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Hauke Dorsch and
Carola Lentz

Musical nationalism
The indigenisation of military marches in Ghana

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Abstract

Military parades in lockstep, supported by music—mainly brass and percussion—in a marching rhythm, are a global format that has travelled widely. In this article, we explore how this model has been adapted to a specific local musical environment and how, in turn, local elements have been refashioned to fit into the marching genre. Our analysis is based on findings from Carola Lentz's research on Ghanaian Independence Day celebrations from 2007 until 2017, on both authors' focused observations of the Independence Day parades in 2014 and 2017, and on interviews with the musical directors of the Ghana Armed Forces Mass Band and the Ghana Police Band. We will discuss the musical directors' concept of "indigenisation" and how it was implemented and bore fruit in popularizing the marches played at the Independence Day celebrations and other official occasions over the years. Drawing on what they regard as a representative variety of regional and ethnic musical styles from the entire country, the officers aim at developing a marching music repertoire that follows the motto of "unity in diversity", the Ghanaian cultural politics' preferred dictum. Thus, military music is intended to contribute towards nation-building and, at the same time, making the army a popular institution.

Keywords / Schlagwörter

Military music, parades, musical change, indigenisation, nationalism and nation-building, Independence Day, Ghana

Militärmusik, Paraden, musikalischer Wandel, Indigenisierung, Nationalismus und Nation Building, Unabhängigkeitsfeiern, Ghana

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Musical nationalism: the indigenisation of military marches in Ghana

Hauke Dorsch and Carola Lentz

"Each music is a language, and we have to give the people the language they understand!"[1] Colonel Samson Paa-Kwesi Ebonyi, the director of music of the Ghana Armed Forces (GAF), explained. This was why the GAF Massed Band's selection of music for Independence Day included many popular "indigenous tunes," as Ebonyi called them. He showed us the playlist that he had drawn up for the 2014 parade, but when we went to observe the actual celebration, the programme was interrupted by heavy rains and thunderstorms. However, though the actual parade had to be considerably shortened, the Massed Band courageously braved the weather and still played a colourful mix of tunes, not least to entertain the audience.[2]

The GAF Massed Band, at a rehearsal for the Independence Day parade, 4th March 2014. Photo: Carola Lentz

All pieces presented during the inspection of the troops by President John Dramani Mahama were based on Ghanaian patriotic songs or regionally well-known "indigenous" tunes. The subsequent brief march past of the army, the navy, and the air force opened with the famous

[1] From an interview by Hauke Dorsch with Colonel Samson Paa-Kwesi Ebonyi, director of music of the Ghana Armed Forces, 4 March 2014, Accra.
[2] This text is an expanded version of an article we wrote for a commemorative publication (expected to be published in 2027) for a Ghanaian colleague, supplemented with photos.

piece "Scipio" from the opera of the same name by Georg Friedrich Handel. Scipio had become the regimental slow march of the British Grenadier Guards in the eighteenth century and later made its way into the repertoire of the colonial and then also the independent Ghanaian army. This was followed by "Linda", a popular hiplife song by the Ghanaian artist Samini, which the GAF's director of music had transformed into a military marching rhythm. The third piece was "Glory, Glory", the famous battle hymn of the Republicans, composed during the American Civil War and then adopted into many marching music repertoires across the Anglophone world. Later, for the quick time pieces, there were further British marches like "Colonel Bogey", a marines' march composed at the beginning of World War I but popularised through the 1957 movie "Bridge on the River Kwai". But just as during the inspection, there were also many marches based on Ghanaian tunes.

During the Independence Day parade on 6th March 2014, a thunderstorm ravaged Black Star Square, but the military contingents and the GAF Massed Band held out. Photo: Carola Lentz

As we observed the parade, sitting amidst the many spectators who had come to watch the celebration, we noticed that people were happily humming along, particularly with the Ghanaian tunes, which they all seemed to know, tapping their feet and clearly enjoying the movement and spirit of the moment. "Scipio" was a standard tune for the soldiers[3] but not very popular among the general audience that obviously preferred the marches based on local church hymns, highlife tunes or Ghanaian patriotic songs that many had learnt in school. Colonel Ebonyi's declared aim to use music to stir national sentiment and make the military performance on Independence Day a popular event seemed to work well.

In our interview Colonel Ebonyi left no doubt that his long-term aim was to successively replace most British and other Commonwealth tunes with Ghanaian ones. When Carola Lentz went back to Ghana in 2017 to look at the rehearsals and the parade for the sixtieth anniversary of independence, she observed that the percentage of marching tunes based on Ghanaian musical pieces had indeed significantly increased. An interview with Superintendent Dr Frank Hukporti, musical director of the Ghana Police Band and in charge of the 2017 independence celebrations, confirmed that Ebonyi's programmatic decision to 'indigenise' the military marches bore fruit. The trend had started, as Ebonyi and Hukporti explained to us, on occasion of the independence jubilee in 2007, when the GAF director of music was given the go-ahead by his superiors to include local tunes in the playlist.

3 For a British military performance of "Scipio", see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFMM9rjL8XA (last accessed 1.12.2025)

It is this adaptation of military music to a specific local musical environment that we wish to explore in this paper. Military parades in lockstep, accompanied by music—mainly brass and percussion—in a marching rhythm, are a global format that has travelled widely. Less well known, however, are the processes by which this format has been 'indigenised' by refashioning local elements to fit into the marching genre, namely with respect to rhythm but also instrumentation for a marching band. Our analysis is based on findings from Carola Lentz's research on Ghanaian independence celebrations from 2007 until 2017, on both authors' focused observations of the independence parades in 2014 and 2017, and on interviews with the musical directors of the Ghana Armed Forces Massed Band and the Ghana Police Band. We will discuss our interviewees' perspectives on, and practices of, locally adapting British military marches with the aim of turning military music into an instrument of nation-building and making the army a popular institution.

