual/ethereal. Ajayi observes that, “in religious practices, dance serves as an effective route for the journey bridging the liminal, and uniting the spiritual with the earthly” (1996:187). He also categorizes the study and structure of sacred and religious dance forms into three different stages: invocational, transcendental, and celebratory. The various stages of the Yeve cult dances at Ave-Dakpa are applicable to Ajayi's argument. They also share the characteristics identified in most religious dance ceremonies. He writes:

Invocational dance takes place at the preliminary stage of the worship. It serves to: “1) call the presence of the god into their midst, get the devotees in the appropriate worshipful mood, 2) divest their secular aspect to get them ready to enter communion with god, and 3) praise the gods for
his mercies.” Transcendental dance is also used as “i) a tool for reaching the sacred and, ii) a ‘possession dance’ which is a sign that communion has been attained with the deity.” Finally, the celebratory dance is used to conclude the ceremony to give thanks and praise (1996:188).

There are seven dances performed during Yeve ceremonies in Ave-Dakpa. These are husago, adavu, aforvu, akor, sovu, avlevu and davu dances. Husago falls into Ajayi’s invocational dance while adavu and aforvu may be categorized as transcendental and akor, sovu and davu as celebratory dances. Avlevu can also be considered as a celebration dance due to the dramatic and comic aspects of its performance.

To help readers understand the dances describe in this chapter with specific regards to time signature, tempo and the specific foot or steps I have transcribed the gankogui pattern to explain what foot is on a particular beat. I abbreviated the right foot as “R.ft” and the left foot as “L.ft.” Where the foot is used alternatively especially in adavu dance I represent it with the letter R or L.

![Dance Arena Diagram](image)

Figure 6-1. Structure of Yeve dance arena
The schematic diagram above (Figure 6-1) is a structural representation and organization of dance-drumming performances of the Yeve cult in Ave-Dakpa. In a typical Yeve ceremony, the drummers form the base around which dancers or Yeve initiates surround or sometimes connect from both sides as shown in the diagram. The Yeve initiates sit on benches in a curvy formation on both sides. The spiritual leaders who are referred to in this diagram as elders sit behind the drummers. The elders sit behind the drummers with the purpose to monitor the activities of that are taking place and are also on watch for any physical and spiritual attacks during Yeve ceremonies. The dancers or Yeve initiates dance everywhere in the dance arena. It is important to note that the Yeve initiates are not only limited in the area labeled “dance arena.” However, they are free to dance in and out of the dance arena especially in Aforvu.

**Husago Dance**

Object 6-1. Videos of the dances covered in this Chapter can be found by clicking on this link.

Many people have concluded, and in my own experience I agree, that *husago* is an introductory dance performed at the beginning of all Yeve events. Jones (1959), Fiagbedzi (1966), and Avorgbedor (1987) have studied some aspects of this *husago* dance music and refer to it as the introductory dance to several dance-drumming pieces of the Yeve rituals. The name of this dance was adopted from the popular Ewe dance called *misego*. There is still unresolved debate as to what name should be agreed on. However, the dance name has been somehow socially justified based on the events at which it is performed. When the dance is performed during traditional ritual ceremonies it is called *husago*. In the Ewe traditional religious system *hu* refers to god and deity. Therefore it is probable that it is a dance performed for the gods/deities in the shrine or
cults. Anytime the dance is performed socially or during the migration annual festival called *Hogbetsotso* it is referred to as *misego*. Although the movements of *misego* and *husago* are the same it is the songs that performers sing that makes a distinction between the two. For instance, the songs performed during *misego* narrate the suffering and maltreatment experienced in the town of Notse while the songs that accompany *husago* talk about the role of deities and give honor to them. Locke also discusses *husago* dance as a reference to the Ewes’ migration and how it is used in the Yeve cult. He says, “*husago* [drum] accorded prestige among the Ewe people because they understand it to be the music that was performed by their ancestors on the night of their exodus from the walled city of Notsie and the tyranny of King Agorkoli. In context of the Yeve worship, *husago* pays homage to the heroes of the Ewe migration to their current homeland” (2010: 6). Further, Adinku describes the context of the dance as a funeral dance. He says, “the traditional *husago* dance is a ritual dance for deceased members of the Yeve cult. Opoku borrowed the idea of bereavement from this society” (1994: 24).

During my field research in Ave-Dakpa, Agbayiza and some of the *yevesiow* (initiates) also referred to this dance sometimes as *misego* and other times as *husago*. When I asked Agbayiza why they are not consistent with one name he told me that they use both names interchangeably and it does not matter how a particular person calls it. The most important thing is that they know how the drumming sounds and how to perform the dance. Despite the inconsistencies in the use of the name *husago* or *misego* I will (as I started using already in Chapter 5) refer to this dance throughout this chapter as *husago*.

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Besides an introductory dance husago is also an invocation dance performed by high-ranking priests and priestesses referred to as minawo, midawo, hugbono, and hunowo. Husago is performed to invoke the presence of the gods and to set the mood for the entire Yeve ceremony as stated in Ajayi above. The Yeve ceremonies may start early in the morning or afternoon depending on the type of rite under performance. For instance, during graduation ceremonies of the members the dance may start in the late afternoon throughout the night into the following day. If it is a funeral the dance starts early morning until the deceased is buried. In Ave-Dakpa deceased are normally buried late afternoon and not in the morning unless there is an urgent need. Burial in the late afternoon does not apply to the Yeve cult alone but the entire Ave-Dakpa town. There are inconsistencies with regards to the overall organizations and mode of Yeve performances. As the dance-drumming starts selected priests and priestesses perform prayers, sacrifices and sprinkle ritual herbs that are believed to pave the way and a symbol of readiness to receive the gods.

In all performances including husago, the dancers get their starting cues from the lead drummer (azaguno). Husago dance may start and end anywhere in the dancing arena (Figure 6-1). The dance is performed with two to three people dancing together. It is unusual to see one person dancing alone unless the person wants to express specific gestures. Husago dance is not a gender-based dance as seen in avlevu, both male and female initiates participate in the dance performance. This can be seen in the accompany DVD under Husago dance starting in 00mins:09seconds.

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2 The cue prescribed by the drummer for dancers to start their main movement is discussed into details in the previous chapter.
Structurally, the dance starts with *adasasa*, a preparatory movement. This preparatory movement is not a required or standard movement compulsory for every dancer. Instead, it is any kind of movement that the dancer gently executes based on his/her internalization of the drumming and how he/she intends to start the principal movements of the *husago* dance. The preparatory movement however, is not performed randomly but must be on time with the drumming. After the dancers have begun performing their preparatory movement and before the dancers begin the principal movements, the *azaguno* gives a signal that is known to everyone as a cue to start.

The principal movements involve the use of the feet and the torso. The upper part of the dancer’s body, especially the torso engages in a “contraction and release” movements articulating the beat and reinforcing the timeline of the drumming. Analytically, the dancer’s torso “release” falls on the strong beat which is indicated as R.ft on the first beat in the the second measure and the “contraction” on the weak beat in the second-half of the first, second and third measures in the transcription below (Figure 6-2). The torso contraction and release can be clearly seen in the accompanying DVD under *husago* dance (03mins: 40sec). The “contraction and release” of the torso is accompanied by the arms and the shoulders blades as seen in *agbadza*. Explaining the *agbadza* movement Amegago explains that, *agbadza* style is characterized by the position of the hands by the sides of the body (at waist), the contraction and release of the upper torso along with the expansion of the shoulder blades” (2011: 102). This is exactly what happens in *husago* dance.

Secondly, the use of the feet is very important. It is in fact the movement of the feet that differentiates *husago* from *agbadza*. In *husago* the accurate position is to bend
the knee or what ballet dancers refer to as “plié.” As the dancer bends he/she dances by stepping each foot alternatively on the strong beats. In addition to the bent knee the dancer twists his/her heel inwardly as if it is about to touch the other foot. This is done and repeated in alternation. In chapter 5, the strong beat of husago drumming is notated as the first beat-note in measure 2 and 3 of the gakogui in the supporting rhythmic patterns labeled R.ft. It is also on this beat-note that the torso of the dancer is released and the inward twist of the heel (both right and left in alternation) applies.

![Diagram of R.ft and L.ft]

Figure 6-2. Husago

In Ave-Dakpa the women perform husago dance as described above. The men do the same except that they do not twist their heels. They perform the dance purely as agbadza and lift their foot (feet) upwards and downwards along with their hand movements downward and back to place. The characteristic feature of this husago dance involves “forward-backward” dance movements. Interestingly, in Ave-Dakpa, the husunuwo do not necessarily adhere to the “forward-backward” movement. The Yeve cult members sometimes perform the dance in the forward-backward movements or just perform it moving forward and returning back into their seats.

Adavu Dance

Adavu is one of the principal dances of the Yeve cult at Ave-Dakpa and one of the most serious of all the dances. It is considered the most powerful and spiritual dance of the Yeve cult, and is performed mostly by the midawo and husunuwo (priests).
The rest of the yevesiwo (initiates) sing and make simple dance movements to accompany their singing. Their singing is done to enhance the dance of the midawo and husunuwo. Adavu is where dancers experience the forces and presence of the gods that can be manifested through trance, healing or a medium may receive message from the gods and delivered to the members. Avorgbedor describes adavu dance performance as “a medium for heightened spiritual experience” (1987: 5).

It is important to clarify the notion of dance in adavu performance. The dance, adavu, does not necessarily conform to the Ewe’s customary understanding of dancing. For example, when an Ewe person or native is dancing he/she first considers the excitement of the drumming and how well the drumming is organized to inspire him/her to dance. The Ewe native also thinks of what exciting gestures to execute in order to convey some kind of messages for people to understand. And finally, he/she dances with the drum music in time. In adavu dance, however, all these characteristics are not required. What constitute the dance are the intense twirling movements with display of ritual and mystical objects accompanied with highly energetic singing evoking the gods. The dance may seem unattractive and unorganized in the typical Ewe aesthetics. The adavu dance is chapter two on the DVD that accompanies the dissertation.

During adavu dance, the introduction drumming as transcribed in chapter 5 is the music that normally brings the midawo and husunowo into the dancing arena. This is a processional dance that involved spiritually heightened songs and simple swaying movements as the priests walk from the cult house into the dance arena (watch DVD Adavu procession 05min 25sec -07min 10sec). The moment the drumming starts, the yevesiwo (rest of the initiates, mostly females) announce to the public that the spiritual
men are on their way into the ritual space, the dance arena. The announcement is done through yodeling. Immediately, those who are not Yeve members or are not spiritually strong normally leave the scene. The dance is performed in a circle where the initiates demonstrate their involvement with a great degree of energy. As this music is highly ritualized the audience is also requested to bare their chests and even not wear scarves on their heads.

The moment the *midawo* and the *husunuwo* arrive in the dance space the drummer then changes to the rhythmic pattern labeled “*adavu transition,*” which is a more sophisticated drumming to match up with the spirit and emotion of the priests. In the course of the procession, the *midawo* and *husunuwo* often carry spiritually dangerous objects and amulets as they chant, invoke and perform miracles. Avorgbedor examines the elements of this part of *adavu* dance and explains that, “it is also a moment during which magico-spiritual objects are brought out, and sometimes miraculous feats may be performed” (1987: 12).

In an interview, Togbi Alorwoyie describes the state of the priest as he *dances adavu* as, *ezu gbogbo menya, enumake dzezi dede wo no dodom* (Personal interview with Togbi Alorwoyie September 22, 2012). This sentence translates, “It [priests presence] becomes a spiritual affair or warfare, immediately specific signs are noticed.” This intensive nature of the dance explains why the dance is called dance of fury. Locke explains it as “a drum of seriousness” (2010: 14). Illuminating some of the elements and activities that occur during this spiritually heightened dance Nketia writes that, “they [dancers] therefore perform the dance in a state of ecstasy. All those present prostrate themselves and shout *ho ho ho*, or clap their hands to hail the arrival of the divinities”
(1975: 221). The *adavu* dance also falls into Ajayi’s second category of sacred dance performance. He notes that during the dance performance, “the medium has surrendered himself or herself to be taken over by the spirit of the deity…The expected and inevitable response is heightened memories of the deity – possession” (1996: 189).

