

# Unpacking the Dynamics of Dance Troupes in the Central Region of Ghana: Functions, Perceptions, Motivations, Aspirations, and Social Networks

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## Abstract

This ethnographic study explores the multifaceted dynamics of dance troupes in the Central Region of Ghana, examining how perceptions, motivations, aspirations, social networks, and functions shape their activities and impact the broader community. Through participant observation and in-depth interviews with members of selected dance troupes in the Central Region, the research reveals a complex interplay of factors driving their continued participation. While a strong sense of cultural preservation and passion for dance are evident, aspirations for personal advancement, including travel abroad and interracial relationships, significantly influence members' involvement. The study identifies dance troupes' manifest functions (skill development, community engagement, economic activity) and latent functions (social cohesion, physical and mental well-being, knowledge dissemination). However, challenges such as financial instability, inter-troupe competition, and environmental concerns bring some dynamics to their work culture. The findings highlight a dichotomy between the troupes' stated aims and the individual motivations of their members, underscoring the need for a more nuanced understanding of the complex forces shaping the cultural landscape of Cape Coast's dance community.

**Keywords:** Dance Troupes, Perceptions, Motivations, Aspirations, Social Networks

## 1. Introduction

In the Central Region of Ghana, a rhythmic pulse beats through the streets, echoing the footsteps of a rich cultural heritage. Here, dance is not just a form of expression but a way of life. It's a language that speaks to the soul, a bridge that connects the past to the present, and a thread that weaves together the community fabric. In this city, dance troupes are the guardians of tradition, the innovators of style, and the heartbeat of the cultural landscape. They are the keepers of the rhythm, the tellers of stories, and the embodiment of the African spirit. However, the driving forces behind these troupes remain largely unexplored. This study seeks to understand how perceptions, motivations, aspirations, social networks, and functions shape the dynamics of dance troupes in the Central Region of Ghana. Specifically, our research question asks: *How do perceptions, motivations, aspirations, social networks, and functions shape the dynamics of the dance troupes, and what are the resulting consequences?* Our objective is to explore the complex interplay of these factors, analysing their impact on individual members and the br-

oader cultural landscape.

## 2. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design, primarily ethnographic, with elements of a case study approach. The researchers adopted a mixed-methods strategy, integrating qualitative data collection techniques with some quantitative descriptive elements. The aim was to gain an in-depth understanding of the complex dynamics within and between dance troupes in the Central Region. This involved immersive participant observation, allowing us to directly observe rehearsals, performances, and social interactions within the dance community. This immersive approach provided rich contextual data, supplementing interview responses and offering a nuanced perspective on the lived experiences of dance troupe members. Semi-structured interviews, both group and individual, formed a central component of data collection. These interviews used open-ended questions to elicit detailed narratives from members and leaders regarding their perceptions, motivations, aspirations, and experiences within their respective dance troupes. The flexible nature of semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to adapt questions based on the flow of conversation, leading to a more organic exploration of participant perspectives. While not explicitly stated in the excerpt, the methodology included a review of relevant documents, such as troupe promotional materials or online presence, to contextualise interview data.

Data analysis primarily utilised thematic analysis. This involved identifying recurring themes and patterns within interview transcripts and observational notes. The coding process sought to uncover meaningful connections between participants' narratives and the central research questions concerning perceptions, motivations, aspirations, social networks, and functions of the dance troupes. Thematic analysis, being iterative and reflexive, allowed for refinement of the coding scheme throughout the analytical process. The resultant themes were then categorised and described, incorporating rich illustrative quotations from participant interviews. A comparative analysis approach was utilised to examine similarities and differences between various dance troupes, comparing and contrasting their unique characteristics, practices, and beliefs. The qualitative description played a significant role, providing vivid and detailed accounts of the observed phenomena and enriching the interpretation of the findings.

The study's sample comprised a selection of dance troupes based in in Central Region of Ghana, a purposive sample chosen for its representation of the diversity found within the Central Region's dance community. While this approach offers detailed insight into the specific dynamics of selected troupes, it inherently limits the generalisability of the findings to other dance troupes within Ghana or beyond. A potential limitation of this methodology is the inherent subjectivity involved in qualitative research. Researcher bias could potentially influence interpretation and require careful consideration throughout the analysis and reporting of findings. The findings ultimately offer insights into the intricate interplay of factors shaping the dance troupe community in the Central Region, rather than offering broad-scale generalisations about dance troupes across Ghana.

