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# Singing Truth to Power and the Disempowered: The Case of Lucky Mensah and His Song, “Nkratoɔ”

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## Introduction: Background

Political communication in Africa increasingly manifests characteristics of a dialogue or conversation rather than the monologue it may be perceived to be, especially in light of the proliferation of new media and innovative means of dissemination (including the internet and concomitant mobile apps). This work focuses on *Nkratoɔ* “Message” by Alex Lucky Mensah, which is sung in the Akan language of Ghana.

His de facto position parallels his call on the imaginary “Uncle *Tawia*” to tell his very real brother—the then President of Ghana, John Evans Atta Mills—that things are not going well for the common citizen. The song by all standards is a commentary and a biting criticism of the socioeconomic state of the country attributed to the governance (or perceived lack thereof) by the current political party (the National Democratic Congress a.k.a. NDC) and, as evinced by its popularity, reflected the sentiments of various constituencies in the country.

The song *Nkratoɔ* “Message” is sung in the Akan language. The Akan language is a predominantly SVO language categorized within the Kwa group of languages comprising part of the larger Niger–Congo phylum. Akan is spoken by about 44 % of Ghana’s population as a first language and is used as a second language by a large percentage of the remainder (Dolphyne 1996, p. xi). Akan is an umbrella term that has been used to designate the ethno-linguistic group of the same name since the 1950s (Dolphyne 1988, p. xi). Three of the Akan dialects, Akuapem, Asante, and Fante, have acquired literary status (Dolphyne 1988, p. xi). Through collaborative efforts of the Language Teaching Center and Linguistics Department of the University of Ghana at Legon together with the Akan Language Committee of the Bureau of Ghanaian Languages, a standard orthography has been devised for the

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language, which, while written, is not spoken (Dolphyne 1988, p. 20). According to Kyeremateng (1996, p. 23), as a distinct ethnic group, the Akan people trace their history to a large-scale migration from the Sahel after the Almoravid invasion of ancient Ghana in 1076 CE and the subsequent breakup of that empire. Konadu, however, maintains that Akan archeological evidence shows that for approximately two millennia, the Akan forest was inhabited by agriculturalists (Konadu 2010:29). Such an understanding pushes back the date of settlement significantly. However, rather than getting caught in a migrant/autochthone binary, it may be instructive to note the Akan proverb:

1. Ye-firi      aman      firi      aman      na      ε-ye      ɔman.  
 IPL-from   PL-nation   from   PL-nation   FOC   3SG-do/be   nation  
 'We come from different nations to make a nation.' (Konadu 2010, p. 93)

Such an indigenous notion may be instructive in terms of our understanding of who the Akan are and in avoidance of anachronisms with regard to several groups (perhaps inclusive of autochthones and migrants now labeled as one group).

Among the Akan, there is an appreciation for the traditional position of *ɔkyeame* "spokesperson/intermediary"—invariably occupied by one who is a master of the Akan language and its use. According to Yankah:

In the *ɔkyeame*'s care, royal words, whether whispered or spoken, may be paraphrased, elaborated, punctuated with history, ornamented with metaphor, enlivened with proverbs and allegories, or even dramatized outright. Through the art of the surrogate orator, royal words are refined, poeticized, and made palatable for public consumption (Yankah 1995).

In this chapter, we draw parallels between the traditional *ɔkyeame* "spokesperson/intermediary" and Lucky Mensah, the artist whose work is the focus of the study.

Alex Lucky Mensah is a Ghanaian musician born on June 3rd, 1970, at Gomoa Dominasi in the Central Region of Ghana to his late mother Agnes Odoom and his late father Jacob Wilson (Lisa 2015). He began his career in the church singing at the Christo Asafo church in Gomoa in 1981 at the tender age of just 11 years (Lisa 2015). His mother took issue with his aspirations to be a singer, but she passed away in 1981 compelling Mensah to move to the New Town area of Accra—the capital of Ghana—to live with his mother's sibling. He continued to sing in the Accra New Town congregation of the Christo Asafo Church until he became inspired by Figo Brothers Band to start writing songs in 1990 (Lisa 2015). Eventually, he was able to get the money to record a mastered album in 1993 from his Germany-based half brother William Crentil (Lisa 2015). While he has never held a political position, he has been associated with several political songs both for the ruling NDC party and against it.

In 2008, popular Ghanaian Highlife musician, Lucky Mensah released a campaign song entitled *Come Back, Come Back* (also referred to as *Yeresesa mu* along with an associated rolling hand gesture) in support of National Democratic Congress (NDC) political party which "sensitized Ghanaians to the hardships under the Kuffuor-led NPP government" (Adofo 2012). Some have expressed the view that *Yeresesa mu* was significant in garnering more votes for the NDC noting that "Lucky was one of the musicians whose songs were successfully appropriated by

the then opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC) in its electoral campaign against the NPP government” (Quayesi-Amakye 2010, p. 73). However, in 2009, Mensah complained publicly that he was not properly compensated for the song and that, in fact, his music career suffered due to the campaign song (One 2011). In the midst of his complaints in 2010 which were receiving significant media coverage at the time, Mensah released a song entitled *Nkratoɔ* (cf. anglicized *Nkratuo*) which is heavily critical of the NDC government and, indeed, became campaign fodder for the opposition party, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) (One 2011). The song *Nkratoɔ* resonated with listeners and became popular with some saying that “When Lucky Mensah sings of ‘Nkratow’, it symbolises the average Ghanaian’s frustration” with the ruling NDC administration in light of the financial hardships which they continue to endure (Chronicle 2011). Indeed, with *Nkratoɔ*, “By the insinuating lyrics, [Mensah] revealed how the President’s weaknesses, mediocrity, actions and inactions are running Ghana into a ditch” (Adofo 2012). However, in an abrupt about-face after an alleged “‘palm-greasing’ consultation,” Mensah released another campaign song in support of the ruling NDC government entitled *Atta bɛyɛ ama mo* “Atta will do for you” in reference to the late president John Evans Atta Mills (Adofo 2012). In yet another perplexing turn of events, in 2013, Mensah came out with another single entitled *Esi Araba* “which subtly questioned the ability of the Mahama-led government to deliver, especially as the president’s former boss, the late John Mills was seen in some circles as having failed to deliver” (Okaley 2015). This flip-flopping behavior of Mensah has led some to refer to him with such uncomplimentary terms as a “gold digger” and “political prostitute” (Adofo 2012, 2015). One scholar commenting on the song said Lucky Mensah’s song *Nkratoɔ* “clearly displays his disappointment at President Atta Mills’ government’s failure to ‘appease him’ for helping them to win the 2008 elections” (Quayesi-Amakye 2010, p. 73). An insightful observer even noticed that Mensah’s perceived artistic hypocrisy and amoral opportunism could be seen as art imitating life in that the musician’s behavior very closely approximates the opportunism often associated with politicians (Kambon 2015). In an incisive criticism of Mensah, Adofo (2012) argues that Mensah is confused, unscrupulous, and is simply looking for wealth. He argues that Mensah is

neither honest with himself nor with Ghanaians. He is only in pursuit of money, cashing in on the corruptibility of the NDC government at the least opportunity. What else can explain his actions if they are not corruption-induced? (Adofo 2012)