The dance can be conceived as a free form of movements performed with or without considering necessarily the drum music provided. The performers in the cult become pugnacious and very wild due to the presence of supernatural spirits, which also creates aggravated noise among them. The *adavu* dance in this instance becomes chaotic because neither the song nor the dance goes with the drumming. The initiates get possessed due to the preferred rhythms of the deities being played and how they are hailed through singing. To the insider this becomes the exciting and spiritual moment of the dance, but it may be confusing to the outsider. The dance is performed with the feet dragged on the ground forward and back. Some dancers also execute whirling movements; others dance from side to side in both clockwise and counterclockwise directions. The *husunuwo* perform the *adavu* dance by stomping the feet that rhythmically imitate the strokes of the gankogui pattern as notated below (Figure 6-3). I must emphasize that during *adavu* dance performance the priests or the priestesses can start with any of their foot either right or left especially those who try to imitate the gankogui pattern. As I indicate there are some people who may use the foot specified on top of the notated gankogui pattern while others use the foot indicated below the notation. The dance is more of an individual’s expression and feelings.
The female initiates dance by swinging their arms with their hands opened, expressing their sentiments to the deities. Avorgbedor describes the general importance of the adavu dance performance without a specific reference to a particular town in the Volta region. He writes, "The dance which accompanies the adavu dance assumes a form of running in a semi dancing in a circle. While the running does not necessarily synchronize with the background rhythmic precision, arm and torso movements normally accent the initial beats" (1987: 14). I agree with Avorgbedor’s explanation of adavu dance because those qualities and characteristics are also visible in adavu performance at Ave-Dakpa (watch DVD under adavu dance 14mins 55sec – 16mins). The dancers sometimes stop and sing in place with great emotion and continue from that point until the drummers introduce a different dance to be performed. Some performers also heighten the dance by motivating other dancers through exclamations with their hands at their mouths. The adavu dance is very important to establish a relationship between the cosmic and the living. The significance of what takes place in the adavu dance is what Adinku explains as follows:

The significance of [adavu] dance as ritual activity, one notes that the dance has been based in portraying various laws and principles believed to be found within cosmic nature. The medium and adherents of the various ritual traditions assume that should they successfully portray these cosmic principles in their dances, it would be easy for them to establish contact with cosmic host whose characteristics have been thought to relate to these principles. Attunement with the cosmic laws is, therefore,
the desire of all ritual dancers who believe that through such attunement they come to live in harmony with the cosmic forces (1994: 17).

The dance is performed in a circle where the initiates demonstrate their involvement with a great degree of energy. As this music is highly ritualized the audience is also requested to bare their chests and even not wear scarves on their heads. During adavu dance the Yeve object (vodu) is brought out (see adavu procession on the DVD). As part of the rituals, everyone present during this performance must honor this sacred object. Most often, it is announced that the Yeve object (vodu) will be out so anyone who will not comply with the rules by taking off his/her shirt and scarf should disappear from the arena before the gods intervene. If someone disobeys this regulation the husunu tortures the person with his spiritual gun, tukpi. The sickness given through the tukpi can stay with the person forever and can cause untimely death.

Adavu also plays a significant role during a member’s funeral. When a cult member dies this performance is held to let loose the spirit of the deceased from the Yeve cult to enable him to join his ancestors. As part of the ritual dance performance and a custom of the Yeve cult, a fowl is tied with a rope and dragged inside and outside the dance arena amidst the dance drumming with speed. The fowl is then placed inside a small hut made out of thatch at the side of the dance arena or sometimes inside the cult house. The fowl is burnt to death by one of the priests (midawo) mentioning the deceased person’s name, which signifies that the spirit of the deceased has been cast out from the earth to its destination or spiritual home. While the fowl keeps burning the initiates dance running in a circle around the hut as a sign of mourning. At the same
time the *hugbono* requests forgiveness for the deceased in case the deceased offended someone in life or even violated any of the laws of the deities in the cult.

The DVD has two recording of *adavu*. The first section is a procession with the Yeve deity and the second section is the dance in a circle

**Aforvu Dance**

*Aforvu*, also known as *afortoe*, is the fastest of all the dances performed during Yeve events. As described in Chapter five, Aforvu derives its name from the phrase *afor fe vu*. In Anlo-Ewe, *afor* means “foot” and *vu* means “performance.” Therefore, aforvu literally means a dance designed for the feet or a performance that involves manipulations of the feet.

Agbayiza explained to me that *aforvu* and *adavu* dances, although they are not the same, both engage with deities and spirits of some sort. This is because *aforvu* follows *adavu* directly and the spirits that have been invoked during *adavu* still work within them until they dance it out. To put Agbayiza's explanation in some perspective I will borrow Friedson's chapter title “where divine horsemen ride” (2009: 15). When *aforvu* starts, the existing spirits ride the initiates through fast and energetic dancing until they cool down or the spirits go away. In Ave-Dakpa the idea that the spirits are riding the initiates facilitates the stylish use and manipulation of the feet, hence, *aforvu*. Ajayi reaffirms this point and writes: “During possession, the full personality of the deity, including habits, emotional dispositions and the social mores he or she symbolizes, are danced out and the distinctive physical features of the deity are manifested in the dancer… Like the deity, the medium becomes imbued with superhuman qualities and is able to see visions or perform extraordinary feats usually described as ‘magic’” (1996: 189-190). This can be clearly seen in the accompanying video in *aforvu* dance.
Aforvu dance is performed using every space in the dance arena (Figure 6-1), commonly dancing a long distance across the entire dance arena and back to the original place. The dancer performs the dance to any distance as long as he/she can hear the drum. Thus the expression, etsoe de aforvu meaning that “the dancer has taken over the dance upon his/her feet or the feet are in control.” Sometimes the dancers keep revolving round the entire dance arena or sometimes moving within the arena from one point to the other. As in husago, the dancer is not required (although he can) to do adasasa before beginning the main dance. Yeve members start dancing depending on the drum rhythm or drum text inspire them. In aforvu a Yeve initiate is free to dance solo, as a duet, or with a group of people. The fast tempo of the drumming helps dancers express themselves with different gestures. This is the only dance in the Yeve cult at Ave-Dakpa that uses long and elaborate steps to travel. The aforvu dance-drumming is chapter three on the DVD.

In aforvu performance the dancer normally pays attention to two important features: the use of the feet and the torso. The ability to manipulate the feet and the consistency of the torso contraction and release when marching at a quick pace makes aforvu dance unique and fascinating. The dancer’s foot alternates one after the other placing the strong beat on the first beat-note of the gakogui rhythmic pattern (watch aforvu dance DVD 22mins 05sec – 23min 15 sec).

Analytically, in the full gakogui pattern there are two kicks of the foot, right and left. For instance, in a four beat cycle the right foot kick is on the first beat which is the right foot with the indication R.ft and the left foot kick is be on the third beat which is the eighth note labeled L.ft. as seen below (Figure 6-4).
The torso together with the shoulder blades also moves according to the beat and pulse in the contraction and release motion as discussed in *husago* dance. During an individual display, a dancer can dwell on one foot while expressing his/her own gestures before changing to the other foot. This is how Locke describes the use of the feet and the arms of *aforvu*: the “[dance] entails a kicking gesture prior to shifting of weight from one foot to the other that often scuffs up a small cloud of sand. The torso and arms execute a contraction-expansion motion that can be regarded as being iconic of Ewe cultural identity” (2010: 16).

The drum text that accompanies *aforvu* dance is very significant in understanding the spiritual aspects of the dance. I must emphasize here that the drum texts of the lead drum help intensify the ritual activities embodied in the dancing of the *husunu*. Within *aforvu* dance, the *husunu* dances and engages in two different cosmos; physical and spiritual. Physically, the *husunu* displays his competency as an energetic beautiful dancer and his masculinity as the man in control of the dancing space. His dance is physically and aesthetically pleasing to the audience. However, the *husunu*’s skills are transcended into a spiritual space or realm where he engages with specific rituals such as *gbesa* (different forms of incantations) and *tukpidada* (literally, firing a spiritual gun). Understanding what happens in the physical and the spiritual realm of the *husunu* depends on the lead drummers’ ability to articulate and communicate specific drum texts that ignite the link between the *husunu* and the spirits or deities. The main drum
text that cause this to happen is, *egbe mie do go; egbe mie kpe vor*, meaning “coward! Today we have finally met” (see Chapter 5 for transcription). In Ewe, this is a threatening statement that is not commonly heard among people. The day an individual tells someone this statement it means that one of the two people has targeted the other for something that has happened between them in the past and that one person is interested in fighting the other. The statement initiates a time for revenge where one person survives the fight or both will be injured. Translating this concept and interpretation of the drum text into *aforvu* dance, it is evident that the *husunu* engages in a spiritual warfare and competition where various intensities of incantations are chanted and performed. Here, the *husunu’s* physical dance performance can be explained in three skillful techniques: (a) dancing around the dance arena, (b) stomping in place and (c) ending the dance. The three techniques symbolize and interpret what the *husunu* engages with spiritually.

First, the *husunu* dances around the dance arena he secretly recites or chants the *gbesa*. *Gbesa* is empowered by the speed, energy and the skillful play of the divine lead drummer supported by the rest of the ensembles. The faster and invigorating or solid the drumming, the more dance movements the *husunu* executes and the more *gbesa* he recites or chants. Symbolically, this is when the *husunu* is on a journey into the spiritual realm to interact with deities or engage in spiritually activities. Movement symbolism is a significant feature in *aforvu* and has been addressed in Buck. She says, “Symbolic movement is the language of the dance. It is a natural means of reaching beyond ourselves to the transcendent. By adding gesture to language, word symbols are given an intensity of meaning which can become a powerfully moving force” (1987:
13). It is important to note that the activities of the *husunu* both the stylish movements and the *gbesa* may not be able to achieve their spiritual objectives if not the essential role of the lead drummer.

Secondly, when the husunu stops at one place stomping with vigor the indication is that he is facing a tough spiritual battle and in a competition with a more powerful spirit that needs serious concentration. This is the time a more advance form of *gbesa* comes into play to enable him to accomplish the combat. As he stops at one place the lead drummer understand the *husunu*'s moment or situation and reinforces his action with the drum text to help him achieve his purpose. The *husunu* then dances tirelessly and stomp until he is convinced to have a accomplished his objectives.

Thirdly, as the *husunu* is about to finish his dance, he spins around several times. The spinning is a signal that he is about to fire or release the *tukpi* (a kind of spiritual gun). The shooting happens when he stops spinning and kicks his foot (as if he were kicking a ball). For the *husunu* to be successful at performing these rituals, it is the responsibility of the divine drummer’s esoteric knowledge empowered by the drum text to intensify the *husunu*'s mood and move him from the physical realm into the spiritual to complete his goals. The divine drummer’s expertise to distinctly perform appropriate drum texts uplifts and transcends the *husunu* into a completely different spiritual being and this is seen in the way he dances.

**Ako Dance**

*Ako* is a popularly known dance in Ave-Dakpa because it sounds similar to *agbadza*. It is a dance performed in the Yeve cult for entertainment and for relaxation. It is so far the only dance type that during certain occasion’s people (audience and community members) are allowed join in and dance at their own will. The dance, as with
the drumming, is in 12/8 meter. In a conversation with Tsale, he says that there is no difference between agbadza and ako to him personally. If there will be any difference at all it is the fact that ako is performed in the Yeve cult with songs that focus on the deities while agbadza is more social and involves the entire community with songs that focus on human relations and other topical issues. Several scholars have researched and written on Ewe social and funeral musical forms especially the dance-drumming styles that employ the Ewe standard drum patterns as seen in agbadza dance-drumming (see Jones 1959; Ladzekpo 1971; Pantaleoni 1972 and Amegago 2011).

According to Agbayiza, the men perform ako to show off their skills and energy. It is performed in the cult to socialize and release tension. In the performance the dancers most often sit on long benches arranged in a circular form and dance from every angle of the dance arena and end anywhere. As an important component of the dance, the women sit in a circle, clap their hands and sing along with the drumming to inspire those dancing in the circle.

Ako dance has three distinct elements that are critically observed. These elements are present in agbadza dance as important norms observed in Ewe dancing. These are: 1) adasasa, 2) yedudu/dzime, and 3) yetso. 