The following sections address the research questions by presenting the key findings that emerged from the data analysis, illustrating how perceptions, motivations, aspirations, and social networks, interact to shape the experiences of individuals within the Central Regions dance community.

## 3. Functions and Dysfunction

This section analyses the functions and dysfunctions of dance troupes through the lens of structural func-

tionism (Malinowski, 1922; Wallace & Wolf, 1995). Structural functionalism posits that social systems, including dance troupes, comprise interacting individuals striving to maximise individual gratification within a culturally defined framework (Parsons, 1951). To maintain this system, troupe leaders actively cultivate and reinforce shared motivations and cultural norms, even if these are sometimes presented in a manner that obscures underlying economic or individual ambitions. Understanding the dance troupes requires analysing their contribution to the broader social system and evaluating both their intended (manifest) and unintended (latent) consequences. The following sections will explore both the positive contributions and negative consequences of these troupes within the Central Region’s social context.

**Figure 1: “Twerampon Traditionals” Performing at Elmina. Source: Fieldwork, February, 2020.**



### 3.1. Manifest Functions

Analysis of Cape Coast's dance troupes reveals several manifest functions; those intended and openly recognised purposes for their existence (Merton, 1957). A primary manifest function is providing employment, particularly for young people. While the economic model may not conform to traditional notions of professionalism, troupes such as Korye Dance Theatre and African Footprint generate income through paid performances, providing a crucial source of livelihood for performers. Other troupes, while not always offering consistent salaries, nevertheless provide employment opportunities based on negotiated agreements.

**Figure 2: AFRIMUDA Foundation after a Performance in Denmark. Source: Kuubeterzie John, Fieldwork, 2020.**



Beyond economic contributions, the troupes function as crucial sites for skill development. Members acquire and refine skills in dancing and drumming, while also developing managerial skills through various roles and responsibilities within the troupe structure. The collaborative nature of troupe activities fosters teamwork and the development of shared goals.



**Figure 3: AFODAT in a Performance at Accra. Source: Fieldwork, 2020.**

Furthermore, the troupes serve as valuable assets for event organisers and the broader Central Region, contributing to festivals, private events (parties, funerals, weddings), and community celebrations. Their performances add significant cultural value and enrich community life. The troupes also disseminate knowledge and awareness through workshops and outreach initiatives, both locally and internationally, underscoring their broader social and cultural contributions. In conclusion, dance troupes fulfil a range of manifest functions, impacting the economic, social, and cultural fabric of the community in significant and multifaceted ways.

### **3.2. Latent Functions**

Beyond the explicitly stated goals, dance troupes fulfil several latent functions, and unintended and often unrecognised consequences of their activities (Merton, 1957). A key latent function is the reinforcement of group identity. The regular rehearsals and workshops provide a consistent social space for members to interact, fostering a strong sense of community and shared identity. This is particularly notable among male members, who develop shared styles of dress and grooming, creating a distinct visual identity within the community.

**Figure 4: African Footprint in a Rehearsal Session at Green Hill, Cape Coast. Source: Fieldwork, 2020**



Furthermore, the physical activity inherent in dance and drumming contributes to the mental and physical well-being of troupe members. The rhythmic nature of the activities, combined with the social interaction, provides a form of exercise that benefits both physical and mental health (Arcangeli, 2000). This latent function highlights the positive impact of troupe involvement on individual well-being, particularly enhanced self-esteem and emotional regulation.

**Figure 5: Korye Dance Theatre, after a Performance at Oasis Beach Resort. Source: Fieldwork, 2020**



Engagement with the dance troupe also encourages members to develop technological skills and embrace modern forms of communication. The use of online platforms for advertising performances and promoting personal products illustrates how troupe involvement necessitates engagement with modern technology, ultimately bridging the gap between traditional art forms and modern communication practices.

Finally, dance troupes in the Central region of Ghana serve as a valuable resource for researchers and academics. Students and faculty at the University of Cape Coast and the University of Education, Winneba, frequently engage with the troupes, seeking information for research and academic projects. This collaboration extends to assisting with theatrical productions, highlighting the troupes' role in supporting local academic pursuits and fostering cross-disciplinary engagement. These latent functions demonstrate the far-reaching impacts of the dance troupes, extending beyond their immediate goals to contribute to community wellbeing, technological development, and academic scholarship.