While it is difficult to get a sense of the degree to which Adofo’s criticism is reflective of popular sentiment and the acceptability of Mensah’s works given the dearth of scholarly resources on his work, as there is rather than are undoubtedly a wide range of opinions and some, such as Adofo (2015) are more vocal than others in their assessment of his character. Indeed, in what some may view as just desserts, Mensah was apparently abandoned by the ruling NDC party that he helped in their reelection bid by means of his campaign song. According to Mensah, “My song had a big influence in retaining the NDC party in power but the leaders and executives of the party, instead of appreciating my good works, have rather neglected me”

(Okailey 2015). Others, however, have no sympathy for him writing "his rejection by NDC serves him right. He is an opportunist. He has the intent of making quick buck [*sic*] same as our current crop of corrupt politicians is [*sic*] doing. He has not the collective interests of Ghanaians at heart, but solely his selfish interests and agenda to pursue" (Adofo 2015).

However, in addition to the criticisms leveled against Lucky Mensah, we would also like to address the seeming level of political naïveté expressed by Mensah. It is readily noticeable that the complaints addressed towards President Mills either intentionally or unintentionally leave out the dynamic interplay between forces within the country and outside of the country that contribute to the plight of the common person. While articulating the perceived failings of President Mills, there is no mention of the role of structural adjustment programs, IMF/World Bank loans and their commensurate conditionalities, and other externally directed manifestations of neocolonialism and their relationship to the challenges that face the common citizen of Ghana and other such states victimized by neocolonial enemies in various guises. Further, he either intentionally ignores or appears to be unintentionally ignorant of the role of criminal organizations such as the CIA, MI6, and neocolonial Eurasian-American governments' complicity in and/or outright sponsoring and organizing of coup d'état's and assassinations such as those of Patrice Lumumba, Kwame Nkrumah, and Thomas Sankara most notably while propping up anti-African puppets like Mobutu Sese Seko and Blaise Compaoré among others. In what is tantamount to human-on-human artificial selection, those who govern in ways that may be beneficial to African people while detrimental to Eurasian interests are removed directly or indirectly by those interests while those who toe the line are allowed to remain in office ad infinitum despite untold atrocities. While such a critique which would, perhaps, better reflect an understanding of causation on a broader scope, it appears that either Mensah, himself, fails to grasp the internal/external dynamics or he thinks that such an analysis would be lost on his audience. The former may be slightly more likely than the latter.

While the political intrigue surrounding Lucky Mensah may be worthy of a separate treatment in and of itself, in this article, we would like to focus primarily on a musicological exegesis of Mensah's *Nkratoɔ* as an artistic piece due to its depth of language use with regard to proverbs, idioms, metaphors, analogies, and other devices for allusion, insinuation, and criticism. We further argue that *Nkratoɔ* is an exemplification of the changing landscape of political communication where artists utilize various means and channels of communication available to them to express themselves.

While *Nkratoɔ* uses allusion and insinuation, there is an underlying recognition of cultural values of politeness and indirection as aspects of cultural competence that buttress the communicative force of the song. We argue that this recognition tempers the song's use of allusion, innuendo, insinuation, implication, intimation, reference, and aspersion. Implicit in the usage of these oratory devices in the context of Lucky Mensah's *Nkratoɔ* is the nature of power dynamics, i.e., the empowered vs. the disempowered. While these terms are used for the sake of conceptualizing the phenomenon, it is worth noting that the roles of empowered

and disempowered are fluid in which the disempowered, through the oratory act itself, becomes momentarily empowered to say what he/she wants to say while the empowered must listen.

On analogy with traditional rulership, when a citizen of the nation wishes to address the ruler, such speech may be directed to the ruler through the *ɔkyeame* “spokesperson/intermediary.” Alternatively, speech may be ostensibly directed to the ruler through the *ɔkyeame* while, in reality, the speech is directed to the listening audience. Indeed, in Akan society, the position of the *ɔkyeame* “spokesperson” is institutionalized as the spokesperson serves as a permanent intermediary between the common populace and the ruler (Yankah 1995). Similarly, in *Nkratoɔ*, Mensah appeals to just such an intermediary figure in the person of the imaginary Uncle *Tawia*.

In *Nkratoɔ*, Lucky Mensah appeals to the imaginary Uncle *Tawia* to serve in this role of *ɔkyeame* to relay concerns without causing loss of “face” to either himself or the ruler, in this case Former President John Evans Atta Mills (Agyekum 2004; Obeng 1994, 1997a) who, incidentally, is from the same Akan ethnic group as Mensah, himself: Fante. Given that they are from the same ethnic group, it is possible that Mensah may have expected the fruits of nepotism to rain down upon him and the song, in turn, may ultimately be a vehicle for expressing this disappointment.

It is worthy of note that in the song, the use of the name *Tawia* is not an incidental one. The indigenous name of the President is the Akan name *Ata* “twin” (anglicized Atta) and in Akan this is a name that indicates that he is a twin. *Tawia* (anglicized Tawiah) is similarly a birth order name that is given to the sibling immediately following the birth of twins. While appealing to a sibling may be seen as a strategy of persuasion (Agyekum 2013; Obeng 1994, 1997a, b, 1999), in actuality, the undercurrent of the song is one of subversion and aspersion as a source of freedom of speech.