In the first section, the adasasa is a preparatory movement used to usher in the main part of the dance. During this time the dancer(s) alerts the azaguno with his/her choice of movement as an indication of readiness. The adasasa movements are not fixed or structured, but are free as an externalization and projection of sentiments of the dancer’s artistic expression and energy that lure him/her into the main dance. Particularly in ako dance, adasasa requires shifting the hip from one side to the other on
either the flat foot or on the balls with the heels up. A dancer displaying these techniques shows mastery of the dance. Sometimes the dancers bend down and swing their arms from one direction to the other according to the tempo of the music with knees bouncing as they play the beat of the drumming.

After the adasasa, dancers go into the main dance section known as yedudu. Some of the members in the cult prefer to call it dzime because they believe a good dancer performing ako should have the ability to use his/her torso in a contraction and release manner while employing the arms. This also implies that the dancer is using the right techniques with full commitment in what he or she is dancing. As the main section of the dance, the dancers slightly bend their knee “plié” and dance with intensity and quickness in the torso. The azaguno is always responsible for the yedudu section of the dance. The important rhythm for this section is what is transcribed in measure 4 of the lead ako drum in chapter five with the drum text ke de me (also referred as koe de me) or njie de me (also nj de me). When the lead drummer announces this drum text he signals dancers who are standing waiting for this rhythm to start the dance now. In context, the drummer is commanding the dancers to get down to it. They must dance vigorously and use appropriate gestures to express their sentiments and skills. When this drum text is introduced it sometimes feels as if dancers are competing with each other. Members dance and sweat until they are tired before some of them will take their seat.

Structurally, this dance is performed just like the agbadza dance of the Ewe. In one cycle of the gankogui pattern there are four conceptualized beats. In performing

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3 It is the section where dancers put their emotions, energy, and perform the dance with vigor.
ako the dancer steps twice on each foot before using the other foot. For example two right foots (R.ft) as beat 1 and 2 and two left foots (L.ft) as beat 3 and 4 (also get a better clarity by watching the DVD on Ako dance). The strong beat of the ako, which is the right foot, is the first note (the down beat bell) with the indication R.ft in the transcription below. I did not put the second right foot in the transcription because it falls within the second note. However, when you divide the quarter note into two it is easy to see where the second right foot lands. The same is repeated for the left foot. Therefore the transcription below explains the basic foot works or steps of the ako dance as performed in the Yeve cult at Ave-Dakpa. It is also important to note that some people still add extra footwork to display their skills. But what every one does is the double steps of each foot in alternation.

Figure 6–5. Ako

The final section of the dance is a repetition of the first section but with variations called yetso. Yetso in Anlo-Ewe means, “ending the dance.” During this section the dancer’s skill and energy is exhausted and the drummer must bring the dance to an end. At this point, the dancer does not need a signal from the lead drummer to help her end the dance. Instead, he/she calculates the beats in his mind and gently ends the dance. The end is mostly on a beat sometimes accompanied with one or two gestures. The gestures often involve dropping of arms with the hands pointing to the ground symbolizing acknowledgment of mother earth.
Sovu Dance

Sovu is a beautiful dance performed to honor the thunder god, so. The dance is performed also for spiritual consecration or during any Yeve events. The dance is very simple and the drumming is so exciting that it has become one of the dances adapted for the proscenium stage and popularized by amateur and professional dance companies in Accra. Of course, in the theatricalized versions other movements that are not from sovu have been added to make it artistically pleasing and enjoyable to diverse non-Yeve audiences. The dance, as with the drumming is in 4/4 meter in a moderate tempo. The sovu dance is the only dance that many songs associated with it.

Structurally, the dance begins with a movement leading into a semi-circle or sometimes a complete circle depending on the number of dancers available. There are times in Ave-Dakpa the dance is not performed in semi circle so the idea of circle is not consistent but relevant. The dance is performed in counterclockwise direction with the right foot leading, accompanied with the typical Ewe torso contraction and release technique discussed in the previous dances. Below is the basic footstep with the right foot (R.ft) leading (watch the DVD on Sovu dance-drumming)

[Diagram of footstep]

Figure 6-6. Sovu

In a four beat cycle, the right foot is on the strong beat that is the first note of the gankogui labeled R.ft above. Therefore the foot of the dancer alternates as if he/she is marching right-left alternation. To reinforce the strong beat in the drumming the dancer
pushes his/her leading right foot (R.ft) forward and articulates it with a slight drop of the right shoulder all together on the beat.

Since most husunu are initiated into the god of thunder they tend to dominate the sovu dance performance although everybody performs. The significance of performing sovu in a counterclockwise circle symbolizes the peoples’ societal order and understanding of themselves in the cosmos. It is believed that human beings are born and may toil, struggle, move from one place to another for job, family and many other things. So as the dance is performed in the circle it reminds them of who and what they are here for and ask the thunder god, so to bless and protect them throughout their endeavors.

**Avle Dance**

*Avle* dance is a type of dance drama performance for comic relief. It is an important dance that creates laughter among the members in the cult. In context, the dance is primarily performed to test the emotional state and seriousness of the husunuwo and midawo priests. The dance is also performed to honor avleketi, a god who is part of the total being of the god of thunder. The dance drama is known as avlewowo meaning performing or dramatizing avle. *Avle* dance is only performed by avlesi and no other person is expected to perform it.

*Avlesi* is a category of female initiate who has some privileges and freedom to do certain things or behave in a particular way. For instance, *avlesi* has the right to wear pants, shirts, shoes, sandals, tie, hat, cap and sunglasses without restrictions or offence. However, no member can wear these items in the cult house. This is an

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4 See Kumassah (2009)
example of the privileges *avlesi* has in the cult house (see chapter 3 for full description of Avle). Depending on the occasion, *avle* dance may be performed in the public. However, the dance drama is less serious since audience are not part of the cult and do not understand the reasons for performing a dance like *avle* dance.

Although the dance is full of fun and is very short, it is also performed during the funeral of the *avlesi* despite its context. In this case, the context of the dance is flirtatious in character, but performed to remember the deceased during her life as a member and also as a farewell to her ancestral home. The *avlevu* (*avlewowo*) is danced in patterns of two and contains two different sections. Although it is only the female initiates who perform this dance, one female performs the role of a man and the other as a woman. Sometimes, the *avlesi* can go to the extent of dancing with a male initiate but this is uncommon.

Agbayiza notes that during the ritual performances in the Yeve cult, the *avlesi* who change their roles to perform the male part of the dance dress themselves in hats, spectacles, and shoes. One major characteristic he also describes is how the *avlesi* artfully creates a wooden penis (*ava*) with a rope on each side tied on her waist (Agbayiza, August 2, 2006). I have personally seen this dance performed in my hometown many times. The DVD has the avle performance from the slow to the fast style.

As mentioned above, *avlevu* performance is in two sections: slow and fast. In the slow section the *avlesi* gets up from her sitting place and starts to dance alone. The dance that is heavily accompanied with gestures signifies that she is looking for a man or a partner to dramatize *avle* with. She uses this slow drumming to make a selection.
and a personality she is interested in. The action of the *avlesi* looking for a partner to
dance with is explained in the *kpetsi* support drum in *avlevu* (see chapter five on
*avlevu*). The lead drum announces that the time has come for *avlewowo*. The drum text
states: *nude dzodzom, 'vlesiawo le dodom mi te va mi dui*. The sentence means,
“something is happening, the *avle* initiates are getting ready (coming or about to start
their show) everyone (members) come and dance with them.” As the lead drum
introduces this drum text the support drum responds by saying *woa wo de ga mea su*
meaning, “where are they the time is up or now.” These two drum texts meaningfully
weave the conversation together. The response drum reinforces and affirms the search
of *avlesi*’s partner. For instance, in this section *avlesi* can make gestures pointing to her
private parts, having hands on her waist or buttocks or placing her hand by her ear if
someone will call her. When she finds her appropriate partner she takes her into the
middle of the dance arena for *avlewowo* to begin. The dancers relate to one another in
a responsive manner by both moving their bodies towards each other and in opposite
directions. The two participants perform the dance by looking straight into each other’s
face aggressively or excitingly depending on their choice of movements. They also use
their arms around one another as they move or swing their partners from one direction
to another to give meaning to the audience. Meaning of movement is very important in
*avlevu* performance. Adinku explains meaning in dance this way:

> Meaning in the dance also becomes apparent by examining the interaction
of dancers and their response to each other’s movements and expression.
These interactions may be found in duets, group performances or even in
solo dancing when the performer relates to onlookers and musicians. In
the duet, one dancer would communicate an idea and the partner would
respond with different sets of movements. The dramatic interaction
through movements is important to bring out the intended meaning and
feeling (1994: 19)
The avle dance starts in a moderate tempo to allow the participants to express their actions. As seen in the transcription below (figure 6-7) the dancer’s basic steps relates to what I described in ako dance as the double step of each foot in alternation. This transcription is in 6/8 because the double steps of each foot complement reinforce the dancer’s hand gesture. With the represented footworks below, both dancers move forward with their gestures until they get closer to each other before they get into the faster tempo where the climax of their drama or action is revealed.

![Figure 6-7. Avle](image)

The second section, which is the fast or the dramatic part, is introduced in the lead drum pattern, which changes gradually from slow to fast. This helps to intensify the action and the drummer mimics the action of the dancers in his drumming. The change introduced by the lead drummer also serves as a cue to the dancers to perform their drama. The azaguno controls the entire performance based on how exciting the participants actively interact with one another. The azaguno can also decide to create confusion and distort the movement by increasing the tempo at random to the extent that the dancers will not be able to relate and articulate their dance movements and cannot convey the message of their drama in relation to the beat. At the point when the energy level is very high and exhausting the azaguno again plays a phrase, which is known to all the members to end the section.
The drum text for the fast section is *te de dzi* meaning “push it on or get excited.” The moment this rhythm starts the two participants cling to themselves up in a form of hug with torso contact moving their heads alone from one direction to the other. In this part there are two places of concentration: direct eye contact, which signifies admiration from whoever dominates the dance, and the movement of the waist and hips, which incorporates the sexual act. The core of the dance drama is that *avle* with her partner simulate copulation until the drumming stops. Avorgbedor describes this second section as *avlewowo* and writes:

The total movement pattern, which assumes a gradual acceleration in tempo, is a simulation of an erotic act with the aid of a stick which is manipulated as a phallus. As the music speeds up gradually in a synchrony with the Awlesi’s movements, the audience’s excitement and expectation gains momentum accordingly. The simulation culminates in a chaotic climax during which the Awlesi concludes through a vigorous and quick simulation of the act of copulation (1987: 11-12).

When the drummer realizes that the action is getting out of control, he ends the dance by playing the drum text phrase *blewu, blewu blewu* meaning “calm down,” “slow down” or “end it right there.” Besides the *avlewowo*, the *avlevu* dance can be performed in a free-style where dancers can naturally express their sentiments within the context of the dance.

**Davu Dance**

This is one of the most important dances performed in the Yeve cult. *Da* refers to a snake or the snake god cult into which some of the members are initiated. Female initiates, whose names begin with *Da*, for example, Dashi, Dangoe, Daenyeametor, and Danyehu, are legitimate participants in the *davu* performance. During *davu* members sometimes get possessed and lay on the ground. They emulate the snake by stretching and coiling as part of the possession. The chief priest sprinkles purified water on the
possessed member(s) together with some chanting to enable her to gain consciousness. In the course of this, the possessed member becomes grimy due to the sprinkled water and is later taken into the sacred room for further rituals after which she changes her clothes into new ones.

During possession the deities sometimes give messages through the medium to the entire group. The state of possession entered by the devotees renders immunity to pain (only achieved by those whose commitment to a deity has been maintained over many years). It takes many hours for the medium to gain consciousness because she becomes very stiff and until the spirit imbued in her accomplishes his responsibility she will not gain consciousness, which may also lead to her sickness. Agbayiza did not allow some of the devout members who easily get possessed to be part of this performance. He explains that it takes sometimes a week for them to recuperate and he will not cause them that torture. The dance most often takes place under the cult tree in the cult house and moves in a circle in a steady gait. The beat of the drummers then picks up slightly, provoking the dancers into changing their body movements. A good photograph of this dance and various costumes is illustrated in Dagan (1997:196-201).