### 3.3. Dysfunctions

While contributing positively to the community, dance troupes in the Central Region also exhibit several dysfunctions and unintended negative consequences of their activities. One manifest dysfunction is noise pollution. The intense drumming during rehearsals at the Asaase Pa Recreational Centre, for example, interfered with a nearby shrine, causing conflict between the drummers and the religious leader.

Another significant dysfunction, potentially latent, involves the exploitation of performers. While not suggesting intentional exploitation by troupe leaders, the study highlights a system that is disproportionately

benefits the troupes while providing insufficient compensation to their members. Performers often work for little or no pay, driven by the hope of gaining travel opportunities, particularly to Denmark, often perceived as a more lucrative market for performers. These trips, however, often result in financial losses and dissatisfaction among members and their families, highlighting a systemic issue where the rewards are disproportionately distributed.

Further, the study notes that the pursuit of international relationships, particularly with foreigners, can lead to exploitation and objectification, especially affecting female performers, who face slut-shaming when they engage in such relationships. This exposes the intersection of gender and economic inequality within the dance troupe community. Additionally, traditional gender roles persist within the troupes, limiting women's participation in certain roles, such as drumming during public performances.

Finally, the troupes' contributions to environmental unsustainability pose a significant concern. The continued use of non-renewable resources like leather and wood in the creation of drums and costumes contributes to environmental depletion without sufficient effort towards sustainable alternatives. These dysfunctions, both manifest and latent, illustrate the complexities and contradictions within the dance troupe system, demanding a critical examination of power dynamics, economic realities, and environmental responsibility within this important aspect of Cape Coast's cultural landscape.

#### 4. Self-Perceptions

The study explored the self-perception of dance troupes in the Central Region of Ghana, acknowledging the significant influence of perception on actions and outcomes within cultural contexts. Despite numerous challenges including limited rehearsal spaces, substance abuse, and low income (Anlimah, 2018; Boyer-Dry, 2008; Schauert, 2015), members demonstrated unwavering dedication, consistently prioritizing rehearsals even at the cost of other commitments. This suggests underlying, unquantifiable rewards associated with troupe membership.

Interviews with members of AFRIMUDA and AFODAT revealed a strong, self-identified professional identity cultivated through the founders' influence. This self-perception served as a motivating factor and a source of pride, fostering a sense of superiority compared to other troupes. The understanding of "professionalism" within these troupes extended beyond financial compensation and instead encompassed aspects such as branding, disciplined conduct, and structured organisation. This was evidenced by several member responses:

one member of AFODAT explained, *"...for me how they explained it is that we have to stay only here, like how the people in fashion also have one place that promotes them. A professional does not move from place to place. They know what they want and they focus..."*;

another, Cindy Abena Owusu (AFRIMUDA), described professionalism as *"...someone who belongs to a particular field. They know everything about that field and they grow in it...If you look at the other troupes, they barely know what goes into costuming for different programs..."*;

Uncle Richmond (AFRIMUDA) offered, *"...for me, if you say professional, it means something like a workplace with workers who give their time to doing what needs to be done. If you compare AFRIMUDA to any professional workplace, you will see that we have positions too, from the director to the member."*

The founders reinforced this perception, contrasting "professional" troupes with "amateur" troupes characterised by a lack of formal structure (Kuubeterzie, AFRIMUDA) or lax behavioral standards (Mrs. Akpalu, AFODAT).

While a traditional definition of "professionalism" often centres on financial compensation, the study su-

uggests that in the context of dance troupes in the Central Region of Ghana, the concept aligns more closely with dedication, skill, structured organisation, and commitment to a specific artistic identity. Therefore, the troupes' self-designation as "professional" reflects a justifiable assessment of their commitment and organisational structure, even in the absence of consistent monetary compensation.

## 5. Motivation of Members

The motivations behind the continued operation of dance troupes were multifaceted and varied between leaders and members. Analysis of interview data revealed a complex interplay of altruistic and self-interested goals. While most leaders (excluding Korye Dance Theatre) emphasised a passionate commitment to preserving Ghanaian culture and fostering opportunities for youth, their narratives often minimised the economic realities of the venture. This presented a somewhat disingenuous portrayal, downplaying the inherent capitalist elements driving the troupes' activities.