Studies on the relationship of music and independence have so far mainly focused on musical expressions of the euphoria of the independence era (see, for instance, Dorsch 2010) or on the role of music for post-independence nation-building, mostly following the lead of Kelly Askew's (2002) ground-breaking book *Performing the Nation*. However, only few studies have focussed on the military music used during national celebrations. Two important Ghanaian studies by the above-mentioned musical practitioners and scholars Ebonyi (n.D.) and Hukporti (2013/2014) are a rare exception. Building on their insights, expressed both in their publications and their interviews with us, as well as on our own observations during Independence Day celebrations, we analyse the role of local musical traditions in modern military music and the politics of ethnic balancing when drawing up musical programmes. We hope to contribute to studies of Ghanaian music in particular and military marching music in general as well as to a deeper understanding of music as a powerful tool of nation-building.

In what follows, we will first look at the history of military music, focussing on the Gold Coast and Ghana. We will base our brief overview of the history of Ghanaian military music mainly on Ebonyi and Hukporti's writings, retracing their historical justification of their indigenisation project. After discussing their understanding of "indigenisation"' in the context of alternative concepts of cultural appropriation and adaptation, we will briefly present Ebonyi and Hukporti's professional biographies and their roles as musical directors in the GAF and Ghana Police respectively. We will then take a closer look at the Independence Day celebrations of 2014 and 2017 and focus on how the two musical directors have shaped the musical programme. Finally, we conclude with some general remarks on the exchange between military and non-military musical genres.

A glimpse at the history of military music in Ghana

A brief look at the history of military music, in Ghana and beyond, is important for two reasons: first, to better understand the background of the current national celebrations and their symbolism; and secondly, to trace how Colonel Ebonyi and Superintendent Hukporti base their indigenisation project on their understanding of the history of military music in Gold

Coast and independent Ghana.[4] However, before turning to Ghana, we will sketch out some general developments in European military music that later travelled to West Africa.

"The sound we usually have in our ear when we think of military music is essentially that of a brass band with some percussion added," writes Martin Rempe (2017: 329) in his discussion of the global career of European military music. "This instrumentation, however," Rempe notes, "was only fully established by the second third of the nineteenth century". Indeed, throughout the eighteenth and early parts of the nineteenth centuries, military music in most European countries was composed mainly for wind instruments, aiming at an ideal of "Harmoniemusik" that German music theorists had developed. Surprisingly, these theorists saw percussion instruments and especially drums as detrimental to order and to marching in lockstep (Farmer 1954: 53; Saakana 1995: 334). This changed dramatically, however, when the loud and rhythmically dynamic "Janitscharen-Musik" became popular as military music in the second half of the nineteenth century in Europe (Saakana 1995: 334). As Rempe (2017) shows, this Turkish, or more precisely Ottoman court and military music, is at the heart of what is today considered modern military music. In Europe, these Ottoman roots had long been (actively) forgotten, as music historians and practitioners were eager to stress the national character of each country's military music tradition. However, as Rempe points out, travelling musicians and marches continuously transformed the global musical landscape and thus challenged static ideas of homogenous national musical traditions.

The assumption that music and the nation are closely connected is very much a product of nineteenth-century Europe. It was only then that national hymns were composed and sung, based on either praise music for monarchs or revolutionary marches, depending on the country's political orientation (Steinbeck 2014). That music, and especially folkloric music, was an expression of a nation's spirit became an increasingly popular idea. Composers endeavoured to express this national spirit in their compositions, especially in those regions of Europe, where young nations aimed at defining themselves against the formerly dominating Habsburg and Ottoman Empires (ibid.).

Military music started its career as a means to encourage and cheer the troops and scare the enemy, which explains the omnipresence of loud brass instruments in most armies and especially bagpipes in the British Empire's military bands. Over the centuries, the roles of military music changed, as it was increasingly used in ceremonial and representative contexts and, probably as an outcome of the French Revolution, as a means to improve the popular acceptance of the military. It was less directly relevant for training purposes, although it was used for practising the lockstep, especially for parades. Beyond the musical elements, some formerly functional aspects of the parade have also been maintained but have become purely ceremonial, as, for example, in the famous trooping of the colours (Schramm 2008, Müller 2008).

Military music, whether played on the battlefield, for drills, at parades or tattoos, requires certain elements, the most important being a stable and clear-cut rhythm, usually a 6/8, 2/4 or 4/4 rhythm, which serve best for accompanying marches. Today marches are usually played at 120 beats per minute (bpm), except funeral marches that are traditionally set at 60 bpm.

[4] We will base parts of our historical overview on both authors' dissertations (Ebonyi n.d.; Hukporti 2014). Unfortunately, Ebonyi's thesis was not finalized, but he made parts of his manuscript available to us, particularly chapters 2 and 3 from which we quote.

There are, however, different national traditions. In Germany, for example, 114 bpm are common while in Sweden 110 bpm is the usual tempo.[5] The requirements of a particular tempo and regular beat limit the adaptability of non-military musical material to use in military contexts such as parades. Furthermore, the band that plays usually also marches on. Thus, instruments must be suitable for carrying, and the sound level must be adequate for an outdoors noisy environment. Brass and wind instruments, and later drums and percussion instruments, have become central elements in the globally travelling pattern for the instrumentation of military music (Schramm 2008). Finally, there has been a general trend towards an increasing professionalisation of military bands. In the Anglophone world, for example, the Royal Military School of Music at Kneller Hall near London was established as early as 1857 and has ever since been an important instrument in ensuring a certain standardization of military music.[6]

Trooping the colours at the Independence Day parade on 6th March 2017. Photo: Marie-Christin Gabriel

All these trends also shaped the history of the Ghanaian military (and police) bands. As mentioned above, Hukporti and Ebonyi narrate the history of Ghanaian military music against the backdrop of their project of indigenising military music. Hukporti (2014: 40ff.) therefore starts his historical overview not with the European travelling models but with a discussion of the Akan/Fante and Ewe traditional military ensembles' use of music. First, he focuses on the Asafo companies that exist until today.