As stated in Chapter 5, there are two sections of davu dance: (a) a search dance and (b) a celebratory dance. The search dance is performed when Da is missing or out of her temple and has not return for days. In certain areas of the Volta region when people are missing there are brave search men also known as asafo who go with their instruments on a search to find the missing person. This is the same in the Yeve cult in Ave-Dakpa.
It is very important to note that the significance of the search dance is the manner in which the *Da* is searched through the dance and how various instruments in the ensemble contribute sonically to facilitate the search and the capturing of the *Da*. Specific instruments such as *gakogui* and *axatse* play an important role in the search of the *Da*. This is not because they play consistent rhythmic patterns but because of the materials out of which the instruments are made and the sound that comes from them. For example: *Gakogui* is the loudest instrument and can be heard against many drums. This is also true of *axatse* with its buzzy and loud sound. It is believed in the *Yeve* cult and also from various studies that snakes are very sensitive to vibration and can be easily stressed with loud sounds. Hence, the loud and buzzing sounds of the *gakogui* and *axatse* are to make the *Da* uncomfortable and cause her to quickly expose herself to be brought into her temple. *Kagan* on the other hand, performs two consistent tones – low and high alternatively. The rhythm and the alternated sounds of the *kagan* imitate the steps of the dancers in the ritual search process. *Yeve* members imitate these steps so that their feet do not syncopate with the rhythm and the sound provided. If the sounds and the steps are together then it becomes unified in achieving the same goal. In the search performance, dancers move sideways in a counter clockwise direction facing-in the circle with their hands open – a gesture depicting a symbol of searching.

The lead drum in the search dance performs only one task besides the complimentary rhythms that it plays. Its primary function is to give signal when the *Da* is found so that she can be captured. The moment the rhythmic phrase is introduced, dancers interpret it by turning their hands down on the last beat-note meaning that they have captured the *Da*. That same phrase also serves as the end phrase of the dance.
performance as explained in the previous chapter. Refer to the DVD to get a better understanding of how Davu I is performed and the cues from the drummers.

The transcription below is similar descriptively in the manner at which sovu dance is performed except that the time signature is different. In this performance the dancer’s lead foot labeled R.ft reinforce the strong beat by moving a little forward in a four-count cycle. Although it seems very easy and simple it is difficult for lots of people to keep time in performing this first search dance.

![Transcription of Davu I](image)

Figure 6-8. Davu I

In Davu II, the dance is organized to celebrate the return of the Da into her temple. The dance performance uses the same techniques involved in ako. The rhythms are the same except for the lead drum pattern however, the use of the torso and the feet remain the same. The drum text of the lead drum pattern transcribed in chapter five is also listed below. As we can see from the translation it is merely a celebration where everyone dances and has fun.

ηto ηto ηto ηto wo li
ηto ηto ηto woli
ηto wole da gboe

Real, real, for sure it has been captured
Real, for sure the Da has been captured
Real! They brought the snake home
Besides the drum texts written above there is an important phrase that is crucial in davu II dance performance. The phrase reads *mi tugui deme*. This is an expression most Ewes use in different contexts such as washing, cooking, wrestling and dancing among others. However, in this context it is dance related. During this dance performance the lead drummer performs the drum text that orders dancers to exert more energy and dance vigorously. As soon as the variation, *mi tugui deme* is introduced, the attitudes of dancers change from normal dancing to a more competitive dancing with lots of expressions and skill. The DVD for davu dance II gives a clear understanding of how the dance-drumming is performed.

**Dance Gestures**

In most traditional African dances the use of body to communicate is an essential part of the dance. The bodily gestures communicate messages of love, joy, humor, pain, and sadness among other things. Scholars agree on the significance of African dance as a multi channel model for communication (Nketia 1975; Kariamu 1996; Adinku 1994; Ajayi 1998; Blum 1974; Warren 1972).

Ajayi writes “dance is an effective symbol of communication, where the inner concepts are externalized through the physical body in motion” (1998: 22). As such the body is used as a communicative tool to convey messages to the public. Nicholls also added that, “For the African, dance is a mode of communication which utilizes gestures
and movement to convey information, and as such, is a major educational vehicle” (1996: 47). Dances are used to give meaning and are significant to every important occasion in the life cycle of human beings. Occasions in human life cycles where dance plays an important role include funerals, marriages, and naming ceremonies among others. Dance in a ritual context can act as a healer during curative rituals, involving the diagnosis and treatment of the physically and mentally ill people; it also conveys messages through the devotees to the members. The dancers in the Yeve cult perform dance movements, which the non-members find very complicated to understand.

The philosophical understanding of traditional Ghanaian music-dance performance in a circle is that it symbolizes togetherness and unity. This holds true in relation to the Yeve dance as well. Traditional religion is very tightly connected to the dance. The repetitive nature of most traditional dance along with the symbolism of the dances’ circular formations, are expressive of the peoples’ societal order and understanding of themselves in the cosmos. According to Spine, “the symbol of the circle is primordial because it represents the image of the infinite structure of the family and village… This emphasis on repetition reveals that the community is attempting to express the perceived stability of its environment” (1996: 64-66). Ajayi also notes that, “it is not incongruous to use the body in glorification of God and other divine manifestations. It is a useful tool for both God and man. The secular and cultural dimensions of the body only serve to establish, confirm and enhance the circular (as opposed to the linear) relationship between the Creator, nature and culture” (1996: 186). In relation to this argument, Warren describes the body and position of an African dancer as a tool or instrument for expression of emotions. She writes:
The response of the body to expression of love, joy, grief, and despair – all to the accompaniment of music, songs, and drumming – is the heritage of the African. To see an African dance is to witness his cultural past and present. Africans use their bodies to reflect their emotions, their hopes and their religion: The head moves in one rhythm, the shoulders in another, the arms in still a third, the feet in still another. Their dance is a text motion, link to the music of the drums, instruments and voice" (Warren 1972: ii).

During the entire Yeve dance performance the devotees dance with a variety of gestures to convey messages to the audience. Some of these gestures are described below:

5. Placing two hands on the torso while dancing. This is an important gesture in the Yeve cult especially in ako dance performance. This gesture is mostly associated with male dancers. Women do not often use it. The gesture symbolizes being “proud of one’s achievements.” It also symbolizes someone with a “clean heart thus no evil intention.” Finally, it also signifies it is a matter of the chest. The chest is a symbolism of “strength.” So when someone dances and has his hands on his chest it means with my strength I can achieve and excel in everything.

6. Raising the hand skywards with head facing up. This gesture is expressed individually and not in duet or group dancing. It works mostly in solo dancing. This is the point where initiates express their joy and grief to their deities. The meaning of dancing with hands skywards is “I look to God.” Since individuals are initiated in various deities in the cult they “look to their deity or god” for answers and solutions. This is very common in Yeve dance.

7. Two fingers up for a dancer or drummer. Raising of fingers seems to be popular in most Ewe dances, perhaps Ghanaian dances in general. The fingers that are used are the index and the middle fingers of the right arm and not the left arm. It is the same gesture made in the United States to express “peace.” However, it is possible to use the selected finger of both arms and raise them up pointing to who deserves it. This is an important gesture that symbolizes “appreciation.” This is not a gesture that is done to a dancer or drummer to give him some sort of pride but instead encourages him to do more of what he/she is doing. In the Yeve cult at Ave-Dakpa this is an important gesture. Sometimes in my opinion observing how the dancers and drummers perform it feels to me as if they are competing for this gesture, although they are not. However, it is a desire for every individual performing to have the hugbonoga acknowledges him/her by raising those two fingers. Before a person is recognized with this action, the hugbono goes to invite the individual dancer and dance with him/her. In the process of dancing he raises the fingers and does it again after the dance. This may sound very common to some people who have experienced this gesture in social dance-drumming. However, in the Yeve cult in Ave-Dakpa it is an
important gesture and high form of acknowledging the skills of the drummer or dancer.

In the same manner, placing money on the forehead and dropping cloth around a person’s neck is another gesture. These two gestures go hand-in-hand. They can be seen in social and recreational dance-drums and ments. In the Yeve cult money is not used, instead the thumb is placed on the forehead. The person who receives the thumb on his/her forehead is the one who has the dance vocabularies coupled with skillful gestures that express and glorify or reference something in connection to the event. Both male and female initiates can receive the thumb on their forehead. In the same manner, cloths are also placed around the neck of skillful drummers and dancers. For instance, a drummer may play an appellation involving the praise name of the deity of a dancer while dancing. In addition, a drummer will also play the dancer’s ahano nko (drinking name). The two appellations performed make the dancer go crazy with his dancing and at the end of his dance he puts a cloth around the drummer’s neck for his acknowledgments.

8. Placing both hands on the head. This signal is normally seen during funeral events of the cult members. The gesture means, “I have a burden.” The burden can be explained in different ways. Sometimes the burden is loosing a good friend or a loved one. Other times it is the unfairness and uncertainties of life, a damage of property, or a need for help.

9. Holding the drum before and after dancing. This is a common phenomenon among the husunuwo in the Yeve cult at Ave-Dakpa. It is also done in some areas of the Volta region during other social occasions. The significance of holding the drum is to acknowledge the drummer and request them to play for the dancer a good music. Sometimes drummers identify particular drum rhythms of some individuals, which are played for them during this section. Thus holding the drum is also a request from the dancer. After the dance the same gesture is repeated to thank the drummer.

10. Finger in the ear and another pointing to the eye. This gesture is another unique gesture that educates the public to be wise and vigilant. It means, “if you cannot hear (everything), you should be able to see it (things).” It is a common gesture
used in a *husago* dance. The dancer uses that gesture when there are rumors and people do not get to understand the details of the issue.

11. Dancing facing or in front of the drummers. This generally also falls in the category of appreciation, but in the Yeve cult, Agbayiza told me that it turns out to be a competition between the dancer(s) and the drummer to elevate and recuperate their energy. This also enhances the whole ensemble by enlivening the other drummers and dancers. During social performances outside the cult house the lead singer may chant with the words *Hododui oh!* And the group will respond *Hoo!*

12. Displaying with *awlaya* while dancing. In general dancers express themselves depending on how exciting the drumming is. Most often the *husunu* in the cult displays his dancing skills by holding part of his *awlaya* (costume) as he dances. Holding the *awlaya* implies having authority over the dance being performed. On the other hand, it is also a means of showing off wealth by having lots of expensive cloths in various layers displayed in the dance.

13. Yetsotso. This is the third episode in the *Agbadza* dance that brings the dancer to the end of the dance. At the very last movement, the dancer does the *adasasa* and drops his/her hands to the floor. This acknowledges the mother earth that she is the stronghold and support and that she is given honor.

These gestures as non-verbal communications between the members of the Yeve cult are very important tool of communication. Some of the gestures communicate or are understood by non-members because they are also similar and performed in social dance-drumming. However, non-members are always careful with their interpretations of Yeve cult gestures because their interpretation can be misleading. We have to take in to account that this is a secret society and despite the fact that the gestures may be similar, the interpretation and the connotations of the gestures may be different on many levels. As Ajayi explains, "a visual aspect of the body communication includes gaze, eye contact, and facial expressions and is most commonly found in interpersonal attitudes regarding emotional or social state" (1998: 16). The gestures Ajayi’s discussed are also exhibited in the Yeve cult as I have personally witnessed many times and unfortunately misinterpreted. Despite this, I still argue that their
meanings in the Yeve cult at Ave-Dakpa are beyond the social meaning attached to it by the public. It is important that we understand the meaning in the context in which it is demonstrated.

Songs that accompany the dance-drumming also facilitate the effective performance of traditional religious dance forms. The songs represent a significant means of propelling a person’s spirit to reach the divine atmosphere of the gods. The role and importance of Yeve songs are discussed in Chapter 7 to help readers understand the context in which the songs are composed.
CHAPTER 7
YEVE RELIGIOUS SONGS, MEANINGS AND TRANSCRIPTIONS

As with dance and drumming, songs are an essential aspect of African, Ghanaian and in particular, the Ewe peoples’ life. Songs are used to express the peoples’ philosophy and their sentiments. The singing of songs motivates both dancers and other instrumentalists. Many scholars including Agordoh (1994; 2005), Ampene (2005) and Nketia (1974) among others have agreed that songs and singing are important factors that boost morale and prolong successful dance-drumming events in Africa.