The subversive undercurrent of the song may be expressed in the Akan proverb:

- |    |          |       |          |       |
|----|----------|-------|----------|-------|
| 2. | Akutia   | nim   | ne       | wura  |
|    | innuendo | knows | 3SG.POSS | owner |
- ‘Innuendo knows its target.’ (And, conversely, the person who is the target knows that the innuendo is meant for him/her)

In other words, because the one upon whom aspersions are being cast is not mentioned by name, this gives the speaker the latitude to actually say what he/she wants to without the possibility of being taken to task. This is because, if the person being implicated raises his/her voice, it is taken that he/she inadvertently has accepted that all the things mentioned actually pertain to him/her. Similarly, the speaker can always deny that the target of such aspersions is indeed the target. There is well-known Akan *Ananse* folktale wherein the animals make a drum. The monkey does not do any of the work, but, at the end, they say that they need someone who is very ugly to carry the drum. Because of feeling guilty, the monkey jumps up to say *Merensoa twene no* “I will not carry the drum.” Of course, no one mentioned him by name, but, again, the one who is implied knows who he or she is.

Although through the use of allusion, there is leeway in terms of freedom of speech, nevertheless, there is a degree of restraint that the oral artist will impose upon him or herself due to norms and expectations within the society that there be a modicum of politeness befitting the rank of the ostensible addressee. This understanding of the necessity of politeness is a reflection upon the degree to which the speaker may be perceived as having a good upbringing and also the degree to which the speaker will be respected (Obeng 1996, 1997a, 1999, 2003; Totimeh and Bosiwah 2015). Therefore, cultural competence is a key component in communicative competence in general and in political communication in particular. Indeed, a major part of exhibiting cultural competence is in the knowledge and erudite use of proverbs, idioms, poetic devices, etc. Additionally, cultural competence includes an understanding of propriety in the sense of understanding not only what to say but when to say it and in what context. In *Nkratoɔ*, various poetic devices are used to accomplish a plethora of tasks including criticism, entertainment, and cathartic release all within the context of social acceptability and cultural competence.

It is worth noting that while typically in Akan society certain proscriptions on incendiary speech would make it very difficult to fully express oneself in a public space, there are certain organized times/spaces wherein one may speak truth to power. One such occasion is the *Apoɔ* festival. During this festival, the common person is absolved of regular restrictions upon speech and is allowed to criticize or even insult the traditional rulers of the society. This festival serves as a cathartic release wherein the voiceless have the opportunity to release pent up tension. In *Nkratoɔ*, Lucky Mensah is similarly able to provide a degree of cathartic relief—not only for himself but also for the portion of the listening audience who, due to their cultural and communicative competence, are able to commiserate in the common plight facing them collectively.

In this chapter, we will analyze the tools used by Lucky Mensah as an exemplification of the changing modes of political communication in Africa. Indeed, citizens have changed from passive recipient position due to several factors “including interest groups in civil society,” the “strengthening of organized public participation,” the “introduction of the Internet,” and mobile telecommunications (Windeck 2010, p. 19). According to Windeck, due to such factors, the political communication “structures have shifted from a ‘top-down approach’ to a polycentric communications system” (Windeck 2010, p. 19). We argue that Mensah’s *Nkratoɔ* takes advantage of this changing landscape to take part in political communication. While the media and context are different, his analogous role as the spokesperson/intermediary is similar to that of the traditional *okyeame* ‘spokesperson/intermediary’ as mentioned previously. As such, we will first look at the linguistic repertoire that he employs with specific reference to proverbs, idioms, metaphors, and analogies. Then, we will turn our attention to what these tools are used for in terms of allusion and insinuation as a means of singing truth to the empowered and the disempowered in an African context.

## Analysis of the Song *Nkratoɔ*

### Proverbs

One of the primary vehicles used for political communication in *Nkratoɔ* is the use of proverbs. The text of the song is replete with proverbial utterances in whole or in part. In this initial section, we will focus on Lucky Mensah's use of proverbs in his overall creation of a political communication dialogue whereby the empowered may be taken to task and the disempowered may be given voice.

The first proverb is:

3. Apumpuo n-ko-hyia nanka; [...] apumpuo  
centipede IMPER-EGR-meet puff adder; [...] centipede
- a-m-ma oo, nanka amma oo  
COMPL-NEG-come whether puff adder COMPL-NEG-come whether
- 'The centipede should go meet the puff adder; whether it was the centipede that didn't come, or the puff adder didn't come.'

This rephrased proverb, which is the first half of the utterance continued in example (23), is expressive of a situation in which one expects something to happen but ends up waiting in vain. This is the proverb that Lucky Mensah chooses to open the song with as a foreshadowing of the critique that is to come. In short, this proverb expresses the idea that, while many had high hopes for President Mills' tenure as president, the object of those hopes and aspirations never materialized for himself and many others.

The next proverb is probably the first use of insinuation in the song:

4. See ano a ye-de bo bosea no,  
So it is mouth REL 1PL-take strike loan CD,
- £-n-ye eno ara na ye-de tua?  
3SG.INAN-NEG-be that just FOC 1PL-take pay?
- 'Is it not the case that the mouth that we use to ask for a loan is not the same one that we use to pay it back?'

While typically the form of this proverb is in the affirmative, Mensah phrases it in the form of an interrogative construction. The significance of the proverb is that Mensah is taking President Mills to task for his unfulfilled promises made during campaigning. The central idea is that a promise is like a debt that is owed and just as easily as he opened his mouth to make promises, it is that very same mouth that he should use to make good on the debt and pay (i.e., fulfill his promises). However, now that he has gotten what he wanted, he seems to now be speaking with an entirely different mouth. Here, it is worth noting that, in Akan, the word for truth is *nokore* (literally "one mouth"). The veiled insinuation is that President Mills has not been following this unwritten rule of the maintenance of good social relations through the maintenance of trust. In other words, he is figuratively using one mouth

to get what he wants and then another mouth when people come to collect on the promises that he made. As such, Mensah, in an indirect way and without mentioning anyone's name, is saying that President Mills is both untrustworthy and unreliable.

5. Ahwede Abenaa ede ε-n-kɔ-si nkɔn.  
 Sugar-cane Abenaa sweetness 3SG.INAN-NEG-EGR-stand end  
 "Abenaa sugarcane is not sweet from the bottom to the end of the stem."

This proverb suggests that while President Mills and those of his inner circle may be enjoying the sweetness of their power, position, and privilege for now, eventually all things come to an end. While the means by which their positions will come to an end is not stated explicitly, it is known by anyone cursorily familiar with recent or ancient history that such a removal can come by either lawful or unlawful means.

6. Faako a ye-kyekyere-e aboa no,  
 same-place REL 1PL-tie-tie-COMPL animal DEF  
 ɛho ara na ye-gyae no  
 there just FOC 1PL-leave 3SG  
 "The same place that we tied up the animal is the very same place that it is released."