[5] Wikipedia offers a helpful overview; in English: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/March_(music); in German: https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marsch_(Musik) (last accessed 7.3.2024).
[6] See the Wikipedia entry on Kneller Hall, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Military_School_of_Music (last accessed, 7.3.2024).

Asafo companies were especially important among the Fante and established along the coast following the brutalization of the region by the slave trade. The companies were noted for their uniforms, flags, and music ensembles that resemble modern military aesthetics and thus lend themselves to the establishment of a pre-colonial genealogy of modern-day Ghanaian military music. The Asafo music ensembles play drums, bells, and calabashes, while all members of the companies dance and sing. Today, as their services as warriors are no longer needed, the Asafo perform at festivals and ceremonies.

Drawings of Asafo Company flag iconography, Cape Coast Museum. Photo: Carola Lentz, 2007

Next, Hukporti turns to the Ewe military musicians who used drums, castanets, and horns when going to battle. Especially the drums, often decorated with human bones and skulls from enemies, were seen as powerful objects. Particularly relevant for our discussion is the *Atsiagbekor*, a dance that incorporated European-style military movements that Ewe soldiers had learnt from the British and French colonial armies during the Second World War (Hukporti 2014: 52).[7] Furthermore, the colonial era in the Gold Coast saw the introduction of wind instruments, such as trumpets, horns, saxophones, drums kits, and even bag pipes but, as Hukporti (2014: 56ff.) stresses, also new patterns of movements, such as marches and new dances based on these musical influences.

According to Hukporti (2014: 58), who follows the chronology of European military music in the Gold Coast suggested by Rumbolz (2000:53), military fife-and-drum ensembles first appeared in the region in 1750. Some scholars, however, question this date (Bender 2007: 72f), and it seems that more research, examining more reliable sources, may be needed. What is well documented, however, is the formal and informal use of Western band instruments in the army and police since the early nineteenth century (e.g. Beecham 1841; see Hukporti 2014: 58).

7 For an example of a performance of Agbekor (short form of Atsiabegkor), see the video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7NUjDKOiyas (last accessed 1.12.2025).

The stationing of the West Indian Regiment in Cape Coast in the 1840s led to a professionalisation of the military music scene. Furthermore, West Indian musical elements came to be incorporated into Gold Coast military music (Hukporti 2014: 60; Bender 2007: 73; Collins 2019a:9). From the early twentieth century on, the band of the West African Frontier Force, renamed in 1928 as the Royal West African Frontier Force and stationed not only in the Gold Coast but also in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and the Gambia, carried on the West Indian Regiment's British military music tradition.

Thus, already in the nineteenth century, military bands introduced West Indian and European genres and rhythms, such as calypso, polka, and marches. Local music groups copied and 'Africanised' these genres and rhythms, ultimately developing their own genres, such as the *Adaha.* The military and police bands, in turn, also started to play *Adaha* tunes (Hukporti 2014: 61ff.; Collins 2019a: 9). Entire brass bands were formed around this *Adaha* style, which later developed into *Konkoma*. Both *Adaha* and *Konkoma* were known for their close association with military marching bands, including the use of uniforms by band members (Collins 2019d: 342). Initially, both missionaries and colonial officials criticized these new styles as "heathen dance and worldly amusements" (Hukporti 2013: 70), and "objectionable native tunes" (Hukporti 2014: 63). However, with the Second World War, the British Army pragmatically realized the huge success of *Konkoma* among the youth and started to use famous *Konkoma* songs for the recruitment of young men (Hukporti 2014:64f.). *Konkoma*, in turn, strongly influenced the Ewe *Borborbor* style, which, as Hukporti (2014: 67) notes, was established by a police officer who encouraged the musicians to use the bugle "for military-like calls between the songs" (Hukporti 2014: 67).[8]

Ghanaian independence in 1957 seems to have brought no significant change. The musical material that the military bands played remained largely the same, and the structure of the orchestras continued to be based on the Western, or rather British, model. The instrumentation of the army and police bands exhibits continuities lasting to the present day. The brass wind section still uses the cornet, trumpet, flugelhorn, trombone, horn, euphonium, and tuba; the woodwind instruments continue to be piccolo flute, flute, oboe, English horn, clarinet, bassoon saxophone; and the percussion section employs bass drum, snare/side drum, triangle, cymbals, tambourine, glockenspiel (marching bells), kettle drum, xylophone, tubular bells, and castanets. As Hukporti stresses, all these Western instruments continue to be used today, and, although a few Ghanaian instruments, such as the flute *atenteben*, the *fontomfrom* drum ensemble or the *dondo* drum, may be played in concert programmes, they remain absent from parades (Hukporti: 2014: 240f, 242ff.). Indeed, during the independence celebrations of 2014 and 2017 that we observed, local instruments were only used in performances that referred to traditional musical contexts such as Asante court music.

Until the early 1960s, even the Army Band's musical directors were still chosen from among British officers (Hukporti 2014: 74ff.), and the first Ghanaians to be appointed to that position were all trained at the Royal Military School of Music at Kneller Hall, like their British predecessors. At Kneller Hall, the Ghanaian music students met musicians from the UK and from other colonies, which broadened their knowledge of music throughout the Commonwealth (Hukporti 2014: 78ff.). In 1963, finally, Lieutenant Colonel Robert Badu-Larbi, a Kneller Hall graduate, was the first Ghanaian Officer to be appointed to command the band. He, in turn,

[8] Collins (2019b:89f.), however, claims that *Borborbor* was not used for marching purposes and thus had fewer military associations than *Adaha* and *Konkoma*.