Specific leader motivations included: Okyerema Prah's concern that *"the youth have thrown away their dances and have engaged in the Djembe culture,"* driving his focus on training the next generation; Mr. Bennet Tetteh of Footprint's aim to *"bridge the gap between the privileged and the less privileged"* and provide travel opportunities for members; Mr. Kuubeterzie of AFRIMUDA's desire to *"make the lives of the youth who have the talents better,"* evidenced by his members' success abroad; and Mr. Akpalu of AFODAT's vision for his *"ultramodern cultural village"* and commitment to safeguarding cultural heritage. In contrast, Korye Dance Theatre's motivation centred on securing sponsorship for international relocation, noting that *"money from performances goes a long way to solve a lot of their personal needs."* In contrast to the leaders' pronouncements, members' motivations were more diverse, ranging from intrinsic passion for dance and drumming to extrinsic factors such as personal financial gain. Importantly, in troupes lacking consistent remuneration, the majority of members reported motivations unrelated to specific troupe affiliation, suggesting that financial incentives played a significant role in sustaining participation.

This disparity highlights the disconnect between the idealistic narratives presented by leaders and the pragmatic motivations driving members' engagement. The study, therefore, suggests that a comprehensive understanding of troupe motivations requires considering both the idealistic pronouncements of leaders and the more pragmatic motivations of the individual members.

## 6. Aspiration of Members

The aspirations of dance troupe members diverge significantly from the pan-African nationalist ideals promoted by Kwame Nkrumah, which envisioned drumming and dance as tools for cultivating African identity and fostering patriotism (Schauert, 2015). While state-sponsored ensembles in Ghana have historically aimed to promote national unity, the reality is often far removed from this ideal, with individual members prioritising personal aspirations, even to the extent of leaving the country (Schauert, 2015). This same tension exists within the dance troupes in the Central region, where the collective goals of the troupe often conflict with the individual aspirations of its members. Many viewed their troupe membership as a means to an end, a stepping stone towards achieving personal goals, rather than a commitment to a shared cultural mission.

Several members openly expressed a desire to use their participation in the dance troupe as a pathway to life abroad, often viewing their troupes as "escape routes." This perspective challenges the notion of the troupe as a unified entity working towards a common cultural goal, instead highlighting a prevailing

individualism where personal ambitions frequently overshadow collective objectives. One member argued that, regardless of collective rhetoric, dance troupes function as “private businesses,” implying that the troupe leader’s aspirations often dictate the troupe’s overall direction. This is exemplified by AFODAT, where the leader’s vision is likely to guide the troupe’s future even after their passing, as the enterprise will be inherited by their spouse, a former member of the Ghana Dance Ensemble. Beyond emigration, other key aspirations included establishing independent troupes and achieving a higher social standing, often linked to the prospect of interracial relationships. These diverse aspirations reflect a complex interplay between cultural preservation, personal ambition, and the socio-economic realities faced by members of dance troupes in the Central region of Ghana.

### 6.1 Gaining a Place in Society

For many members of the dance troupes, a central aspiration was achieving recognition and respect within society, a desire particularly poignant given their often-disadvantaged backgrounds. While some members had completed high school and possessed fluency in English, the majority faced significant socio-economic challenges. The perception that they were viewed as mere “decorative objects” fueled a strong desire to “level up” and challenge societal perceptions of their profession. The meagre financial returns from performances often proved insufficient to meet basic needs, such as adequate housing and family support.

This struggle was vividly expressed by several members: “...Only God knows how we make it to and from rehearsals and all that. After dancing, you get hungry, you must eat, you must buy soap to wash your clothes, you must either walk or take transport. It’s all about money. Our leaders are not helping. Some are doing well, but sometimes when we go for shows, it is the money that people throw at us that we share. It mostly is not up to 10 cedis...”

A member vividly poured out: “...Our families do not respect us because what do we get from the “culture” that we are doing? In Footprint, when they travel, they do not pay anything and at least they come home with something. But we go through a lot just to go on trips and even there too, things are hard. Then, you come home and you cannot even buy a phone for your wife or your mother. So, if you take the experience away, what is left? You have rather made a loss...”