Nketia (1974) points out that there are different types of traditional songs performed throughout life such as cradle songs, recreational songs, reflective songs, historical songs, war songs, dirges (funeral songs) and general songs. Songs are also the foundation on which other types of songs are composed and are very vital in all human societies in general. Traditional songs are very philosophical and powerful weapons used in transforming and educating the society at large. It is very important to emphasize that sometimes it is more powerful and effective to advise people through songs rather than using any other method. This is because the language, melody and voice texture used in singing the songs are frequently thought affect a person’s attitude. This is reaffirmed in the work of Tracy through his observation of song performances in different African societies. He explains, “you can say publicly in songs what you cannot say to a man’s face, and so this is one of the ways African society takes to maintain a spiritual healthy community” (1954: 237). The knowledge found in traditional songs is transmitted from one generation to the other. The lyrics reinforce societal norms and

1 See Chernoff (1979), Fiagbedzi (1996) and Amegago (2011)
serve as a guide to leading good life. Nketia describes traditional songs as “music transmitted orally, associated with traditional mores and customs, and practiced by the communities or in environments which preserve traditional modes of life, irrespective of considerations of antiquity or authorship” (1963: 7).

In a religious context, songs are an important component of the veneration of gods, deities, divinities, and other ancestral spirits. One of the most important attributes of African gods is that they are music-loving gods who typically manifest themselves during ritual performances containing music that they like. But African gods are also believed to show displeasure with singing and music that they do not like. Agordoh says that African gods “descend to the people through their human forms and participate in the drama of worship. Acting through these bodies, they are known to object to the singing of particular songs or to show displeasure when a performance is lacking in animation or vigor” (1994: 39).

The songs associated with the worship of the gods in the Yeve cult may be organized by a textual or stylistic basis. An individual or an entire chorus may sing these songs. The songs may embody the beliefs of the cult, which may further express the relationship between members and deities. Generally, the Yeve songs, like most other religious songs in Africa, are primarily sung in praise of the gods, which is central to the entire worship. These songs can reference interpersonal relationships or make allusion to the historical circumstances of the community where divinities play major roles. Fiagbedzi explains that, “interpersonal relationships within the cult constitute another interesting theme in song texts. It is found represented in various forms:
admonishments for good living, the need for circumspection, meekness rather than violence or arrogance, and comradeship” (1966: 77).

During the section of the worship when the gods send down their spirits, the Yeve songs serve as a means of stimulating and convening the deities to action and keeping them in a condition of ecstasy until their missions are fulfilled. Possession also occurs during this section of the worship. To maintain this religious state, Agordoh writes: “Once possessed, a medium continues to remain in the atmosphere of music to call up songs of her particular liking in order that she might have the strength to act as required of her. The excitement of certain phrases of worship is prolonged for as long as the instruments remain sounding and worshipper continue to sing” (1994: 42).

**Song Texts**

According to Merriam, “one of the most obvious sources for the understanding of human behavior in connection with music is song texts” (1964: 187). He further elaborates that song texts, “are language behavior rather than musical sound but they are integral part of music and there is clear-cut evidence that the language used in connection with music differs from that of ordinary discourse” (1964:187). Similar to Merriam, Nketia discusses song texts, the elements they typically involve, and their relationship with the human being or community. He writes:

The themes of song tend to center around events and matters of common interest and concern to members of a community or social groups within it. They may deal with everyday life or with the traditions, beliefs, and customs of the society. This is true not only of serious songs associated with ceremonies and rites, but even of simple tunes, like cradle songs sung to children who may not have mastered their mother tongue enough to appreciate the meaning of the texts” (1974: 189).

In the Yeve cult song texts are very powerful, and include many coded words and messages that are most often beyond ordinary literal interpretations and any one
individual’s understanding. Amegago also explains that, “language is the bedrock of African music” (2011: 111).² This is to say that language use in these types of songs is not used on a day-to-day basis. Yeve song texts are full of allusion and hidden meanings that are sometimes impossible to translate or be understood by an outsider. For example, the Yeve cult has its own cult language or dialect (see Akuetey 1998/9) that is spoken and understood only by the yevesiwo (initiates). Some of their song text are in the cult language Yevegbe and go beyond the understanding of non-members. In the case of Ave-Dakpa, initiates sing in the Avegbe, Ewegbe and Yevegbe. Although the Yeve cult has a large song repertory, there are five principal themes around which the songs are organized. These are:

1. Focus on the deities/gods, spirits, ancestors, and other divinities associated with the cult.

2. Expression of the inherent qualities of the gods and ancestors. For example, their destructive nature and their positive impact on both cult members and non-members.

3. Education and warnings for non-member(s) (ahevi) about what he/she can and cannot do against the yevesiwo.

4. Maintenance of Law and Order. Although it is only the yevesi who can sing the cult songs, the content, context and meaning of the song texts are beneficial to the entire public for the maintenance of law and order. For example, the subject matter of some of the songs feature threats and the consequences of stealing, murder, and cruelty across the Eweland.

5. Ultimate demise of human beings. The song texts very often remind the yevesiwo about the kind of suffering they will encounter and predictions of what might cause their death, sometimes revealed during the oath taking ceremony.

**Song Organization**


discussed the structural organization, characteristic elements and performance of traditional songs in African societies especially in Ghana but more particularly focusing on the Ewe song [musical] performances. Some of the features that characterize these songs involve call-response, cantor-chorus, interjections, harmony, types of scales and the general form of songs. Unlike other dance-drumming groups, the Yeve cult performs songs in both free rhythm and strict rhythms. In the Yeve cult at Ave-Dakpa and in other Yeve cults these elements are also present in Yeve songs performance. Below I will discuss some of the most important aspects of musical organization in Ewe singing.

**Call and Response**

This is an important feature of traditional song performance and is very predominant in drumming as well. The concept of call and response is sometimes confused with cantor-chorus in the ethnomusicology discourse. One way to distinguish between the two is that call and response occurs when a leader calls with a phrase and the other people (choir) respond to it with an alternate phrase. Let me give an example here: A call: *Kale natsu me tsina gbe o*, “a warrior never dies in the battle” then response: *megbona go doo*, “he will surely come home.” My point here is that the response normally completes the musical sentence unlike in cantor-chorus. That is why some people instead refer to this technique as “question and answer.” Also a call is normally higher in pitch than the response.

**Cantor-Chorus**

Cantor-chorus is when the cantor or lead singer sings a particular song from the beginning to the end and the chorus repeats the entire song with the same words as sung by the cantor. For instance, *koklotsu le gli la dzi* then the chorus says *koklotsu le*
gli la dzi. This means “the rooster is standing on the wall.” The difference between cantor-chorus and call-response is clear.

**Interjection**

In social dance-drumming such as *kpanlogo*[^1] and *bobobo* the technique of vocal interjection is very common. In this technique, when a person is leading a song or specifically introducing a song, another person can easily interject by taking over the song before the entire call ends. The person who interjects does not inform the previous person leading the song. It is not an offence but rather a technique employed in their song performance. With regards to this technique, any one who knows the song very well or who has a good voice and direction to finish the call of the song is free to use the technique of interjection.

**Harmony**

Singing in different parts is a completely different technique in traditional Ewe music when compared to the western concept of harmony. The use of harmony in Ewe traditional songs is common across many repertoires. It can occur in a work song for communal labor or in war songs preparing the brave for battle. Generally, individuals or a group of people sing in unison and then some naturally move up or down with an interval of a third, fourth or fifth depending on the range and what they want to emphasize. Therefore the harmony is not imposed on the singers; it is their own spontaneous creation. Sometimes one may not hear it at all and other times there are a few notes that are harmonized. In the Yeve cult there are a lot of those what I refer to as natural harmonies that come about rather spontaneously. It is difficult to ask a singer to

[^1]: Kpanlogo is a social and recreational dance-drumming of the Ga people in Accra
repeat something when he/she was being spontaneous. But the evidence is that there are lots of simple harmonies that enrich the Yeve cult song performances as you will see in some of the transcriptions.

**Scales**

There are two main scales the Ewes of the southeastern corner of Ghana normally use when they sing traditional songs. These are pentatonic or hexatonic scales.\(^4\) Pentatonic scales involve five notes ranging C-D-E-G-A-(C) and hexatonic scales includes six notes ranging C-D-E-F-G-A-(C). This, however, does not mean that traditional songs that are arranged for choirs in the church maintain these scales. For church, composers normally impose a European-derived diatonic scale on those traditional songs so that they can harmonize it in a western harmonic style. However, this depends on each particular composer with some who leave the songs the way they are so that they feel more traditional. I will point out the scale use in all the transcriptions.

All these characteristics do not strictly apply to the Yeve cult however; my argument is that they are very prevalent. The totality of these characteristics makes Yeve song performance fascinating, energetic and invigorating.

**Consequences of Singing Yeve Cult Songs**

As stated, the Yeve cult is a religious institution limited to a particular group of people who have gone through a series of intensive initiation activities to become members. Most of their activities and performances are reserved for the initiates alone. As stated earlier, most of the rules or restrictions against the Yeve cult are common

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knowledge amongst the Ewe people. Therefore, if a person goes against their rules it is perceived as disrespect and the offending person must bear the consequences. It is taken as common sense in the community that ahevi or non-members are forbidden to sing Yeve songs. For ahevi to sing Yeve songs is considered a mockery, especially when the person realizes that there is a Yeve member around. Even parents whose children are initiated into the cult have no right to sing any of these songs either by themselves or privately with their children. For example, if an ahevi intentionally or accidentally sings Yeve songs in an open or hidden place and an initiate hears the song she will quickly react. The reaction is unique and rare among the Ewe. It is a complex organized scream while the hand hits the lips continuously. This unusual screaming, according to the Yeve customs and norms, alerts the unauthorized singer that an initiate has heard him/her. It is a type of screaming that is rare to hear among people. Anytime it is heard everyone knows that there is something dangerous happening or someone is in a critical condition and needs help.

The unauthorized singing of Yeve songs is also believed to spiritually inflict pain and discomfort on an initiate. The implication is that the singer by virtue of singing an unauthorized song defiles the Yeve initiate. This can lead to the mechanism of redress called alagadzedze, which is discussed thoroughly in chapter four. The two common expressions used when an initiate is defiled are: ekpor ahe me ne and wo de amea gbe. The two phrases mean the same thing in context but are literally different in meaning. The first phrase ekpor ahe me ne literally means, “seeing the initiate’s nakedness.” In this instance the ahevi is described as that person who has seen the nakedness of the initiate by singing this song. To elaborate on this point further, the ahevi is said to
disrespect and violate the initiate’s norms, which is a private and intimate part of her spiritual life; singing her song is likened to undressing her.

The second phrase, *wo de amea gbe* means, “sending a person into the forest.” This situation explains what normally happen to the initiate after their defilement. Since those who sung the cult song undressed her, she runs into the forest where she uses leaves and branches of trees to make a dress as explained in chapter four.

**Yeve Songs and Analysis**

The characteristics of the Ewe singing discussed above may vary depending on the occasion, be it a funeral, initiation, or other rites. However, they constitute the common features of the song tradition in the Yeve cult. I will now discuss and analyze some of the songs and their meaning as studied in the Yeve cult at Ave-Dakpa.