"trained the non-Commissioned Officers on how to score or arrange Military Band music (Orchestration), including the Harmonization of tunes. (…) There was a major recruitment during Lieutenant Colonel Badu-Larbi's time of three hundred and twenty bandsmen for all the services" (Ebonyi, n.d.: 3). Badu-Larbi himself composed the famous piece "Obedience", which is still played for the trooping of the colours (Hukporti 2014: 78). From 120 members under Lieutenant Colonel Badu-Larbi and 300 under Colonel Okwampah, the number of band members under Colonel Ebonyi, who took office in 1999, substantially increased to over 700 members, including the corps of drums (Ebonyi n.d.: 4). (ibid.).

The GAF Massed Band, playing their typical brass and wind instruments at the 2017 Independence Day parade. Photo: Marie-Christian Gabriel

In their theses, Hukporti and Ebonyi not only sketch the adaptation of local tunes by the increasingly Africanised military bands but also discuss the close entanglement of the development of military marching music and urban entertainment pieces. This entanglement has already been discussed in Kwabena Nketia's (1992) seminal work *The Music of Africa*. Nketia stresses the importance of army and police bands for the entertainment of colonial officials and traders in Cape Coast and other colonial centres from the nineteenth century onwards. He shows how European musical influences and the recruitment of African musicians for military, religious, and entertainment purposes, resulted in new urban "communities of taste" that created new genres, notably urban genres such as highlife (Nketia 1992:15ff). Colonel Ebonyi, too, emphasised the close interaction between military and popular urban music:

> The garrison bands, the tunes that the British brought to Accra… the Africans also decided to play their own version of the music. So, they used the military type of tunes to

> play their local tunes, and that is from where the popular music came. We had and have *Konkoma* and all those things. That is the black man's version of highlife, and it developed and developed and developed… So, the highlife came from the military.[9]

While interested in the feedback of military music into urban entertainment music, Ebonyi and Hukporti's emphasis clearly was on innovation in the reverse direction; that is, on the "indigenisation" of the army and police bands' musical repertoire through the adoption of tunes from highlife and other popular urban or traditional genres.

The concepts of "indigenisation" and "domestication"

Given the wide variety of concepts used to describe cultural encounters and exchanges in music production and performance, it is interesting that our interlocutors chose the terms indigenisation and domestication for their own musical innovations of the parades. The term indigenous is not commonly used when discussing Ghanaian cultural dynamics; instead, terms like local, traditional, or African' are generally preferred. Examining the adaptation of marches played at national celebrations to the taste of Ghanaian spectators, one would probably speak of localisation, traditionalisation, nostrification or even "cultural appropriation" (Hahn 2011: 11-26), a concept that is currently widely used. One could also interpret Ebonyi and Hukporti's project as an attempt at decolonization.[10] However, our interviewees preferred speaking of indigenisation or domestication. They did not explicitly give reasons for their choice but would probably concur with Ghanaian musicologist John-Doe Dordzro who argues that indigenisation would be the preferable term because it does more justice to the multistranded nature of the musical exchanges. For Dordzro (2020: 141), "indigenisation is not a straightforward process of adaptation" but a "process of ongoing aesthetic tensions and differences resulting in new musical forms and new forms of socialisation organised around musical performance". In addition to focussing on the creative, innovative, and socialising aspects, the term indigenisation, in Dordzro's eyes, also implies an awareness of the colonial power structures involved. He argues that the indigenisation of military music is both a continuation of the colonial model and post-colonial resistance to it (Dordzro 2020:145-146). Thus, he finds this concept preferable over comparable concepts used by other ethnomusicologists, such as acculturation, reinterpretation of style, refashioning or any other concept that we listed above.

In their interviews with us, both musical directors expressed their views about what they wanted to achieve with the domestication or indigenisation of the music of the parades. Superintendent Dr Frank Hukporti, the musical director of the Ghana Police Band, explained his understanding of domestication:

> I tell them that we should try and domesticate our songs. I even captured it in my thesis. (…) It is like trying to tell them [the police band musicians stationed in the various Ghanaian regions, H.D. and C.L.] to take our local material and then work at it. And at the end of the day, you come out with a very good piece of music so that when you play, the audience can also sing along. They can understand what you are playing. So,

[9] Interview by Hauke Dorsch with Colonel Samson Paa-Kwesi Ebonyi, 4 March 2014, Accra.

[10] Decolonisation, however, would put too much emphasis on the aspect of getting rid of the colonial heritage rather than engaging with the conscious process of introducing local tunes. We thank Judith Opoku-Boateng of the Kwabena Nketia Archive of the University of Ghana for bringing this up in a personal conversation, March 17, 2023.

> we try to encourage them also to do all those things. It shouldn't come all the way from Accra where we have a lot of work, and then anytime we write a piece of music we have to send it to them, no! We try to encourage them also to write something to suit their regions.[11]

Playing known tunes which allow the audience to understand and sing along is at the heart of the idea to bring the music 'home'. In the same vein, Colonel Ebonyi's understanding of indigenisation focuses on the idea of connecting with the audiences through well-known local tunes that replace the British and other foreign tunes that had dominated the parades so far:

> (T)he British, when they came here, they brought their tunes, everything. It was inherited until recently. Even now, we are playing their tunes, but this is what we are trying to change. In the past, when they played the tunes, it was only the military that was maybe inclined, but when you looked at the entire country, they didn't understand. We say that music is a language. (…) They [the people] understand their local tune better than a British tune, and that is where it started that we are making our own tunes.[12]

Ebonyi and Hukporti both aim at introducing local Ghanaian tunes into the military musical repertoire. Hukporti more often speaks of domestication or, when referring to trends that started in the colonial period and go beyond Ghana including other British colonies, also uses the concept Africanization (Hukporti 2013: 66) in his unpublished thesis, but then moves to indigenisation (Hukporti 2014: 58). Ebonyi also prefers the term indigenisation, which he regards as an "experimental field" to which he wishes to contribute (Ebonyi n.d.: 5). Since domestication carries associations with the process of bringing animals or plants under human control, we will use the term indigenisation as Dordzro, Ebonyi and Hukporti in his published thesis propose.