Their aspirations to gain a more respected position in society extended beyond mere financial stability. It encompassed the ability to own their troupes, enact positive change within their community, and achieve a level of affluence that would earn them admiration and respect. This desire for social mobility was evident in their descriptions of ideal futures, which included owning a car and affording better clothing, representing not only financial security but also upward mobility and social acceptance. The enthusiasm with which they envisioned such futures was palpable, expressed through animated gestures: “...The ecstasy they derived from imagining their future, was characterised by gestures that included jumps, claps, majestic short steps, and looking up into the sky with a grin.” This intense yearning for social recognition highlights the profound impact of socio-economic realities on the aspirations and lived experiences of dance troupe members. Their commitment to their art form is deeply interwoven with their desire for social mobility and recognition.

### 6.2. Genuine Interests

While group interviews revealed a collective acknowledgement of genuine interest in drumming and dancing among dance troupe members, further inquiry revealed a more nuanced reality. Although many initially affirmed this interest, observations and subsequent probing suggested that this was sometimes a response prompted by social pressure rather than a deeply held conviction. It became apparent that even



those using dance troupes as a stepping stone towards other goals (e.g., travel) still required an underlying level of interest in the art form itself. As a lead female dancer, of Twerampon Traditionals, eloquently articulated:

*"...As for genuine interest, one cannot say it does not count. I am not in the minds of others, but most of my brothers and sisters doing dancing and drumming want to continue when they go abroad. It is the dancing and drumming that will even make someone come and take you abroad. So, if the interest is not there, what talent will you use when you travel?"*

This statement highlights the fundamental role of genuine interest, even if overshadowed by other aspirations, as a prerequisite for success and continued involvement within the dance community.

### **6.3. Accomplishments of Peers Abroad**

The visit of a former member, now residing in Denmark, to Korye and AFRIMUDA dance troupes in November 2019, highlighted the significant influence of perceived "success" abroad on the aspirations of troupe members. This individual, having achieved a life abroad through marriage to a European woman, implicitly assumed a position of authority upon his return, immediately taking on the role of Artistic Director during his visit. This shift in power dynamics, marked by the formal arrangement of seating during his "talk" with the troupe, underscored the symbolic power attributed to those who have achieved international success. His advice, while seemingly encouraging, revealed a transactional understanding of success abroad:

*"...Your 'help' does not like dirt. They like presentable people so learn to smell nice and keep your hair tidy. They also don't like lazy people. Outside (abroad), everything works with time. How you look and how you behave is what will make someone decide to date you and help you. Just focus and you will get there..."* (a former Korye troupe member).

This encounter illustrates how the perceived achievements of successful ex-members fuel aspirations to live abroad among current members. The distinction between short-term tours and longer-term emigration is crucial. While tours offer a temporary boost in status, they yield minimal tangible benefits and often lead to heightened expectations from family and community members. The pressure to "make it" abroad is exacerbated by the limited financial returns of troupe membership, leaving many to feel the weight of unmet expectations following a tour. As Philomena Cobbold from Footprint noted, returning from a tour without financial gain often results in familial resentment and anger, highlighting the financial pressures faced by members. This pursuit of international success acts as a powerful motivator, yet the reality often falls short of expectations, creating internal conflict and adding stress to the already challenging realities of troupe life.

### **6.4. Sex Appeal/Popularity**

The study explored the complex relationship between physical attractiveness, fame, and romantic relationships within dance troupes. While physical fitness and stamina are undeniably linked to dance performance (Pietro et al., 2002; Hanna, 2006), the study uncovered a more nuanced connection between physical attributes and social dynamics. Fame, for male performers, was frequently linked to physical attributes and perceived sexual attractiveness. This association stemmed from a combination of factors, including the physically demanding nature of the dance, leading to well-toned physiques often highlighted by costumes. One female member's comment, *"...that is what the white women like. We prefer them when their pockets have been to the gym"* (Mariama Haruna, AFRIMUDA Foundation), reveals a perception that physical attractiveness, particularly among men, is directly linked to romantic success, especially with foreign women.

Male performers from Footprint and Korye, acknowledging their socio-economic status as members of the lower class, highlighted the challenges of forming lasting relationships due to financial constraints. However, they also noted that their fame as performers attracted female attention, suggesting that talent, fame, and perceived physical prowess offered a compensatory advantage in the dating landscape.

One male drummer's perspective underscored this: "*...the whites who come down like strong black boys. Most of them, it is just about the sex... They will just sleep with you and leave you. But some will be interested in you and want to date you... They like us this way. Our hair too, we don't cut it because many of us are Rastafarians. We are like Samson. Our hair adds to the dancing and shows how powerful we are in sex too...*"

This highlights a transactional dynamic, where physical attractiveness and performance skills are perceived as commodities in romantic relationships.