This proverb is an oblique reference to the idea that just as President Mills was placed in his position, he can just as easily be let go. Implicit in this proverb is the idea of peaceful removal rather than by other more desperate means. This is due to the fact that President Mills was elected lawfully. As such, just as he was placed in his position by means of the ballot box, he can be removed. Therefore, he can be removed by means of the vote if the people's concerns are not adequately addressed.

7. Sedee nantwie dua n-ka ne to no  
 Manner cow tail NEG-remain 3SG.POSS rump CD  
 in which  
 ɛno ara na ε-n-gyina ɔkɔmfɔ nsam'  
 such just FOC 3SG-NEG-stand diviner/healer hand-inside  
 "Just as the cow's tail doesn't remain on his rump, so it is that it will not remain in the traditional diviner/healer's hand"

In Akan *bodua* "cow/horse tail switch" and other African cultures such as that of the Yorùbá *irùkèrè* "cow/horse tail switch," Igbo *otufe* "cow/horse tail switch," Bakôngo *nseša* "cow/horse tail switch," isiZulu/isiXhosa *itshoba* "cow/horse tail switch," the cow or horse tail represents a potent symbol of authority in that just as an animal uses its tail to swat away pests, so too should the holder of the cow-tail switch be able to drive away negative forces and energies from

him/herself and the community at large. However, the implication is that holding a symbol of authority should not be thought of as a permanent state of affairs. Given the fact that such a symbol of authority was not even able to stay with the cow—its rightful owner—obviously it will not remain in the hands of the traditional diviner/healer permanently. In the use of this proverb, Mensah is using a deep cultural reference to draw an analogy between similar situations. The implication is that just as President Mills was elected, he can be removed given that the only constant in the world is change and, indeed, no situation is permanent.

|    |          |            |          |              |       |     |
|----|----------|------------|----------|--------------|-------|-----|
| 8. | Abaa     | a          | ye-de    | bo-o         | Takyi | no, |
|    | stick    | REL        | 1PL-take | strike-COMPL | T.    | CD  |
|    | Ye-de    | be-bo      | Baa      | da           | bi.   |     |
|    | 1PL-take | FUT-strike | B.       | day          | INDEF |     |

"The stick that we use to beat Takyi will be used to strike Baa one day."

This proverb is an allusion to how ill treatment can and will be meted out equally across the board. This is a logical extension of the former proverb which mentioned how the cow tail—a pervasive traditional symbol of authority—did not remain with the cow, it also will not remain in the hand of the traditional diviner/healer. In a similar fashion, the way in which the people of Ghana are suffering, one day the perceived perpetrator will suffer in like fashion. The intent of this veiled threat seems to be as a means of getting the then president Mills to understand the impermanent and precarious nature of his position and how the law of reciprocity (known in classical Africa as  $\text{Maat}$  'Maat') is no respecter of persons. In Ancient  $\text{Kmt}$  "Land of Black People (i.e., Ancient Egypt)"  $\text{Maat}$  "Maat" was the world's first legal and moral system encompassing the 7 cardinal virtues of truth, justice, righteousness/propriety, order, balance, harmony, and reciprocity. The 42 declarations of innocence formed a core aspect of the articulation and understanding of  $\text{Maat}$  "Maat."

|    |                    |         |              |       |          |      |       |
|----|--------------------|---------|--------------|-------|----------|------|-------|
| 9. | Se                 | obi     | de           | wo    | ko-hwe   | nkwa | a,    |
|    | If                 | someone | take         | 2SG   | EGR-look | life | COND, |
|    | Ye-m-m-fa          | no      | nkohwe       | owuo. |          |      |       |
|    | 1PL-IMPER-NEG-take | 3SG     | NEG-EGR-look | death |          |      |       |

"If someone takes you to go look at life, you don't take him/her to go look at death."

In yet another reference to the law of reciprocity ( $\text{Maat}$  "Maat"), the implication here is that by virtue of the mandate to rule via lawful elections, President Mills has been blessed with an opportunity which is analogous to having been taken to go look at life. However, in his apparent lack of appreciation, rather than returning the favor by taking the country to also look at life, he is showing the citizenry nothing but death. This proverb expresses the frustration that Mensah and others may have felt in having their high hopes and good faith dashed.

10. Wo-sa akapoma a, dwa mu  
 2SG-dance akapoma-dance COND slaughter inside  
 "If you do the *akapoma* dance, exert energy."

*Akapoma* is a type of traditional music with specific characteristic features. Notably, when dancing *akapoma*, it is expected that one put forth an earnest effort to jump up high to show that one is serious about performing the dance. If the dance is done halfheartedly, the dancer in question may be considered as being fake or artificial. Here the picture the composer is trying to paint is that President Mills is not seriously giving effort to manage the economy of the country. As a result, nothing appears to be going well with the citizenry and untold hardship is now the order of the day for the common person. In other words, if he should aspire to be president, once he has that high honor bestowed upon him, he should act with all of his heart and soul rather than merely perfunctorily going through the motions.

11. Se wo yafunu ye wo ya a,  
 If 2SG.POSS stomach do 2SG pain COND  
 na wo-a-n-nwene wo se a, ye-n-hunu  
 CONJ 2SG-COMPL-NEG-bare 2SG teeth COND, 1PL-NEG-see  
 wo mmobo  
 2SG.POSS pity  
 "If your stomach aches and you don't bare your teeth, you will not be pitied."

This proverb is an apparent shift away from the previous lambasting of President Mills for Mensah to justify the reasons why he (Mensah) has said all that he has said thus far. In other words, "The squeaky wheel gets the grease." As such, if Mensah keeps quiet through all of his personal suffering, no one will know what he and others are going through and, thus, no one will sympathize or empathize with the terrible state of affairs that they are experiencing.

12. Okoto re-wea, ne mma re-wea;  
 crab PROG-crawl, 3SG.POSS children PROG-crawl  
 Na hwan na o-be-gye ataataa?  
 CONJ who FOC 3SG-FUT-receive toddling

'The crab is crawling; his/her children are crawling; who is going to help the other to walk steadily?