The agents of indigenisation: Sampson Paa-Kwesi Ebonyi and Frank Kwashie Hukporti[13]

Colonel Sampson Paa-Kwesi Ebonyi, the GAF musical director during the 2014 independence celebrations and at that time in his fifties, is one of the pioneers of indigenising Ghana's military music. Ebonyi is the son of a reverend and thus was from early on influenced by church music. As a young man, he joined the military, then attended the National Academy of Music at Winneba (now the University College of Education at Winneba), before re-joining the service as a lieutenant. After receiving his master's degree from the University of Ghana, he left for Britain to continue his education at Kneller Hall in Great Britain to obtain another degree in advanced music education. The thorough military and music training in Britain prepared him for taking over full responsibility of the Ghanaian Armed Forces Music Divisions upon his return in 1999. Interestingly, it was precisely his stay in Britain that inspired Ebonyi to develop his ideas of indigenisation. In Britain, he observed how military music appealed to audiences when locally known pieces were performed, and he learnt that the British Army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force Bands played arrangements of songs drawing on popular, local songs so that even the children could sing along when the army band played.

[11] Interview by Carola Lentz with Superintendent Dr Frank Hukporti, 5 March 2017, Accra.
[12] Interview by Hauke Dorsch with Colonel Samson Paa-Kwesi Ebonyi, 4 March 2014, Accra.
[13] Information in this section is based on our interviews with both authors and on their theses.

A few days before the Ghanaian independence celebration in March 2014, Colonel Ebonyi agreed to meet us[14] for an interview about his ideas concerning musical performances for parades. We were invited to come to his office in the GAF barracks, which, not surprisingly, confronted us with strict security measures. In contrast to the hierarchical military setting, Ebonyi was very welcoming towards us, and the interview developed in a friendly, relaxed atmosphere. Our talk felt more like a conversation among academic colleagues than a formal interview, and after this we moved to a café where we continued to discuss for yet another hour. Colonel Ebonyi introduced himself and his tasks for the independence celebration as follows:

> I am the technical advisor for the whole parade. So, after selecting the tunes and everything I also consult opinion leaders within the Armed Forces, the commanders (…), Army, Navy, Air Force (…). Their technical advisors will come together and decide the tunes. In deciding the tunes, we look at the country tunes, mostly patriotic tunes, tunes that educate the people. There are some tunes like "Ghana man",[15] which concern the whole of Ghana. We should unite and perform. (…) "Ghana man" is Akan, that is the central dialect of the country. We also included tunes from the North and from the Volta Region; we have tunes from the Western Region. In short, we have balanced the programme with tunes from the whole of Ghana. The idea of doing that is that we want the country to unite. The music brings them together. So, if you are playing a local tune on TV, for instance, the tune alone, because of its patriotic nature, will make any Ghanaian sit by the side of the TV and listen. At the same time, it is inviting to watch the parade. So, we look at tunes that will bring people to come and watch the parade.

In our interview, Colonel Ebonyi explained his ideas of indigenisation and presented much of the material on which this article is based. He also provided us with excerpts from his PhD manuscript, and even though he had not been able to finalise his thesis, he agreed that we could quote from his chapter drafts. Clearly, Ebonyi was enthusiastic about the indigenisation project and most interested in convincing us of his ideas and methodology.

When Carola Lentz returned to Ghana in 2017, she learnt that Ebonyi was unfortunately ill and could not meet her to continue the conversation. But she was able to speak with the musical director responsible for the military functions during the sixtieth independence anniversary, Superintendent Dr Frank Kwashie Hukporti, the director of the Ghana Police Band. Hukporti was born in the mid-1960s and grew up in the barracks, as he put it, because his father was in the army. From early on, he was thus exposed to the weekly parades in front of the commanding officer that featured military music. He learnt to play the fife, then the trombone, and in 1986 he joined the Ghana Police Band. While serving in the band, he also continued his studies, and in 2006 obtained a master's degree from the University of Ghana with a thesis on "The Historical Development of the Ghana Police Band". Since 2006, he has been director of the police band, and recently, in 2022, was promoted to the rank of an assistant commissioner of police. In his academic career, too, he achieved further merits. After a three-year long research stay in Germany, he completed a PhD in ethnomusicology at the University of Bayreuth in 2014 under the supervision of Wolfgang Bender.

[14] "We", in this case, are Lisa Märcz, at the time a student of anthropology at the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, and Hauke Dorsch.

[15] For an example of a performance of "Ghana Man", see the YouTube video produced by Wutah Kobbo, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zf737evR1OM (last accessed 1.12.2025).

Carola first met Hukporti at Independence Square, during one of the rehearsals for the parade for Ghana's sixtieth independence anniversary. Despite his very busy schedule, Hukporti found time for a brief conversation on the spot and commented on some of the pieces that had been chosen for the different parts of the upcoming celebration. The president as well as other VIPs were allowed to express some preferences for particular pieces, he explained, but generally, there was little if any political influence on the musical programme. Hukporti also drew our attention to the quick time march accompanying the famous "trooping of the colours"; it was not a Western piece as one might intuitively think, he explained, but a highlife tune transformed into marching music by the first Ghanaian GAF band director Lieutenant Colonel Badu-Larbi. Clearly, Hukporti was just as enthusiastic as Ebonyi about indigenising military music and agreed to receive Carola for a longer interview on this topic on one of the following days. Ultimately, the interview had to be squeezed in during a break between two sections of the musical programme for the presidential awards ceremony at which the Ghana Police Band had to perform. Nevertheless, squatting on the stairs outside the banquet hall where the award ceremony took place, Superintendent Hukporti took some time to talk about his professional experiences and the project of indigenising the military tunes. "When I came to the police band in the 1980s," Hukporti explained,