In the analysis, the songs as sung in Avegbe (Ave dialect) are labeled “A” while “A1” indicates songs sung in the standard Ewe. This way a person who can read Ewe can understand the songs and their content. The English translation is written below and labeled English. It is also important to note that repeated phrases or sentences of some the songs may be have multiple interpretations and emphases. Various meanings are explained briefly to help the reader have a better understanding of the contexts

![Figure 7-1. Gamado](image-url)
A
Gamea do mado mado
Gamea do hee
Gbogblame husiwo mado dahee
Gamado yina tsyo do ge
Gamado mado da hee, gamado
Gamado mado da hee
Gamado yina tsyo do ge

A1
Gamea la do, me la do, me la do
Ga mea la do hee
Gbogblame husiwe mado da hee
Ga me la do wo yina atsyo do ge
Ga me la do, me la do da hee, ga me la do
Ga me la do, me la do da hee
Ga me la do wo yina atsyo do ge

English
It is time, it is time, it is time
The time has come
Gbogblame husiwo are very ready
It is time, they are dressing up
It is time; the time has come
It is now, the time is now
They are dressing up for the occasion

This song is performed to accompany ako dance-drumming and sometimes the celebratory part of Davu II. It is a song of encouragement that reminds all Yeve initiates that they have been called for a particular purpose and must live up to the expectation. The song is performed when they are going for an event and also about to indulge in any ritual. They sing it to alert themselves that, “it is time.” The line “dressing up” denotes not only the physical act of dressing oneself but is also a reminder of the spiritual preparations that priests must go through before showing up at various events. Performing this song also gives prestige to Yeve initiates with a reference to Gbogblame(nu), which is an attribute of superiority and power of Yeve deities. The use of this name instills pride in the Yeve members.
Yeve is an old religion or religious system. Many people converted and practice it. Greatgrand fathers also participated in its worship. Great grand mothers also participate in the worshipped.
The Great chief of Sogbo, Galimaku also worship. Celebration (worship) should start. The husunuwo are known as soldiers. Which place are the husunuwo known to be soldiers? Their powers and prowess are known at Nogokpo.

This is an example of a song sung in free rhythm, that is, without a regular metric organization. The song can be sung to accompany any Yeve dance-drumming. It is an invocational song that is performed stylistically based on the emotion and feelings of the performers. As such the singers may choose to perform the song fast, slow, in a recitative manner, or as a chant. This song historically describes Yeve as one of the systems of worship that has been practiced from time immemorial. This song also speaks to the existence and practice of Yeve among the Ewes long before the arrival of the missionaries and colonial administration. By referencing the participation of the greatest chief of Sogbo named Galimaku the song describes the power and the spirituality of the Yeve and its cult.

This song also references another important town called Nogokpo. Nogokpo is known throughout Ghana as the headquarters of the Yeve cult and its name is thought to put fear into the hearts of bad people. For example, if a person is robbed and cannot determine who robbed him/her the victim announces that he/she will take the case to Nogokpo for thunder to strike down the culprit. Usually it does not take long after such an announcement before the victim finds the lost items or learns who the culprit is. Since everyone knows that Nogokpo is where spiritual powers can cause destruction, the name Nogokpo highlights the strength, power and superiority of the Yeve. This song, then, instructs the entire public not to indulge in bad activities so that they can escape the wrath of the gods at Nogokpo.
Figure 7-3. Gbogblamenu

A
Gbogblamene 'do lo de hame, edo hamee
Azala sue, azalasu yomi
Azalasuu, azalasuu yomi
Eha le huu nu mila sua 'za hee
Azalasu gbe mila su Bokor
E Bokor su gbe mila tso Yeve eee
Azalasu, azalasuu yomi

A
Gbogblamenu do, edo de fufote
Aza lasu, aza lasu wo yomi
Aza lasu, aza lasu wo yomi
Eha le husiwo (yeyesiwo) nu wo le dzidzim
Aza lasu, egbe miayi akpe Bokowo
Bokowo d兹rado, mia yi ako Yeve
Aza lasu, aza lasu wo yomi

English

Gbogblamenu has come out into the public
Today is the day event we are ready for it
Today is the day event we are ready for it
Husiwo or Yeyesiwo are vigorously in tune (singing)
It is today we will meet the diviners and priests
The diviners and priests are set are set, hail to the deity, Yeve
Today is the celebration and we are ready for it

“Gbogblamenu” is another song in free rhythm. The phrases in the songs can be
prolonged at the will of the cantor in order to have time to express his or her sentiments.
This song is primarily performed during adavu dance-drumming when the husunuwo are
coming to display their spiritual skills. It is also performed to accompany the Yeve vodu
(deity) during procession into the dance arena. This song is very powerful and
invigorating in its performance. It carries intense emotion and force that initiate a link
between ritual leaders and deities. As the English translation reads, Gbogblamenu is a
powerful title accorded to a mystical and superior figure in Ewe mythology. In Ave-
Dakpa the Yeve cult normally refers to their vodu (deity) as the powerful mystical figure
whose presence is felt through many activities, such as within a trance and speaking
through a medium. In this song the composer acknowledges the superior power and the
presence of Gbogblamenu as he is making his way into the public accompanied with
Yeyesiwo, priests, priestesses and diviners. As the song is performed with adavu
dance-drumming the Yeyesiwo experience the divine presence of Gbogblamenu as
they sway around while others chant. I have seen the power of this song and how it
spiritually impacts the entire ritual performance many times in Ave-Dapka.
Figure 7-4. Ahodzo

A
Ahodzo miyi bo, aye ee eloo
Vodua ‘hodzo miyi bo
Yali vodua hodzo miyi bo (2x)
Ahodzo miyi bo, aye ee eloo
Vodua ‘hodzo miyi bo

A1
Aho dzo mi yi bo hee
Vodu ahodzo mi
Yali Vodua ahodzo miyi bo (2x)
Aho dzo miyi bo hee
Vodu ahodzo miyi bo

English
Something horrific has happened let us transcend into the spiritual realm
Deities and gods something horrific has occurred
Yali deity, we are entering the spiritual realm
Something horrific has happened let us transcend into the spiritual realm

This is another song in free rhythm to accompany Yeve dance-drumming,
especially adavu. Similar to other free rhythm or free style songs this particular song is
performed in a recitative manner. In its performance, this song can be considered a
prayer, call, and cry to the gods for assistance. According to Gorlin it is a song that is performed to “deflect evil of a spiritual or supernatural nature. It is an amazing song which seem to magically interact with the adavu musical texture to generate palpable waves of energy and mind-altering excitement” (2009: 144). This song is performed with lots of interjections and yodelings that heighten the mood of the priests to perform magic and interact with deities. The composer also requests the assistance of Yalivodu to carry them to the spiritual realm. The closest English word that explains Yali is “tornado.” As such the composer requests the deity that operates in the form of a tornado to help transcend them (the priests) into the spiritual realm to investigate the cause of the horrific incident that befell them. The significance of this song is to demonstrate high levels of spirituality, magic and the ability to invoke the deities. Also, I must stress that it is not compulsory according to Agbayiza to always mention Yalivodu when singing this song. In place of Yalivodu another deity can freely replace Yalivodu as far as the deity’s name fits perfectly to make the song meaningful.

Figure 7-5 Ayisu Me Vem O
A
Ayisu lee, me vemo hee
Eyi ne woe mevemo tso le nya nu ha
Ayisue lee e mevemo hee
Ayisue be mevemo hee
Eyi ne woe mevemo tso le nya nu hee

A1
Ayisu lee, me vem o sia
Esi ne woe la me vem o, etsor sie nya le
Ayisu, me vem o
Ayisu me be me vem o
Esi ne woe la mevem o etso sie nya le

English
Ayisu, it matters not (it hurts not)
You hurt me the pain is there although I did not complain; tomorrow is another day
Ayisu, you cause me but it hurts not
Ayisu, I said you cause me but it is okay
You hurt me the pain is there although I did not complain but tomorrow is another day

“Ayisu Me Vem O” is sung in free rhythm and accompanies mainly adavu and aforvu. It’s text relates to different aspects of life, for example, that of doing wrong against others. This song expresses the pain Ayisu has caused him/her when Ayisu used his high status to justify acting badly against him. It is the composer’s hope and prayer that Ayisu will definitely reap what he has sown. This song is very dear to the Yeve members in Ave-Dakpa. They sing it with passion, expression and emphatic gestures. It is important to note that the Yeve cult members in Ave-Dakpa (and perhaps across the Ewe territory based on my experience) are not wealthy or rich people. Sometimes those who are wealthy and others in higher authorities disrespect them due to their financial background. This song comforts and encourages them (and others who listen to it) that a person does not remain in a particular situation throughout his/her life.
Figure 7-6. Dalosu

A
Dalosu afoge madi yowo me
Yowo mee mano
Afoge madi yowo me
Yowo mee mano

A1
Dalosu dze ngo ne mano yowome
Yowo mee mano
Dze ngo ne mano yowome
Yowo me no ge mala

English
Dalosu take the lead and I will follow you
After you I come
Take the lead and direct me
And I will follow you

“Dalosu” is sung in veneration of the deity Da. It is also sung to accompany sovu dance-drumming because they both have a common time signature. The song expresses the master-servant relationship between Da and Dashi (Da initiates). It is believed that deities direct, guide and protect initiates in times of troubles and mishaps. As such the song acknowledges these qualities about the Da to lead him in all aspects of life and as his/her master he/she will follow and obey the Da’s commandments.
Figure 7-7. Eku Le Yewu Ge

A
Mawo de kpekpe eku le yewu ge hee
Aho lee, eku le ye wu ge
Dodo de Sokpornu ha bea 'hevio neva
Dodo de hukpornu ya bea 'heviwo ne kpor
Mawo de kpekpe eku le yewu ge hee
Aho lee, eku le yewu ge

A1
Nusianu si mewo ha la, me le kuku ge
Aho lee, mele kuku ge
Madogo de Sokpornu ne aheviwo na kpom
Madogo de Hukpornu ne aheviwo na kpom
Nusianu si mewo ha la, mele kuku ge
Aho lee, mele kuku ge

English
Whatever I have done in this life I will die
Alas, I will die
Even if I display at the Sokpornu for non-members to watch my powers
Even if I show-off with the divinities for outsiders to see
Whatever I have done in this life I will die
Alas! I will die
This song is sung in strict rhythm to a 6/8 meter. It is sung to accompany *husago* dance-drumming. In this song the composer expresses his concerns about this life and its activities. The message of the song is simple but cuts across many aspects of life and gives instructions related to both physical and spiritual living. On a physical level the song speaks about materialistic aspects of life like cars, houses, prestige, wealth and power. As Dashi explains, material items do not keep a person alive forever. If they did, many more people would be alive today. Spiritually, people try to protect themselves with different types of spirits. Yet, eventually they also die. That is why the composer of this song describes that what ever a person acquires and accomplishes in this life he/she will surely die. This song advises both Yeve members and the public that we have brought nothing into this world and shall go with nothing. The most important thing to do according to Agbayiza is to love and be good to others.

Figure 7-8. Agbenya Gbee Meva
English
I have come to live and experience life just to realize that there is also death
I have come for life and now there is also death
Midawo Ashito, I realize there is also death
Midawo Ashito, I realize there is also death
I have come to live and experience life just to realize that there is also death

This song is sung to accompany *husago* dance-drumming and it is in 6/8.

Generally, the song speaks to the reality and expectations of life. In this song the
composer laments about his frustrations with life in two realities. In the first reality the
composer remembers his childhood when he knew nothing about death. All that he
knows is that he has come into this world to live life in abundance. As he begins to
understand the realities of this world and that death is inevitable, he becomes sad and
laments.

The second reality of this song is situated in the traditional religious concept of
attempting to prolong life when faced with difficult situations, such as an incurable
sickness or attacks from malevolent forces. In this practice individuals seek to live long
by entrusting their lives in the hands of the deities and other divinities. In this song the
composer references the priest Midawo Ashito, who promises the composer a long life.
However, in the midst of seeking this promise, the composer involves himself in
situations that rather shorten his life and he cannot undo what he has done. Thus, the 

song also advizes us to also make good choices in life in addition to the reality that 

anyone who is born into this word will one day die.

A
Dolao gbona, vodu dolao gbona
Hotsui\(^5\) kplanya menye dolao
Dolao gbona
Hotsui kplanya menye dolao
Dolao gbona

A1
Dolawo gbona, vodu dolawo gbona
Hotsui kplanya menye na dola o
Dolawo gbona
Hotsui kplanya menye na dola o
Dolawo gbona

English
The priests are coming, \textit{vodu} priests are on their way
Too many cowries doesn’t make one priest
The real priests are coming

\(^5\) Hotsui in the Anlo-Ewe language is a cowry shell mostly used by the Yevesiwo in the cult. A photograph of the cowries is in the appendix B.
Cowries do not make a priest
The real priests are coming

In context, this song is talking about the discipline involved in being a *vodusi* or *yevesi*. The advice in the song comes the second line of the English translation that reads “too many cowry shells do not make one a priest.” Yeve as a religious system is in itself a discipline and a way of life. It takes lots of patience, spiritual growth and dedication to become a legitimate law-abiding member. That is why the song says that it takes more than wearing cowry shells to become a Yevesi. In addition, the song counsels that nothing comes easy in this life. Individuals must work very hard for whatever they intend to accomplish and must use self-discipline, courage, patience and dedication in order to persevere. This song can be performed with any dance-drumming in 2/4 or 4/4 time in the Yeve repertory or can be performed without accompaniment.