The crab by nature crawls around with its underside often scraping the ground. And if the crab is crawling along on the ground and its children are also crawling in a similar fashion then who is going to lead or demonstrate to the other how to stand up properly and walk? The use of this proverb can be understood in reference to statements and accusations by people that the pace at which John Evans Atta Mills, the President, was moving the economy of the state was too slow. President Mills, as the elected leader of the country, is required to be proactive in major decisions

affecting the management of the economy to get it on track in the shortest possible time to reduce the load on his people. Alternately, this proverb could be viewed as a reference to the need for someone to speak up rather than going along with the order of the day. The *ɔkɔtɔ* “crab” is representative of the President who should be a good role model for the citizens of the nation, figuratively represented as the *mma* “children” of the crab. However, when the *ɔkɔtɔ* “crab” is crawling and the *mma* “children” are crawling, there is a need for someone to stand up and take charge of the situation. This proverb again invokes Mensah’s self-justification for taking the initiative of saying what needs to be said, albeit in a culturally appropriate manner of being sufficiently deferential while maintaining the spirit of the grievances to be conveyed to the empowered. By the same token, Mensah is justifying his position to the disempowered by appealing to the need for his, perhaps disconcerting, lyrics to be sung nevertheless. In other words, Mensah refuses to join the crawlers on the ground, even though the nation’s role model is unwilling or unable to take a stand and show the way. Another interpretation is that Mensah is referring to party insiders of various types who are close to the president but rather than offering sage advice for the benefit of the country, they may be simply allowing the status quo to remain in place so that they can profit individually.

13. Ekom ye ya  
hunger do pain  
'Hunger is painful.'

In comparison to others, this proverb is relatively self-explanatory. In short, one of the core duties expected of the President is to ensure an environment in which the common people are able to earn a living and feed themselves. The fact that this is, apparently, not the case under President Mills has led to the citing of this proverb to make plain that the people of the nation are suffering and unable to provide for themselves and their families.

14.   Wo-a-n-nya                     biribi                     a-m-ma                     no  
       2SG-COMPL-NEG-obtain   something           COMPL-NEG-give       3SG  
       a,                     wo-n-san           n-wia                     w'ase.  
       COND,               2SG-NEG-return   NEG-steal           2SG.POSS'in-law  
       ‘‘If you aren’t able to give something to your in-law, you should not steal from her  
       (on top of your inability to fulfill your obligations).’’

The implication is that in Akan culture, it would be expected that a dutiful son-in-law would be ready, willing, and able to give a token of respect and appreciation to one's mother-in law. If, for some reason, you are unable to fulfill that obligation, do not turn round to steal what she has. In traditional African societies, particularly among the Akan people of Ghana, the social and cultural expectation is that if a man visits his mother-in-law and he is about to leave, he will at least offer her a present

in the form of cash or in kind. If during the visit you are unable to offer her anything, the expectation is that you go away quietly, and not that you try to stealthily take something belonging to her away from her. Such an act is always considered abominable, shameful, and unpardonable. In the context of the song, the implication made by Mensah is that this is what President John Evans Atta Mills seems to be doing to the nation and the populace. First and foremost, he is not taking care of his responsibilities to the state and the people. Instead, he seems to be rather depleting what the state already has. Instead of providing the people with the necessities of life, he goes about tormenting them with high taxes, high tolls, high fuel prices, and high prices of goods and services.

15.   Wo-a-ye           a-ma           dondo           afono           Tigare.  
       2SG-PERF-do   PERF-cause   hourglass-drum   exasperate   T.  
       "You have caused the hourglass drum to be exasperating to Tigare."

This proverb means that Mensah—and presumably others for whom he has taken on the role of their *de facto* mouthpiece—is fed up with the real and/or perceived actions and inactions of their apparently inept president. The cultural background of this proverb is that *Tigare* (a Divinity originating in northern Ghana) uses the *dondo* "hourglass talking drum" because it helps in his orchestra to facilitate the spirit medium's possession. While typically, the hourglass drum would be favored by the divinity, due to excess, even *Tigare* finds it intolerable. Understanding this proverb, as with several others, requires a degree of cultural competence wherein knowledge of background information and the cultural milieu are keys to understanding what Lucky Mensah is attempting to convey. In short, the people are fed up and have had enough of President Mills' inattentiveness and neglect of their needs just as *Tigare* has become tired of the *dondo* "hourglass talking drum." Even something that may have been tolerated in the past, when done to excess it can become irksome.

16.   Aduane   n-ni           fie   a,           mmofra   n-tena           fie  
       food   NEG-located   home   COND,   children   NEG-stay   home  
       "When there is no food in the house, children don't stay in the house."

The meaning of this proverb is much more transparent and is a commentary on the current state of affairs whereby there is large-scale emigration out of Ghana in search of greener pastures and brighter horizons. This proverb is cited to draw an analogy to how in the same way the children will not remain in a house when there is no sustenance to be had, similarly, citizens will not stay in a country in which they feel that they cannot earn a living. Because of the ongoing and enduring economic hardships felt in Ghana, people are emigrating indiscriminately out of the country. As an alarming example of this phenomenon of mass emigration, according to a UN report from Ghana's Minister of Interior, Honorable Owusu-Ankomah, "In the past decade, Ghana is estimated to have lost 50 % of its professional nurses to the United

Kingdom, United States of America and Canada” (Owusu-Ankomah 2006, p. 4). Similarly, in an online news article from Ghana News Agency, “According to European Union estimates, 33.8 % of emigrants from Ghana living in OECD countries possess medium skills while 27.6 % have high skills with only 3 % of Ghanaian emigrants having no skills” (GNA 2015). Looking specifically at 2008–2012, during the time period of the Mills regime, there were 121,000 Ghanaians residing in the United States alone (Gambino et al. 2012, p. 2). Poverty and unemployment are seen as the sources of this brain drain. According to Adusei, “available data indicate that nearly 30 % of Ghanaians still live within the high poverty zone (i.e., less than \$2 a day). In the three northern regions 70 % of the people are believed to be living on less than \$1 a day while 28 % of the people in the southern part of Ghana continue to live on less than a dollar a day” (Adusei 2012, p. 2). Drawing a parallel to the proverb, in the same way children will come to the house and remain there when they are well provided for, Ghanaians may find it easier to return to the country or not leave in the first place if they enjoy a decent living for themselves and their families. In appealing to President Mills, Mensah is imploring him to do something to remedy the current state of affairs and to be the provider that the country needs so desperately.

- |     |              |                 |       |            |              |
|-----|--------------|-----------------|-------|------------|--------------|
| 17. | Ye-a-hu      | adowa           | mmɔbɔ | a-ma       | ye-a-di      |
|     | 1PL-PERF-see | antelope        | pity  | PERF-cause | 1PL-PERF-eat |
|     | nkwan        | hunu.           |       |            |              |
|     | soup         | worthless/empty |       |            |              |

“We have pitied the antelope causing us to eat soup without meat.”