> all the pieces that we played, ninety per cent, were British-oriented or European-oriented. But as time went on… I remember that when I worked as the band master and assisted the director, we went to the sports stadium to perform, and I conducted the band, and we played the military march "Alte Kameraden" but in English, "Old Comrades", and then "Under the double eagle". We played these pieces, and when we finished with the performance, we were excited, but some of the spectators started telling us "We don't understand what you are playing". They said this in Twi. So, when I went back home, I sat, and I thought to myself, "If we have our own music, and the people know how to sing it, so why don't we adopt that style? Because we are playing for the Ghanaian audience to listen. So, if they are complaining that they don't understand, then I think we have a serious challenge". So, I took it upon myself, and I started writing church music that is popularly known in Ghana [adopting it for the police band]. And any time we went out to perform, people sang along as we played, and they were happy about it. So, gradually our repertoire started shifting. But that doesn't mean that we have dropped the European repertoire entirely, we play it alongside, depending on where we are performing.

Just like Ebonyi, Hukporti is a practitioner as much as an academic researcher. He, too, has been committed to analysing local musical genres and searching for functional parallels that could allow the adoption of indigenous elements for military purposes, such as using African drum language for a European bugle call. In this endeavour the new military compositions can build on a measure of Westernization that Ghanaian church and art music have already undergone. Highlife musicians or composers like Ephraim Amu have already adapted local dances and songs to church hymns or Western-style dance-hall pieces, and the military composer can then continue this process of adaptation.

The music programmes of Independence Day in 2014 and 2017

"National days celebrate the successful formation of the nation-state" (Lentz 2023: 9). They serve, once a year, to stir patriotic emotions and remind the population of their national affiliation that is usually "forgotten" in every-day life. National days such as independence anniversaries are state-organised celebrations that "fix important events of national history in the annual calendar (…) and synchronize the population's memory of national founding myths, at least for a time" (ibid.).

The GAF Massed Band and military contingents marching on to Black Star Square for the 2017 Independence Day parade. Photo: Carola Lentz

The organisers of national-day celebrations aim at creating among participants and spectators a feeling of belonging to the nation that builds on a sense of continuity and tradition but also conveys openness to respond to a changing society and world.[16] Colonel Ebonyi and Superintendent Hukporti were convinced that music plays a central role in this endeavour, and that it needs to reflect both tradition and innovation. Thus, well-known tunes of European as well as of local origin were balanced with new compositions. A central feature considered in the decision of what to play on the parade grounds was the popularity of the music, regardless of whether of European or local origins. "When they hear the popular music, they come out to see", Ebonyi explained,

> because they are interested in the excitement and those things. But it is also a gateway to uniting, to bringing the people together. If you want to make any talk, you want to do any presentation, if you want to invite people, you use music. When you play music,

[16] For an analysis of the 2007 and 2017 Ghanaian Independence Day celebrations and the controversies surrounding them, see Lentz 2013 and Lentz 2023.

> first of all, you are inviting people to come to see what is happening. Even in the church, music is used for getting the attention of the congregation. (…) When you sing known tunes, then they are ready to listen to you (…). [At the independence celebrations], we actually have to select popular tunes. When it comes to indigenous tunes, we make sure that the tune is very popular, because if it is not popular, you will not achieve the aim.[17]

As mentioned above, our interlocutors regarded it as necessary to cater both to the need for stability and continuity, and to the desire for variety and innovation. Consequently, the parades' musical programmes contain some easily recognizable and fixed as well as some innovative and dynamic elements.

The GAF Massed Band playing for the spectators awaiting the arrival of the Ghanaian president during the 2014 Independence Day parade. Photo: Carola Lentz

Asked about the availability of records from the musical programmes of earlier celebrations, and about how these influence the decision of how and what to change, Colonel Ebonyi responded:

> We have them [the playlists] in the archives.[18] It hasn't changed too much. If we want to change, we inform the high command officer. (…) We look at the social aspect of it and produce music. Of course, there is change, but when the colours are passing, for instance, those tunes are not normally changing. Only a few of the tunes played during inspection, like when the Mohawks and the heavy artillery are passing, those ones we can change. But the police, for instance, they have the Police March, which they don't

[17] Interview by Hauke Dorsch with Colonel Samson Paa-Kwesi Ebonyi, 4 March 2014, Accra.

[18] We tried to follow up on this but were unfortunately not able to locate or access these "archives", which would have been an interesting source for a longer-term comparison of the musical programmes of the independence celebrations.

want to change at all. So, when it comes to their attendants, they play that march, they don't want any change. (…) It's not a Ghanaian march; it's a British march.

The GAF Massed Band during the 2017 Independence Day celebration. Photo: Marie-Christin Gabriel

When comparing the music played at the independence parades in 2014 and in 2017, however, we observed that there was a considerable amount of change and that Ebonyi and Hukporti's project of indigenisation clearly bore fruit. In 2014, the tunes played at the celebration were a mixture of British, Commonwealth, US, and Ghanaian pieces, with backgrounds in Twi, Ga, Fanti, Ewe, and "Northern". The music list included nine British and four US-American tunes, as well as one Canadian and one Kenyan march. In the 2017 celebration, only ten of the almost 50 pieces played by the Massed Band at this occasion came from the repertoire of the British army, other Commonwealth countries or the US. Below we list the tunes played in 2014 and in 2017.[19]

[19] For a full video recording of the 2017 Independence Day celebration at Black Star Square, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uo-kTrT4FXo; for the 2014 celebration, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i-4pPpWYt4I (last accessed 1.12.2025).