![Musical notation]

Figure 7-10. Demeku nenyo wu

A
Wom ala da dia, neme ku nenyo wu
Dalosua wom ala da dia,
Neme ku nenyo wu
Wom ala da dia, neme ku nenyo wu

(A1)
Esi ne wom alea da dia,
Ne de mekua nenyo wu
Dalosu, wom alea da dia,
Ne de mekua nenyo wu
Esi ne wom alea da dia
Ne de mekua nenyo awu

English
Since you have made me this way or put me in this condition
It would have been best if I had died
Dalosu, this is how you treated me
You should have let me die
You have imbibed me with diseases and sicknesses
It would have been better to take my life.

This song can be performed to any dance-drumming in 2/4 and 4/4 time or a
separate song session organized in the Yeve cult. The song expresses some of the
inherent qualities of the deities of the Yeve cult. In this song, the composer was
disturbed and troubled about the deity into which he/she was initiated. When the Yevesi
breaks the oath of secrecy, he/she is punished physically by the disciplinarian in the cult
house. After that he/she also receives a kind of spiritual punishment from his/her deity
for not keeping to his oath. This can be in the form of miserable sickness and discomfort
leading to death. The condition can be so intense that the Yevesi would have preferred
to die than to go through unbearable pain. This is clearly what the song expresses by
choosing death. As this song is performed it reminds all the initiates to keep to their
oath. They are reminded of the consequences that will come as a result of going
contrary to what they promised to abide by.
Figure 7-11. Gbayiza

A
Gbayiza du wo de dzi loo
Gbayiza du wo de dzi
Ahorme vodua do wo de dzie loo
Gbayiza du wo de dzie
Ayee ayee hee
Gbayiza du wo de dzie

A1
Gbayiza du ye de dzi loo
Gbayiza du ye de dzi
Ahorme vodu ha du ye de dzi loo
Gbayiza du ye dzi hee
Ayee ayee hee
Gbayiza du ye de dzi

English
Gbayaiza is dancing for it
Gbayaiza is still dancing for it
Ahorme vodu is in support and dancing too
Gbayaiza is happy for it
Ayee ayee hee
Gbayaiza is dancing and very thankful

This is a popular song sung during ako dance-drumming in the Yeve cult. It is a praise song that is performed to acknowledge the leadership of the Yeve cult. For example, in this song Gbayiza’s (Agbayiza) name has been mentioned because he is the priest in-charge of the Agbelifufu cult. Any leader or past leader’s name can replace
Agbayiza’s name. The “Ahorme vodu” mentioned in line three of the English translation represents a mystical deity. It is believed that deities are happy about law-abiding cult members. As such, it can be realized in the third line that the mystical deities who are known to revenge quickly when people do wrong are in support of Agbayiza’s leadership. Hence, they are all dancing to celebrate the direction that Agbayiza has given the Yeve cult in Ave-Dakpa. As the song is performed individual members remind themselves to be accountable for any position or activity they are assigned in the cult house and make sure they perform it accurately.

Figure 7-12. Huwoe ma ne gble
A
E hu woe ma ne gble, Dalosu to woe ma ne gble
E ne gble to wo menye tonyeo de
Hu woe ma ne gble
Hu woe ma ne gble, Dalosu hu woe ma ne gble
To woe ma ne gble, Dalosu to woe ma ne gble

(A1)
Wo hue ma ne gble, Dalosu to woe ma ne gble
Esi ne gble towo, menye tonye o la,
Wo hu ye ma ne gble
Wo hue ma ne gble, Dalosu wo hue ma ne gble

English
You have destroyed your deity,
Dalosu it is yours that you destroyed
Since you destroyed yours and not mine
It is yours that you defiled
You have destroyed your destiny,
Dalosu, it is yours that you destroyed
It is yours that you destroyed,
Dalosu, you have destroyed your deity

This song can be sung with any dance-drumming in 2/4 or 4/4 in the Yeve cult. It is also sung in free rhythm accompanied by an adodo (a double ended multi-bell). The song expresses a regret for any Yeve initiate disobedience that has caused him/her to experience the wrath of the deity, Da. "Destroying a deity" as stated in the first line of the English translation means that an initiate has not lived up to the expectations of his/her deity. Hence, this is considered a breach of oath between the Yevesi and the Da. When this happens it is believed to affect the Yevesi emotionally and spiritually. Punishment may range from sickness to death depending on the magnitude of the offense. The song then sympathizes with such offenders or culprits in the cult and advises them to be careful of the deities and always remember the oath taken before acting inappropriately.
This song elucidates the burden initiates take on with their oath to the Da. The composer expresses a feeling of frustration with the Da and that if there were a way to
get rid of it he would have done so. Unfortunately for members in this situation, the moment one becomes a member of the Yeve cult he stays a member until he dies.

Yeve songs are very powerful songs and speak to realities of life. The songs are full of moral values, instructions, and advices and are full of metaphor or coded messages. When the coded messages are decoded it is then that everyone appreciates the message of the songs.
CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSION

Throughout the seven chapters I have examined the Yeve cult in Ave-Dakpa, Ghana and its performance practices including the cult history, a variety of rituals, various dance-drumpings, dances and different types of songs performed by the cult. An Ewe adage reads, *dume dede menye du (me) nyanya o*. This means, “a visit to a particular town does not make a person knowledgeable of that town’s geography and history.” I have read articles and columns in newsletters that make false statements and misrepresent the history of towns in Ghana and other areas in Africa. Meanwhile, the native of that town struggles to understand the complexities surrounding the formation of his town. To reinforce the wisdom of this Ewe adage I argue that it is impossible to understand a peoples’ history, philosophies and belief system if one does not fully investigate where the people come from, how they came to their present location, and their general thoughts of themselves as individuals and as a community. It became very clear after compiling and analyzing data from several interviews, narratives and oral accounts, that the history of Ave-Dakpa people and their religious beliefs are tied to the series of events that occurred during their migration from Notise. Thus, in understanding the background of the Yeve in Ave-Dakpa, I gained an understanding of why they do what they do. It is therefore important to emphasize that the oral accounts constitute a significant local understanding of the history of Ave-Dakpa and their socio-religious activities.

My analysis and consultation of secondary sources on the Yeve cult in Ave-Dakpa (including others in the Volta region) reveals a historical connection to the Yoruba Shango and Dahomean Xevioso. The historical connection is demonstrated in
many activities, related symbolism and the deities involved in the cult. For example, Yeve uses the desires and emotions common to several thunderbolt-related deities, The same characteristics are exhibited by the Xevioso and Shango. In addition, Yeve, Xevioso and Shango are all represented by the symbol of the double-edged axe. The double-edged axe is found in front of the Yeve cult in Ave-Dakpa. The Ewes also call Yeve as Xebieso and the Dahomean call their thunder god Xevioso. However, these similarities do not mean that the organization of rituals and ceremonies are the same. In reality, the deities operate through the thunder god but have different components in their ritual activities.

Togbi Midawo Alorwoyie consistently states that, *edu sia du kple efe koklo kokoe*, literally “every town has its own way of cutting a chicken.” This proverb is significant for this dissertation. Since 2005, I have personally observed various differences in the way the Yeve cult in Ave-Dakpa performs its activities and the way they are performed in my hometown. A comparison of the cults is not within the scope of this dissertation. However, a future comparative study should be undertaken to explore the range of Yeve practices and beliefs. Within the different Yeve cults throughout the Volta region, there are similar basic ritual activities, but the organization and operation of the rituals are totally different. A comparative study should go beyond description to answer the question: why are some practices the same and others different?

It is important to emphasize that the roles of the deities in the Yeve cult cannot be underestimated. African religious scholars including Parrinder (1970), Mbiti (1990; 1991), Idowu (1975) and Adegbola (1990) have extensively discussed the roles of
deities in human existence as intermediaries between man and God. The deities in the Yeve cult are believed to serve the same purpose. These deities and others serve as intermediaries, linguists, agents, executors, policemen and guardians in theocratic government of God. Since the Supreme God is not worshipped directly, the Yeve cult members worship through their deities, who impersonate the roles above. Their roles as intermediaries between man and God are are played out in a variety of rites such as adzaletsilele, adadada, dagbatsorsor and tsifodi among others that have been discussed in this study. The rites are effective means of linkage and communication between Yeve members (both living and dead) and their spirits, deities and ancestors. These rites, be they prayers, forms of sacrifices or magic are believed to transcend worldly contexts into the divine realms of the deities with the support of appropriate dance-drumming. The significance of the rituals I discuss in this dissertation should give an understanding of what a Yeve initiate goes through to become a legitimate Yevesi through the concepts of hudzedze, yeveforfor and amegigli.

Unlike other towns, including my hometown, Whuti, the Yeve cult in Ave-Dakpa maintains a relationship of mutual respectf with the rest of the community. The Yevesi are constantly under pressure to preserve and maintain the cult laws and ethics while not falling victim to others or a person’s deity. They must abide by all of the instructions, rules, norms and customs of the cult. However, the secrecy and intensity of the Yeve cult does not prevent the Yevesiwo from socializing with non-members in the community as some have speculated. Through my field research it became very clear to me, and to some of my family members, that the Yeve cult in Ave-Dakpa relates well
with their community. They respect each other’s values, work amongst one another, and participate in community activities without segregation.

I have also observed that in Ave-Dakpa the Yeve cult is one of the many cults whose rituals are conceptualized as serving a positive role to protect the town from external dangers and forces. It is a powerful secret society that enforces the maintenance of law and order in Ave-Dakpa. According to Awolalu and Dopamu, “the secret societies were instituted for the purpose of self-preservation and for the preservation of the community. They enforced and maintained traditions, customs and beliefs. They determined ritual behavior and regulated social attitudes. In this way, they became the ‘power’ of the community where they functioned” (1979: 220-221). The role of the Yeve cult in Ave-Dakpa validates Awolalu and Dopamu’s explanation. My grandfather and uncles as well as chiefs and elders in the Ave-Dakpa community believe that the priests in the Yeve cult (and from other religious shrines) have spiritual eyes and can foresee activities that may befall the town or themselves as individuals. The priests consult the divinities and perform the required sacrifices to prevent any mishap or misfortune that might cause pain to the entire community. They priests in Ave-Dakpa also believe that they are the spiritual guards of Ave-Dakpa. As such, they hold respected positions in the community.

Besides the Yeve cult’s involvement in protecting Ave-Dakpa, it also provides services to the general public, irrespective of a person’s religious background. In Ave-Dakpa priests in the Yeve cult have medicinal knowledge and will attempt to cure maladies among those who seek their help. A community member might seek the help of Yeve priests for is a sickness that is believed to have come from malevolent forces
and cannot be cured using western medicines. I personally witnessed a church member in Ave-Dapka who was very sick and was brought to Agbayiza. It took Agbayiza two days to cure this patient. I attended church with the same woman in 2011 when I was in Ave-Dakpa. When I asked Agbayiza about this woman who was seeking, he explained:

Everything we do here comes from Mawu (God). He created the world and put everything in it for our use. He has given knowledge to our forebears on herbs that can cure, heal, protect and to perform miracle (in this context magic). Those who care to know use them and those who do not believe in them go with the white man’s knowledge (that is hospitals). After all, they forget that the medicines the white man brought were prepared from some of those herbs. In the past do you see people frequently get sick? Look at what is happening today, people die like mosquitos because they all confused. As for me when I feel pain I go into the bush get the right herbs prepare it and drink them. My children and my wives do not go to hospital. Those Christians sometimes come to me for cure when things get difficult. I do not mind, I do not criticize them, I simply charge them and perform my healing. I did not go to school to learn about medicine. It is what I also learned from my father, Ashito Agbelifufu. (Personal conversation with Agbayiza August 14, 2012).