This proverb is a reference to the grace that President Mills was shown by the populace in electing him which has inadvertently led to an unfavorable situation for those same people. This proverb expresses regret in that rather than taking a decision that may have been advantageous to themselves (i.e., by electing another candidate), they elected President Mills and are now suffering the consequences of that decision.

- |     |                    |           |     |               |
|-----|--------------------|-----------|-----|---------------|
| 18. | ɛ-n-kyɛ            | n-kyɛ     | wɔ  | n'afe.        |
|     | 3SG.INAN-NEG-delay | NEG-delay | has | 3SG.POSS'year |

“‘It won’t take long,’ ‘It won’t take long’ has its year.”

The above proverb is probably the closest thing to a threat contained in the song. Its use is roughly akin to saying “One day you’ll get yours!” Again, the proverb sums up the ideas of reciprocity and a recognition of the precarious perch of those in power who can be removed by the people who put them in office. The force of the proverb comes from its ambiguity in that it is both pointed yet open-ended at the same time.

## Idioms

This section will focus on the use of idioms in *Nkratoɔ*. Similar to Mensah's use of proverbs, he is able to draw from a deep reservoir of the Akan language's linguistic resources employed in singing truth to power and the otherwise disempowered.

The first idiom to be discussed is:

19.    ɔ-de-ne-ho  
       3SG-take-3SG.POSS-body  
       “He/she possesses himself/herself”

This idiom is a common appellation to indicate someone who is not subordinate to anyone. In the context of the current song, it is a depiction of President Mills who seems to behaving as though he has no one to whom he must answer. Someone to whom this appellation is used is understood to be a person who cannot be challenged by anyone. In characterizing President Mills in this way, the artist hopes to sensitize the listener to the perception that rather than being a leader who governs well and responds to the needs of the people, he is rather behaving as though he is not beholden to those who elected him to his position.

The next idiom is:

20.    Wo-a-ye            ama            m'afidie            a-yi            kɔkɔsakyi.  
       2SG-PERF-do    PERF-cause    1SG.POSS'trap    PERF-catch    vulture  
       “You have caused my trap to catch a vulture.”

The explanation behind the use of this idiom is that, in Akan culture, the vulture is a bird that commands little to no respect. In one Akan proverb, it is tagged as a foolish procrastinator because it is never able to carry out its plans. Its principal motto in place of “catch phrase” therefore is *ɔkyena mesi me dan* “I will build my house tomorrow.” This is because it is only when it threatens to rain that it hatches plans to build a shelter for itself. But as soon as the rains subside, that spells the end of his plans. The vulture mainly feeds on carcasses and at dump sites and is therefore referred to as a filthy scavenger. As a result, its meat is also regarded as filthy and unwholesome and therefore an abomination for human consumption. For one's trap to catch a vulture therefore means the person has worked in vain because one can neither sell it nor eat it with his family. The implication is that, at the outset, while the election of President Mills seemed to be a possibly fruitful venture, when all was said and done, it ended up being an exercise in futility.

21.    Ye-se            “penpen    wo-se            no            pen”  
       1PL-say    penpen    3PL-say    3SG.INAN    pen  
       “We say ‘penpen is said like pen’.”

This expression is to say that the truth must be said as it is and not distorted or changed in any way. The idiom thus paves the way for the lyrical upbraiding which is to follow in the song.

22. Kɔ-yi      no      asotire  
go-remove      3SG      deafness  
"Go tell him"

This idiom arises from the idea that a person's not knowing about a situation is akin to deafness. Therefore, to tell someone about something is to figuratively remove his/her deafness. As such, the imaginary *Uncle Tawia*, being the younger brother of President Atta Mills should be close enough to him to ensure that any message conveyed through him would eventually reach the president.

23. Danka      no      ara      be-se      ne      torodo.  
gourd      DEF      just      FUT-say      3SG.POSS      pouring sound  
"The gourd will make a pouring sound for itself."

This idiom uses onomatopoeia in that *torodo* is the sound that comes from a gourd when someone is pouring a fluid from it into another container. Obviously, the gourd as an inanimate object cannot speak by itself unless it is helped by somebody. In this case, Lucky Mensah, via his song *Nkratoɔ*, expresses popular sentiment for those who do not have the means to do so for themselves. This is a play on the proverb *Obi nse torodo mma toa* "One does not say torodo for the bottle." Essentially, what is being conveyed is that although, for now, Mensah is playing the role of *ɔkyeame* "spokes-person/intermediary" on behalf of those who are currently voiceless, in the future the people will speak for themselves by means of their votes.

## Analogies

This section of the chapter deals with analogies that cannot be neatly grouped into the two previous sections as they are not necessarily institutionalized proverbs or idioms. However, they comprise analogous situations that Lucky Mensah employs via artistic license to paint a picture of his grievances and those of the common Ghanaian against the governance structure personified in President Mills.

24. Na      ye-gyina      kwantimfi      a      yerewuɔ      ee  
CONJ      1PL-stand      road-middle      REL      1PL-PROG-die      EMPH  
'And we stand in the middle of the road dying.'

The idea behind this analogy is that we are suffering (dying) waiting for something that apparently will not come. Through the deliberate utilization of

hyperbole (given the fact that the song was recorded several years ago and Mensah, himself, is still alive and kicking), Mensah set the tone for the rest of the song to convey that hyperbole and exaggeration can be deftly used to convey a deeper truth that the artist wishes to get across. Further, Mensah conveys the idea that people actually may die or be dying otherwise avoidable deaths as a result of poor governance.

25. Yε-suro                      kuntunkuni,                      ye-n-kɔ                      n-kɔ-fira  
 1PL-fear                      funeral-cloth                      1PL-IMPER-go                      IMPER-ERG-wrap  
 nnwera  
 white-calico-cloth

“We fear wearing funeral cloth, let’s go put on white calico cloth (of celebration).”

The core idea of this analogy is that the people did not want to vote for the other candidate represented by the funeral cloth. Therefore, they elected President Mills, represented by the white calico cloth. The subsequent line is a continuation of this thought saying *Yaanom adee nsae, na yerehwehwe nnwera a, yenhunu* “Kinsmen it’s not yet late, but when we are looking for white calico cloth, we can’t find it” is an oblique reference to the idea that although we thought that we were getting something to celebrate about, in the end, there is no such thing to be found. Here, we find that Mensah’s deft use of allusion and cultural reference are again used to foreshadow the bombshell that he wishes to drop in the forthcoming lyrics.