2014	Title of tune	National, ethnic or regional origin; musical genre	Translation of song title
March on	Young courageous	UK	
	Sane kpakpa	Ga, Christian hymn	The Good News
	Ye beyi wo din aye	Twi, Christian hymn	We will praise your name for you have been victorious unto us
	Masi masi dan wo botan so	Twi, Christian hymn	I will build my house upon the rock
Arrival [of the presidents]	national anthems of Ghana and Guinea Conakry		
Inspection	Ghana man	Fanti, highlife song	
	Ma oman yi ho enhiao	Fanti/Twi, patriotic song	Let the nation be of importance to you
	Dzi gbodi	Ewe	Be patient
	Ghana nyigba	Ewe	The land of Ghana
	Bamaya	Northern Region	(?)
Band troop	Scipio	UK, Georg Friedrich Handel, opera	
	Intsinzin	Rwanda	
	Glory, Glory	USA, Christian hymn	
Slow time	By land and sea	UK	
	Duke of York	UK	
	Aklido	Ewe	
	Dzawo yo	Ewe	
	Dogaga	Ewe	
	Tambayariba	North	
	Enigyesem	Twi/Fanti	
	Nyame ye kese	Twi	
	Mon som	Fanti	
	Our director	USA	
	Prime rose	UK	
	Red cloak	UK	
	Marching through Georgia	USA	
March off	Trumpeters' march	USA	
	Burma	UK	
	Zambia		
	I am a soldier		
	Once a time		
Quick time	Punjab	UK	
	Colonel Boogey	UK	
	Little bugler	Canada	
	Mother Africa	Ghana, Police March	
	Kutambea	Kenya	
	Standard of Saint George	UK	
	Young courageous	UK	
	Beso na hwe	Twi	
	Womba	Northern Region	
	Domfo nyankopon	Fanti	The giver
	Mesi mi dan	Fanti	I will build my house

2017			
March On	Boaseto	Ewe	Patience
	Semekpakpa	Ga, gospel song	Good News
	Wamba	Ghana, patriotic song	(no lyrics)
Inspection	Oye	Twi, gospel song	He (God) is good
	Kama Obiara Nte	Twi, Christian hymn	Say for everyone to hear
	This is the day	?	
	Eye wo de	Twi, gospel song	All I have comes from you
	Yeda Nyame ase	Twi, gospel song	We thank God
	Okura me mu	Twi, gospel song	He holds me
	Nyame ye kese	Twi, gospel song	God is great
	Daa mensomwo	Twi, gospel song	I will serve you everyday
	Aseda	Twi, gospel song	Thanksgiving
	Meda woase	Twi, gospel song	I thank you (God)
	Kyere me kwan	Twi, gospel song	Show me the way
Lighting of perpetual flame	Praise Him	UK, Presbyterian hymn	
Schools march past	Yebe yi wodi aye	Twi, gospel song	We shall praise your name
	Victory	Ghana, Christian hymn	
	Amanso	Twi, patriotic song	
	We are All involved	Ghana, patriotic song	
	Domfo Nyankopong	Twi, gospel song	Ever merciful God
	Power to the People	Ghana, patriotic song	
	Grandfather’s Clock	UK	
Trooping the colours	Obedience	Ghana, comp. Larbi	
	Kutambea	Kenya	
	Dzigbordi	Ewe	Patience
	Tambayiriba	Dagomba, Northern Region	
	Dorgagah	Ewe	Patience
Slow time	Oman ye wo man	Twi, patriotic song	This country is your country
	Ghana man	Fanti, highlife song	
	Ghana Nyigba	Ewe, patriotic song	Gold should lead this country Ghana
	Mosor mu	Twi, patriotic song	Let’s build together
	Nyor nu wui	Ewe, patriotic song	This country Ghana
	Ma oman yi ho nhia wo	Twi, patriotic song	Let this country be your responsibility
	Enigyesem	Twi, Christian hymn	Good news
Quick time	Victory	Ghana, Christian hymn	
	Ghana Land Of Freedom	Ghana, highlife song	Composed by E. T. Mensah, 1957
	Once a time		
	I am Soldier	UK, Christian hymn	

	Zambia	UK	
	Burma	UK	
	Look and Live	Christian hymn	
	Mother Africa	Police March	
	I Remember	UK	
	Trumpeters March	US	
	Womba	Northern Region	
	Beso na hwe	Ewe, gospel song	Taste and see
	Mesi me dan	Twi, gospel song	I will build my house (on the rock)
	Siamba	?	
	Ebenezer	Ghana, church hymn	
	Dodzkiko	Ewe, gospel song	Endurance
	Kplorla	Ewe, gospel song	Leader

In these charts, we note the language and/or the national or ethnic origin of the respective tune as they were given to us by the musical directors. The lists resemble those that Ebonyi and Hukporti used in preparing the programme. In 2014, however, due to the interruption by the heavy rains, not all pieces on the list were actually played. In addition, we offer translations of some of the song titles and categorizations of the musical styles. Thanks are due to Samuel Boateng, back in 2014 student of the Department of Music, University of Ghana, and Dr Abena Kyere, Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, for their support in identifying the musical genres and providing translations of song titles and texts.

It is worth noting that the repertoire of local tunes from which the musical directors drew included not only patriotic songs—that every Ghanaian school child knows—and ethnically specific traditional pieces as well as popular entertainment music, but also many church hymns or other local gospel songs. This may reflect the growing success of religious music in Ghana over the last few decades. It seems no coincidence that the Ghanaian President Nana Akuffo Addo's special wish for the Massed Band to play during the 2017 celebration was an Akan choral gospel, namely 'Oye' ([God is] 'good') that was also played during his inauguration ceremony a few months earlier.