It is important to point out that the relationship between Christians and traditional religious practitioners, especially that of Yeve, is often strained and antagonistic. This reflects Ghana’s colonial history and is frequently due to negative attitudes in the Christian community towards traditional religious practitioners and other non-Christian groups in the area. Throughout Ghana and especially in the Volta region, Christian identity is seen as righteous and free from evil. Traditional practitioners, on the other hand, have been considered evildoers and their religious practices disrespected and devalued. Two popular Ewe phrases describe Christians and non-Christians as, xosetowo kple abosamtowo (“Christians and devil/evil worshippers”) and xosetowo kple vodutowo (“Christians and idol (deity) worshippers”). In fact, anyone who speaks Ewe and understands these words in their context (from an Ewe perspective) will know the
magnitude of these phrases and their connotations. Due to this judgmental attitude, in the two religious groups many people like to associate themselves to Christianity in order to publicly escape from being called *Abosamto* even if they secretly participate in traditional religious practices of some sort. Given the common history and beliefs of the people, but also this tension between religious systems, the relationship between the community members and the Yeve cult can be seen as having many layers. On the bottom layer, each community member comes from the same background and often has a strong belief in the power and ability of the Yeve god to maintain peace and health in the community. Because of this belief, they seek the help of the Yeve priests. However, many choose to do so in secrecy due to the next layer, which holds the beliefs brought by colonialism regarding the evil nature of the Yeve practices. Many do not want their fellow Christians to know that they have been involved in a Yeve ritual. An additional outside layer in Ave-Dakpa includes the way that community and Yeve members alike approach each other with respect. A future study should look into the reasons for this mutual respect in Ave-Dakpa. Why, if this is true, is such respect not found in most other communities, where Yeve members are often publicly disrespected? Perhaps the Ave-Dakpa community members are more enlightened. There is an understanding of this on a societal level that can be seen though the many songs that have been composed throughout the Volta region that mock and criticize the Christian’s attitude against traditional practitioners. From my time living in the town, I believe that the people of Ave-Dakpa do understand themselves as a community whose belief system has a common history. As such, despite diverse Christian, Muslim and traditional religious backgrounds, they all understand the important and foundational
place of the Yeve cult and their contribution to the health and moral values of the community.

There is no doubt that drumming, dancing and singing constitute an essential component of African events and ceremonies. These three elements do not occur separately but come together under one umbrella. Nketia (1975) has discussed the interrelatedness of music, dance and song as a unified concept of African performance traditions. Like Nketia, Stone (2000) emphasizes the notion of African music performances, which she refers to as a constellation of the arts. She explains, “African performance is a tightly wrapped bundle of arts that are sometimes difficult to separate, even for analysis. Singing, playing instruments, dancing, masquerading, and dramatizing are part of a conceptual package that many Africans think of as one and the same” (2000: 7). In the Western world music (in the form of drumming), dancing, singing and drama are often conceptualized as separate disciplines. This led scholars, missionaries and anthropologists who first documented African music decided to focus separately on the music, the dance, and the song texts of performances. Several mistakes have been made in researching African music in this manner, including by native scholars. More often than not the researcher concentrates on their favorite aspect of the performances. For example, one may focus on songs and their scales, another on the instrumental ensembles and still another on just the dance. It is not surprising that this occurred because researchers often failed to consider African performance from a holistic perspective. In addition, many scholars did not possess fcompetency in the music, dance, and linguistic complexities of the performance traditions they sought to analyze. To understand African musical performance
holistically is to understand the entire performance. Only by doing this can one understand the true meaning of the performance.

As a vital aspect of Ewe life, music in the form of drumming, dancing and song accompanies both social and religious aspects of life. This is also true within the Yeve cult in Ave-Dakpa. Dance-drumming cuts across all Yeve rituals, be they sacrifices, prayers, graduations, healings, funerals, divinations, incantations, magic or other activities. As with the dance and singing, the drumming serves as a stimulating force that energizes and empowers the performance of the rituals. The role of Yeve drummers is crucial in Yeve ceremonies. As demonstrated in this dissertation, drummers perform specific rhythms using vugbe (drum texts) that are closely connected to the particular rite being performed. My research in Ave-Dakpa reinforces the known perception of Yeve drummers as exceptional drummers. Their remarkable drumming styles and knowledge is no doubt derived from the training and initiation to understand the knowledge surrounding ritual activities and the ability to invoke the gods. In Chapter 3, Tsale’s personal testimony validates the fact that he acquired his musical knowledge from his father and was initiated as drummer in the Yeve cult. It is a unique background that drummers who play during social events cannot get access to unless they are part of the Yeve cult.

The Yeve cult in Ave-Dakpa performs seven dance-drumming genres, namely husago, adavu, aforvu, sovu, akor, avlevu and davu that accompany its ceremonies. I must emphasize that Yeve dance movements are not radically different from typical Ewe dance that uses the torso contraction and release in addition to the expansion of the shoulder blades back and forth. The Yeve dances however, involve many different
levels of energy, emotions and gestures depending on the particular dance-drumming or specific rite being performed. As given as an example earlier, the dances focus on the exaltation of deities while skillful drummers perform with at highly spirited energy level. In addition, good dancers dance themselves out and are carried away by spirits, while singers sing powerfully, chant and sway themselves until the presence of the deities are experienced.

Yeve songs constitute a vital part of the entire ritual and dance-drumming sessions. The song texts are closely linked to rituals and describe the characteristics of the deities, supernatural powers and interpersonal relationships with deities. These song texts are based on experiences, mistakes, disobedience, breach of oath of secrecy and punishments of past initiates of the cult. The significance of the songs and their texts is to advise current members to learn lessons from the experience of other initiates. It is very important to note that Yeve songs are also full of philosophical thoughts and instructions that indirectly educate non-members about some realities of life. For example, making good decisions in life, not being jealous and respecting one another. These songs have been composed by victims of the cult as a way of sharing their stories and griefs. As the songs are performed, the instructions and the values embedded in them are maintained and transmitted to new members. Explaining the maintenance and values of traditional and religious songs and the people who perform the songs, Gbolonyo explains:

The survival of any type of music is dependent upon the extent to which the music is able to satisfy the values the people seek in it. The values, which may be aesthetic or structural, social, historical or religious, may operate individually or in a simultaneous complexity. In other words, the factors that shape and maintain the music, the text and all other things associated with it may be found in the music itself, in the artist, or in the
context of performance, as well as in the rationale behind the composition and performance of such musical works. Besides that, the poetic creativity that goes into the composition of these songs plays an important role in their maintenance and continuous transmission. (2009: 472)

Yeve songs are very powerful tools in advising the public at large. Although a non-member is forbidden from singing the songs, a non-member can listen to them and understand some of their meanings. I personally experienced the truth that among the Ewe, songs can be effective in changing peoples’ attitudes of with my aunt.\(^6\) This is also true in the Yeve cult in Ave-Dakpa. Yeve songs texts exposed rich cultural values and knowledge on the customs and tradition of the Ewe people. As with the dance-drumming, Yeve songs heighten the entire Yeve performance and help it be effective and satisfactory.

Similar to other traditional religious institutions and societies the Yeve cult in Ave-Dakpa is maintained as an oral tradition whose knowledge and practices are transmitted from one generation to the other. It involves an array of ritual complexities, knowledge systems, dance-drumming-song types and other related activities constituting the totality of the cult. It is important to reiterate that the effective maintenance of the Yeve cult and the preservation of its ritual knowledge from outside influences became an efficient means of ensuring the Yeve tradition’s continuity.

Unlike other social groups, the Yeve cult has resisted the adoption of new dance-drumming styles into its repertoire. Yeve repertories are performed over and over from memory as a means of preserving the continuity of the Yeve cult and its tradition. As Agawu explains: “Precolonial African cultures were predominantly oral cultures whose poetry, dance, and song reside in the memories of the performers and audience. Each

\(^6\) See Avorgbedor (1994; 2001a)
occasion of performance provided an opportunity to retrieve what had been stored and to display it afresh" (2003:18). This is exactly what the Yeve cult in Ave-Dakpa does. Although the Yeve cult is one of the oldest religious traditional cults that continues to perform the same repertoire, every performance is highly powerful and invigorating in its presentation as if it were learned afresh. The performers do not get bored or tired of performing the same dance-drumming because the performance reinforces and reminds the initiates of their commitments, bonds, and the relationship between them and their deities.

This study only describes a small portion of the Yeve cult, rituals and musical activities in Ave-Dakpa and there is more to be done. There is so much to learn not only about the Yeve cult in Ave-Dakpa but from other traditional religious groups and societies among the Ewe speaking people of Ghana. It is obvious that some of these societies, especially that of Yeve, are difficult to research due to the control of esoteric knowledge and specific rites that only initiated members can participate in. I am fortunate to have had the opportunity to participate in Yeve in Ave-Dapka. Although I have experienced lots of challenges and criticism during my research from Christian friends and colleagues in the academy, I stayed focused on the task. I must emphasize that my experience as a native Ewe musician, drummer, dancer and composer, trained in both western and African musical background has contributed immensely to this dissertation. I am confident that this dissertation can serve not only as a model from the view of a scholar-performer but also contributes to an indepth understanding of Ewe cultural traditions in general. My hope is that this piece of work will open opportunities for other researchers and scholars, especially those that are native Ewe, to document
not only the social musical traditions but also traditional religious types since some of them are in decline. That is an important way that we, as native Ewe people, can preserve our cultural heritage and maintain its continuity for the coming generation.
APPENDIX A
BIOGRAPHIES

Agbayiza Agbelifufu

Agbayiza Agbelifufu is a hugbono and the head midawo of the Agbelifufu Yeve cult in Ave-Dakpa. He is also a farmer, diviner, herbalist and a recognized religious leader in the entire Ave-Dakpa. Agbayiza served as my principal informant who explained all the details regarding the rituals of Yeve and its practices. As a leader of the Yeve cult, he was initiated into So and Da the principal deities worshipped in his Agbelifufu Yeve cult. As a priest his major responsibilities include mediating between the gods and man, performing all sacrifices, and being able to summon the gods for action anytime.

Hutodzehu Sofeda

Huto, as he is popularly called, became part of the Agbelifufu Yeve cult when he was healed from a terrible sickness believed to have attacked him by witches. He is a husunu and a great dancer, a farmer and recently an herbalist. He lives in Ave-Dakpa where he helps other working on the farm and also maintains his ritual responsibilities with the Yeve cult.

Togbinye Agbelifufu

Togbinye is the son of Agbayiza Agbelifufu and a carpenter by profession. He is a powerful young man who always assists his father by learning the practices and the operations of the deities. As a great singer, drummer and dancer, he was one of my most valuable research assistants and accompanied me to every corner in Ave-Dakpa and the neighboring towns to observe festivals and other related religious dance-
drumming. He is currently a member of the Ave-Dakpa youth association on religious affairs.

**Tsale Agbelifufu**

Tsale is the lead drummer of the Yeve drum ensemble in Ave-Dapka and organizes drummers during performances in the Yeve cult. Like Torgbinye, Tsale is a son of Agbayiza and has been initiated as a lead drummer of the Yeve cult as narrated in his testimony. He performs extensively in Ghana and other neighboring countries such as Togo and Benin, and organizes drumming workshops in other religious cults in the Volta region. He is an extraordinary drummer who has taught me so much about drumming. Due to his exceptional drumming skills different religious and social groups hire him regularly to perform at their events. On June 2, 2013 in the morning while I was preparing to call Ave-Dakpa to get clarifications on some rituals I had a call from his brother Torgbinye with the sad news that Tsale had died that morning. The Yeve cult at Ave-Dakpa has lost an important person and he will forever be remembered.
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**Videography**


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Samuel Elikem Kwame Nyamuame is a Doctoral Fellow and Ph.D. candidate in Ethnomusicology at the University of Florida. Elikem received his Masters degree from Wesleyan University in Ethnomusicology (World Music). He earned both a Bachelor’s of Fine Arts (BFA) in Dance & Music and a Bachelor’s in Music (Dip.M) from the School of Performing Arts at the University of Ghana, Legon. He is currently a Co-Director of Agbedidi Africa Ensemble and also teaches Ghanaian drumming and dance in the School of Music and the School of Theatre and Dance at the University of Florida. As an experienced drummer, dancer, and choreographer, Elikem has taken a keen interest in researching the concepts and foundations of traditional Ghanaian drum performance while maintaining his expertise in the performance of other styles of African music and dance.