26. ɔ-pam-boɔ,                      me                      ntoma                      a-te~te,  
 NOM-sew-stone                      1SG.POSS                      cloth                      PERF-tear~tear
- Yε-m-fa                      n-kɔ                      ɔ-ye-adee-yie                      a,  
 1PL-IMPER-take                      IMPER-go                      NOM-do-thing-well                      COND,
- Panee                      a                      ɔ-de                      be-pam                      no                      ne                      tokuro  
 needle                      REL                      3SG-take                      FUT-sew                      3SG                      3SG.POSS                      hole
- no                      a-di                      ntuhya  
 3SG                      PERF-do                      mixed-up

“One-who-can-sew-a-stone, my cloth is torn, let’s take it to an adept tailor, the needle that we would use to sew it, the eye of the needle has gotten mixed up.”

The main point of this analogy is that the people have encountered difficulties and are not able to find those who have the wherewithal or the necessary tools to help them.

27. ɔko                      yi,                      ye-se                      ε-n-ye                      wo                      ko  
 Fight                      this,                      1PL-say                      3SG.INAN-NEG-be                      2SG                      fight

“They say that this fight is not your fight.”

In this analogy, Mensah is saying that taking up this cause of speaking for the common Ghanaian is analogous to a fight. Anticipating that some may say that it is not his fight, he thinks otherwise and rather argues that it is his responsibility to play the role that he is playing.

28. Nso                      ye-de              kasa-de,              n-sem-de-de,              nkɔmmɔ-de,  
Also                      1PL-take              speech-sweet              PL-word-sweet~sweet,              conversation-sweet
- N-nwɔmdede              re-twe              amansan              nsono              ase  
PL-song-sweet~sweet              PROG-pull              all-nations              intestines              under
- "Yet they employed sweet talk, sweet words, sweet conversation and sweet music to drag through people's intestines."

Of course, the description of the above idiom is not literal nor could it be in the sense that talk, conversations, and other such intangible phenomena cannot physically be pulled through one's intestines. Rather, this is an appeal to the senses to convey the manner in which deceit was used to win the elections tantamount to shoving a veritable blitzkrieg of campaign tactics down people's throats to win.

29. Ye-a-pia              wo;              wo-a-foro              dua              yi              awie  
1PL-PERF-push              2SG;              2SG-PERF-climb              tree              this              PERF-finish  
Wo-te              a,              wo              nko              ara              na  
2SG-sit              COND,              2SG              only              just              FOC              2SG-eat.
- "We have pushed you up; you have finished climbing the tree. When you sit, you are the only one who eats."

This line is an allusion to the well-known proverb *Woforo dua pa a, na yepia wo* "When you climb a good tree, we push you up." Again, in this analogy, being elected to office is portrayed as being similar to being pushed up a fruitful tree. However, now that President Mills has been elected, he is seen as enjoying the proverbial fruits of his position while everyone else who put him in that position is left out. This imagery is built up on the next analogy:

30. Ebinom              a-didi              a-mee,              nanso              ebi              nso              re-bre  
Some              PERF-eat              PERF-satisfied              DISJ              some              also              PROG-tire  
pa              ara  
very              just  
Ebi              afono              a-bo              a-ma~ma,              ebi              nso              afono              a-to-to  
Some              cheeks              PERF-strike              NOM-full~full              some              also              cheeks              PERF-fall~fall  
emu.  
inside
- "Some people have eaten to satisfaction, but others are also suffering very much. Some people's cheeks have grown fat, while others' are sunken in."

This analogy is again drawing a comparison between the benefits enjoyed by those in the ruling party vs. those who do not have access to the economic gains attendant with political power.

31. Hwe se Agya a-m-mee na ekom de ne  
 Look that father COMPL-NEG-satisfied DISJ hunger take 3SG.POSS  
 m-ma  
 PL-child

"See to it that father doesn't eat to satisfaction while his children are left hungry."

The analogy above further extends previous references to the disparity between those who are benefitting from President Mills' position vis-à-vis those who have received nothing for their good faith in electing him.

32. O-di sika boto na ye-re-we dwan-funu.  
 3SG-eat gold bag CONJ 1PL-PROG-chew sheep-corpse

"He is eating (spending) a bag of money and we are chewing on a sheep's corpse."

This analogy is playing on the fact that the same word is used for both to eat and to spend *di*. This is a continued idea found throughout the song as reiterated at several junctures.

33. Yen boto to re-te~te.  
 1PL.POSS bag bottom PROG-tear-tear

'The bottom of our bag is tearing.'

This last idiom is saying that the people are not only losing what they have (i.e., the contents of the bag), due to President Mills, they are also losing the means by which they could store anything else (due to their raggedy bag being torn). This is another blatant castigation of President Mills while simultaneously functioning as a vivid depiction of the struggles endured by Ghanaians.

While there are several other analogies throughout the duration of the song that may not be categorized as institutionalized proverbs are idioms, suffice it to say that those not mentioned specifically are, for the most part, iterations of common themes covered previously.

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## Conclusion: Overall Significance and Music as Criticism

Popular music serves a necessary function as a platform upon which the ills and frustrations of society may be addressed. As such, it plays a role in the unification of the citizenry. As seen in *Nkratoɔ*, it can also work to undermine the power and prestige of the ruling government by both singing truth to power and the disempowered in Africa. In using music as a tool to speak truth to power, notwithstanding questions of his integrity due to his seeming flip-flopping of positions, Lucky Mensah can be seen in the light of some African musicians as social critics.