In contrast, female performers reported facing slut-shaming from their male counterparts for engaging in relationships, illustrating a gendered double standard within the community. The study concludes that while physical fitness and performance enhance popularity, the relationship between physicality and romantic success is more nuanced, shaped by gender roles and socio-economic factors, particularly impacting the experiences of female performers.

### **6.5. Prospective Interracial Relationship**

The aspiration for interracial relationships, particularly with white women, emerged as a significant theme, deeply intertwined with broader aspirations for upward mobility and emigration. The pervasive idealisation of foreigners, especially white people, as reflected in the Cape Coast saying, "On your way to church if you meet a white man, go home because you have met God," highlights a complex dynamic shaped by both internalised biases and external pressures. While many members did not explicitly recognise this as a form of racial bias, the study critically examines this preference through the lens of racism, recognising that prejudiced attitudes can exist independently of overt expressions of racial superiority. The study argues that racism is manifested not only in acts of overt discrimination but also in the subtle judgments and biased assessments that shape social interactions.

Within the dance troupe context, this bias manifested as a form of objectification, affecting both men and women differently. For men, physical attributes and performance skills were often perceived as commodities that increased desirability in interracial relationships, sometimes leading to transactional relationships with little regard for genuine emotional connection. For women, however, engaging in interracial relationships often resulted in slut-shaming from their male peers, exposing the inherent gender inequalities within the community. The pursuit of interracial relationships was frequently linked to aspirations for migration, often based on the belief that such relationships would increase the likelihood of relocating abroad.

Interviews with former troupe members living abroad revealed a more transactional and exploitative side to these relationships. As one former member stated: "*...what I can say is that the whites who pick our people do not do so because of love. I can even say about 99% is not love. They also have what they are searching for from us. They fall in love with your talent and your body because most of them want mixed children, rough sex, and the talent that you possess. After they have had kids with you, they start to get tired of you and throw you out...*"

This statement underscores a power imbalance where foreign individuals may exploit the vulnerabilities of troupe members, ultimately leading to exploitation and emotional distress. This highlights the complexity of interracial relationships within the dance community, highlighting that the pursuit of such

relationships is a complex and often exploitative dynamic with significant consequences. The study emphasises that this is a transactional space, where both parties have their interests and goals, and the outcomes are often unequal and detrimental to troupe members.

### 6.6. Migrate Abroad

The aspiration to migrate abroad is a powerful motivator for many young people involved in Ghana's performing arts, including members of Cape Coast's dance troupes (Carl, 2011). This desire is fueled by a widely held belief that international markets offer greater opportunities and appreciation for artistic talent than those available within Africa (Boyer-Dry, 2008). Many members, including leaders, explicitly stated that they perceived more support and investment from international audiences, particularly in Europe and America, than from their communities.

However, the romanticised view of life abroad contrasts sharply with the harsh realities faced by those who have migrated. Many performers expressed awareness of the difficulties encountered by those who have left their homes in search of better prospects, highlighting stories of homelessness, exploitative working conditions, and mental health struggles. This knowledge did not deter all, however. While some expressed a desire to pursue more traditional life paths, such as marriage and family life, others remained determined to seek opportunities abroad, believing that even under challenging circumstances, life abroad would still be preferable to their current situation.

Their resolve stemmed from a deep-seated sense of feeling trapped and exploited within the existing system: "...*The seriousness in the tones of the performers questioned what was so broken in this country that made them feel trapped and want to tow an uncertain path...*"

The desire to migrate is not merely about economic opportunity but also encompasses a broader yearning for experience and personal growth. The chance to travel, explore new cultures, and escape perceived limitations drove many to pursue international opportunities, even acknowledging the potential risks. However, this aspiration, often fueled by a sense of desperation and disillusionment, comes at a personal cost, revealing the complex interplay of hope and exploitation within the dance troupe environment. The dream of "greener pastures" is, therefore, both a powerful motivator and a potentially precarious path, highlighting a deeper systemic issue within the Ghanaian performing arts landscape.