All adoption of local tunes is, of course, premised on the necessity of transforming them into a military march. When discussing the limitations this imposes, Colonel Ebonyi drew attention to the different genres of military music that have distinct requirements. "In the Armed Forces", he explained, "we have field music, ceremonial music, and then concert or art music". In "academic" or "art music", he clarified, "you need to listen to the music artistically. Sometimes you need piano or soft music, sometimes you need very, very soft music, so that you can have a certain effect". But in the military field music, "you are using the music to speak to the troops. The field music will move the personnel".[20] Local polyrhythmic structures are made for dancing, not marching and are not easily transformed into the marching band's brass band sound that follows a strict and uniform 6/8, 2/4 or 4/4 rhythm. Furthermore, the musical directors create sheet music or written notes, which would never be the case with traditional tunes and performances, and the band members must follow the score exactly, with little, if any,

[20] Interview with Colonel Ebonyi, 4 March 2014, Accra.

room for variation and improvisation. It is a strictly regimented and highly disciplined performance. There have been attempts to incorporate some 'indigenous' instruments, particularly in the percussion section, but again, there are limits through the necessity to march with the instruments. Thus, traditional instruments are sometimes used for stage performances but not for parades.[21]

"GH is 60": military contingents forming letters and numbers during the 2017 Independence Day parade.
Photo: Carola Lentz

Regarding the ethnic, linguistic, and regional diversity that the parade music programmes reflect, the directors used the categories Akan, Fanti, Twi, Ewe, Ga, and Northern. Clearly, while these categories represent Ghana's southern and central regions and their linguistic varieties in a rather differentiated way (with Akan as a superordinate category that embraces Fanti and Twi), while "Northern" appears as a regional catch-all term and lumps a wide range of linguistic and musical repertoires together. In any case, the musical directors presented a variety of regional and ethnic musical styles that covers the entire national territory—embodying the motto of 'unity in diversity' that is the preferred dictum of Ghanaian cultural politics. As Colonel Ebonyi explained,

> we make sure that tunes that we play will have at least all the regions represented. We don't just focus on one region, not at all. We get tunes from the Northern Region, from the Volta Region; we get tunes from the Ashanti, from the Brong Ahafo, Central, Western regions, all. Every, every part in this country must have its tune, it is evenly distributed. Of course, the Akan is the majority, and the tunes are, sometimes, more on the Akan side. But at this very particular parade [in 2014], the Volta region has got more tunes. And, you know, their tunes are more rhythmic and that is good for slow march and other marches.[22]

In the end, whatever the regional balance, this type of 'unity in diversity' turns out to be unity in a rather rigid sense, since all cultural variety, and especially the different rhythms, are streamlined into music that serves for marching uniformly in lockstep. The audiences, of

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[21] In 2023, the Ghana Police, namely the Accra West District Brigade Central Band, uploaded an educational video with marching music adopted from popular traditional tunes, and explains this adaption as "domestication" (note that this is the term Hukporti used as an equivalent to "indigenisation"); see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPlRJj_nfXo (last accessed 1.12.2025). The description reads: "Ghana March Series is a demonstrational series which helps to popularize the use of local Ghanaian music adapted into Marching Band music."

[22] Interview with Colonel Ebonyi, 4 March 2014, Accra.

course, did not have to march, and their bodily movements, when they moved, resembled more spontaneous joyous dancing than uniform marching. The spectators obviously knew the tunes and knew how to move to them. At the same time, they enjoyed the aesthetics of the parades and marches, the capacity of numerous human bodies to present themselves as a homogenous mass, thus representing the ideal of a unified nation.[23] And particularly in 2017, there were performances of special skills, namely of marching in ways that created numbers and letters ("Ghana is 60") that drew much admiration from the crowd.

Conclusion

The changing music programmes of the parades at the Independence Day celebrations of 2014 and 2017 exemplify the local adaptation of a globally travelling model. The basics of military music are nearly the same globally; when it comes to instrumentation and rhythm, they have to conform to the needs of marching bands and troops parading in lockstep. Originally, these travelling models, developed in European military music, not only included the standard elements of march rhythm and instrumentation but also the "Western" tunes—in the Ghanaian case, mainly British and Commonwealth tunes and marches. In order to involve the audiences, the GAF and police musical directors Colonel Ebonyi and Superintendent Hukporti adapted local popular, urban, religious, and traditional tunes to fit into the parade context. Such attempts to make parades, and by extension also the parading military, popular among a country's citizenry are not uniquely Ghanaian or African. In other regions, too, military music composers have drawn on material from outside the marching traditions. In addition to some musical tunes like battle hymns that were from the very start written for marching, they have adopted tunes from operas, film scores, and popular songs. The major difference may be, however, that the African indigenous musical material is "further" away from the steady rhythmic pattern in 2/4 meter needed for parading than many European non-military compositions.

In order to "perform the nation" (Askew 2002) and engage the entire population, the Ghanaian GAF and police musical directors wanted the military parade music to be a balanced expression of diverse regional, ethnic, linguistic, and national musical styles. They integrated music from all Ghanaian regions, although a Southern and Central bias remained, reflecting existing power relations in contemporary Ghana. In any case, in order to conform to the global model of a parade with soldiers marching in lockstep, all tunes had to be homogenized into the required format.

In their indigenisation project, both Colonel Ebonyi and Superintendent Hukporti were acutely aware of the role of military music in the history of Ghanaian popular music. They could build on a long history of musical exchanges between military, urban popular, and rural music genres. They consciously used existing overlaps and adapted both new and traditional songs rhythmically to the needs of parades. At the same time, when including versions of highlife and other popular songs in the parades, they initiated a new round of exchange since the popularity and stylistic make-over of popular tunes in military music may eventually feed back into non-military musical genres. In any case, judging from our observations at the parades, the endeavour to make the marching music and the parade popular was apparently successful. Whether this means that it also boosted the nation-building process must remain an open question.

[23] On the aesthetics of marching and the embodiment of the nation in lockstep, see Gabriel et al 2020.

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