## 7. Social Networks

The relatively small number of dance troupes in the Central Region of Ghana fosters a close-knit and interconnected social network, facilitating various forms of engagement and interaction. These interactions manifest on multiple levels: individual members, leaders, and between entire troupes. While collaborations between troupes were infrequent, various other forms of interaction thrived. These included informal exchanges between individual members, leveraging social media platforms to maintain connections and share information, and the movement of individual members between troupes. The lending and borrowing of costumes, instruments, and even personnel served as a further means of inter-troupe interaction. The structure of these interactions varied depending on the level of engagement. Member-to-member interactions were predominantly informal, reflecting personal relationships between individuals across different troupes.

Leader-to-leader and leader-to-troupe interactions displayed a more formal character influenced by factors such as geographical proximity, pre-existing relationships, and the relative seniority and experience of those involved. The age of a troupe played a less significant role in shaping these interactions than the reputation and influence of its leader, underscoring the hierarchical nature of power

dynamics within the dance community. Finally, troupe-to-troupe interactions were highly formal, especially when joint projects were undertaken. In these cases, leaders engaged in preliminary negotiations before any formal interactions occurred between the troupes. This often included compensation discussions, highlighting the economic dimensions of these inter-troupe collaborations. The overall network reveals a complex interplay of formal and informal relationships, illustrating the dynamic and multifaceted nature of social ties within dance communities found in the Central region of Ghana.

### 7.1. Collaborations

Formal collaborations between dance troupes were found to be infrequent. Instead of collaborative projects, a more common practice involved one troupe inviting others to participate in their events. As Mr. Peter Bruce, master drummer for African Footprint, explained: *“It is best to just do what you can, and then you invite all sister troupes to come and support in their numbers.”*

This sentiment was echoed by Mr. Kuubeterzie, founder of AFRIMUDA Foundation, who described the challenges of establishing a collaborative arts union: *“...I have been a part of the brains behind the creation of an Arts Union here in Cape Coast... How many people came on board to support this idea? We even had people from the University on board. But the support was not there. So how do we collaborate...?”* This highlights the difficulties in establishing sustained collaborations.

While genuine collaborations were rare, some limited forms of cooperation were observed. Korye and Footprint, for example, had collaborated on two occasions since Korye's inception. However, the prevalence of unhealthy competition among troupes served as a major barrier to broader collaboration. The most frequent form of interaction involved individual members being invited to assist other troupes with performances. This limited form of collaboration highlights the complex social dynamics at play within the dance community, revealing a combination of cooperation and competition that shapes the landscape of collaborative artistic endeavours.

### 7.2. Borrowing and Lending

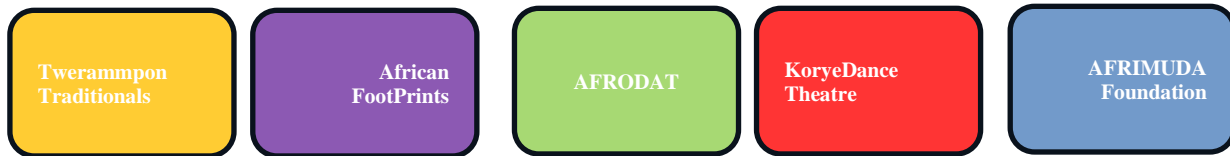
The practice of borrowing and lending within the dance troupe network further strengthens social ties and facilitates resource sharing. The exchange of costumes, props, and even drums is common, often conducted without formal fees, reflecting the close-knit nature of the community and the reciprocal relationships between troupes. However, the exchange of “members” between troupes is strictly regulated and requires explicit permission from troupe leaders, highlighting the importance of maintaining troupe identity and avoiding the perception of disloyalty.

The social networks connecting dance troupes are further strengthened by the shared membership of individuals across different groups. This overlapping membership creates informal links facilitating interaction and resource exchange. The illustration clearly shows that Twerampon and Footprint share three members, while Korye and AFRIMUDA share one member. These shared members act as critical connectors, facilitating informal interactions and supporting a system of reciprocal exchange within the larger dance community.

As Alima Mamoudu, a dancer with AFRIMUDA Foundation, stated: *“...here, we are professionals, we don't just do things anyhow...if you are joining more than one group, what are you trying to say? People must see you and know that you are AFRIMUDA. We don't just mix with others. You ask permission before going to another group. We help them...”* This statement underscores the emphasis placed on exclusive loyalty and the importance of maintaining the troupe's distinct identity. The presence of shared

members across some, but not all, troupes *reveal* a complex social structure shaped by both cooperation and competition.

**Figure 6: Linear Venn Showing Member-dance Troupe Intersections in Cape Coast. Source: Fieldwork, 2020**



The notable exception is AFODAT, which does not share any members with other troupes. This reinforces the significance of their strict "no shared member" policy, highlighting the unique organisational structure and approach to inter-troupe relations adopted by AFODAT.

The leader of AFODAT expressed similar sentiments, emphasising the need for prior authorisation before any member could be loaned out, stating: *"...if you're in AFODAT, you are in AFODAT...If anyone needs a member of mine, they must ask me first...I will call and tell the troupe that they should not take you in. You come from a home. I can't come and suffer to train you, then when it's my turn to benefit from you, you will be in other troupes making them better..."*

This system of borrowing and lending, extending to both material resources and personnel, reflects a dynamic interplay between cooperation and competition. The "parent-boss" dynamic, where troupe leaders exert significant control over their members, reveals the hierarchical power structures within the community. This dynamic, even in the absence of formal contracts, demonstrates the strong sense of ownership and loyalty expected from troupe members. The system underscores the importance of maintaining group identity and the complex relationship between cooperation and competition that shapes the social landscape of dance communities.

### 7.3. Common Events

Observations at two funerals in Cape Coast (December 2019 and February 2020) revealed a unique performance practice centred around a temporary collective known as the "Cape Coast All-Stars." This informal troupe, lacking a designated artistic director, emerged at the funerals of troupe members or their families, bringing together the most skilled performers from various troupes to present a unified performance. The All-Stars troupe represents a continuation of the previous "Nkabom" (meaning "unity"), formed during the CILTAD/Agoro era, which similarly aimed to unite the best performers from different troupes to honour deceased members.

Even though the Nkabom eventually disbanded, forming a temporary collective for funerals persisted. The performances featured a repertoire of dances common to various troupes in Cape Coast (Kete, Fontonfrom, Asafo, Kuku, Bubu, and Gahu), showcasing a collective performance style characterised by a unified and non-competitive spirit. The temporary nature of the All-Stars troupe, combined with the collaborative nature of the performances, highlights the unique social dynamics within Cape Coast's dance community.

The common practice demonstrates a strong sense of shared identity and mutual support among the various troupes. It emphasises collective identity in times of grief and loss while showcasing the depth and richness of their shared cultural heritage.

**Figure 7: Cape Coast All-Stars, at the Funeral of a Veteran Performer Source: Fieldwork, 2019**



## 8. Conclusion

This study investigated the dynamics of dance troupes in the Central Region of Ghana, exploring how perceptions, motivations, aspirations, social networks, and functions shape their activities and impact the broader community. Our research question, *How do perceptions, motivations, aspirations, social networks, and functions shape the dynamics of dance troupes in the Central Region of Ghana, and what are the resulting consequences?* was addressed through an ethnographic approach incorporating participant observation and in-depth interviews. The findings reveal a complex interplay of factors driving participation, extending beyond a simple commitment to cultural preservation. While passion for dance and a dedication to cultural heritage were undeniable, pursuing individual aspirations played a crucial role. These aspirations often included personal advancement, specifically travel abroad and the pursuit of interracial relationships, highlighting a tension between collective cultural goals and individual ambitions.

The study identified both manifest functions (employment, skill development, community engagement) and latent functions (social cohesion, improved well-being, knowledge dissemination) of the dance troupes. However, several dysfunctions emerged, including noise pollution, potential exploitation of performers, gender inequality, and environmental unsustainability. The findings highlight a clear dichotomy between the idealistic narratives promoted by troupe leaders and the more pragmatic motivations driving individual members' engagement. While the leaders emphasise cultural preservation and youth development, many members are primarily motivated by financial gain and opportunities for social mobility, often focusing on international migration as a primary aspiration.

This research underscores the need for a more nuanced understanding of the motivations and experiences of individuals within the dance community, recognising the complex interplay of cultural, social, and economic factors that shape their lives. Future research should focus on developing sustainable practices within the dance community, addressing issues of fair compensation, gender equality, and environmental sustainability, while simultaneously recognising and valuing the cultural contributions of these groups. Only through such a holistic approach can we fully appreciate the complexities and contributions of vibrant dance troupes and ensure their continued success.

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