A few notable names among such musicians include Fẹ́lá Aníkúlápò Kúṭì of Nigeria, Nana Kwame Ampadu of Ghana, Mariam Makeba of South Africa, Majek Fashek of Nigeria, Agboti Yao Mawuena of Togo, and Comfort Amanor of Ghana. By the same token, in *Nkrato*, Mensah is like the traditional *ɔkyeame* “spokesperson/intermediary” through whom the masses are able to communicate to the traditional ruler. This begs the question of in what way is Mensah similar to and different from an *ɔkyeame* “spokesperson/intermediary?”. The first way in which they are similar is in their very function as intermediary between the ruler and the ruled. The *ɔkyeame* is known to use proverbs, allusions, idioms, and analogies in fulfilling this role (Yankah 1995). As Mensah does the same, it can be argued that he and the traditional *ɔkyeame* employ similar approaches between similar parties (i.e., between the ruler(s) and the ruled). In turn, the imaginary Uncle Tawia is called upon to play the same role. By virtue of this allusion to traditional structures, we are made aware that in traditional African societies, via representatives and/or in person, the citizens have channels of recourse to express themselves and their concerns to those assigned to be their leaders. Similarly, they even have the right to destool their rulers—a fact which is built into the traditional governance system—when said rulers stray from their constitutional mandate. This democratic principle wherein the people have a voice is extended into contemporary times by means of new media including music which is disseminated online and via music sharing apps. It should be noted that the foundation of democracy itself originates in Africa (Tiky 2011). According to Diop, Greek democracy which found expression in Athens “was the result of the legislative work of Solon, who first took a trip to Egypt to draw inspiration from the laws of that country” (Diop 1987, p. 27). The African sources of Greek thought were attested by the Greeks, Romans, Sicilians, etc., themselves including first century CE author Diodorus Siculus who wrote “The Egyptians . . . were also greatly admired by the Greeks. For this reason, Greeks of the highest repute for learning were eager to visit Egypt, that they might gain knowledge of its noteworthy laws and customs. . . including Pythagoras of Samos and even Solon the lawgiver” (Asante 2007, p. xv). Beyond the origins of democracy before the birth of Democritus, it is imperative that, as scholars, we do not conflate notions and realities of Eurasian monarchies with the empirical realities on the ground in classical or traditional Africa. Indeed, using the Mossi state as a case study, Tiky outlines the nature of the distribution of powers in an African constitutional monarchy arguing that “This constitutional provision was necessary to make sure that all social classes were represented, thus eliminating the possibility of power being confiscated by the nobility” (Tiky 2011, p. 11). For more on democratic representation in African constitutional monarchies, as well as its philosophical basis in the context of communal land ownership, see Tiky (2011).

As we find democratic principles in both ancient and traditional Africa, we can find that, indeed, in modern Africa in general and in Ghana in particular, popular music now serves as a platform from which representatives of common opinion can

address concerns pertinent to the ordinary citizen. In doing so, they are able to turn the tables and transform the ostensibly disempowered into a powerful united voice. By the same token, they are able to transform the powerful into passive listeners. We argue that Lucky Mensah's *Nkratoɔ* is an attempt at utilizing the transformative power of music as political communication whereby it is a dialogue rather than a one-way monologue. He accomplishes this by singing truth to both the empowered and the disempowered.

## Uncle Tawia Gye Nkratoɔ Yi

Uncle Tawia, gye nkratoɔ yi  
 Ebuo! Tawia ee, gye nkratoɔ yi  
 Ma enko mma wo nua panin no se  
 Yerebre oo, enko yie,  
 Afei dee ato nkoden o

x2

Se ɔye panin o, se kakra o,  
 Yen dee, yennim mpo  
 Nso, wo dee, ka kyere no oo  
 Efise won nyinaa ara de Ata

x2

Uncle Tawia, gye nkratoɔ yi  
 Ebuo! Tawia ee, gye nkratoɔ yi  
 Ma enko mma wo nua panin no se  
 Yerebre oo, na enko yie,  
 Afei dee, ato nkoden o

x2

Se ɔye panin o, se kakra o,  
 Me dee, mennim mpo  
 Nso, wo dee, ka kyere no o  
 Efise won nyinaa ara de Ata

x2

((Sugartone))

Apumpuo nkohyia nanka  
 Ebuo na amanfoɔ ee  
 Apumpuo amma oo nanka amma oo  
 Na yegyina kwantimfi a yerewuo ee  
 Yesuro kuntunkuni  
 Yenko nkofira nnwera  
 Yaanom adee nsaeɛ,  
 na yerehwehwe nnwera a yenhunu  
 Opamboɔ, me ntoma atete,  
 Yemfa nko ɔyeadeeyie a,  
 Panee a ɔde bepam no ne ntokuro no adi ntuhya  
 x2

Nti Tawia, gye nkratoɔ yi  
 Ebuo! Tawia ee, gye nkratoɔ yi

Ma enko mma wo nua panin no se  
 Yerebre oo, enko yie,  
 Afei dee, ato nkoden o  
 x3  
 Se oye panin o, se kakra o,  
 Yen dee, yennim mpo  
 Nso, wo dee, ka kyere no o  
 Efise won nyinaa ara de Ata  
 x2

2nd part  
 Oko yi, yese enye wo ko  
 Nso yede kasade, nsemdede, nkommode,  
 Enwomdede retwe amansan nsono ase:  
 Yeapia wo, woaforo dua yi awie  
 Wote a, wo nko ara na wodi.  
 Se ano a yede bo bosea no,  
 Enye eno ara na yede tua?  
 Ebinom adidi amee, nanso ebi nso rebre pa ara.  
 Ebi afono abo amama, ebi nso afon-fono atoto emu;  
 Kae oo, na ahwedee Abenaa ede enkosi nkon.  
 Faako a yskykyeree aboa no,  
 Eho ara na yegyae no.

Sedee nantwie dua nka ne to no,  
 Eno ara na engyina okomfoo nsam.  
 Abaa a yede bo Takyi no,  
 Yede bebo Baa da bi.  
 Se obi de wo kohwe nkwa a,  
 Yemmfa no kohwe owuo.  
 Emmere bi rebaba a danka no ara bese ne torodo.

Nti Tawia, gye nkrato yi  
 Ebuo! Tawia ee, gye nkrato yi  
 Ma enko mma wo nua panin no se  
 Yerebre oo, enko yie,  
 Afei dee, ato nkoden o.  
 x2  
 Se oye panin o, se kakra o,  
 Me dee, mennim mpo  
 Nso, wo dee, ka kyere no o  
 Efise won nyinaa ara de Ata  
 x2

Yese penpen wose no pen  
 Wosa akapoma a, dwa mu  
 Se wo yafunu ye wo ya a,  
 Na woannwene wo se a, yenhunu wo mmobo  
 Woakyere yen aka dan  
 Nea wokaee ara na merekyere yi  
 Nanso okoto rewaa, ne mma rewaa,  
 Na hwan na obegye ataataa?

((Kasahare))

Enko yie, woate?  
 Tikya Class one, ode-ne-ho gbagbladza,  
 Abo me pusa, ama meda koraa a, mentumi nna,  
 Mpanimfoa kae, wose: "ekom ye ya".  
 Hwe se Agya ammee na ekom de ne mma  
 Woanya dwetire na wode rewe kyinkingya  
 Na wei, wei ara yede pia kaa?  
 Asem nokore yese yento sebe.  
 Woannya bi amma no a, wonsan nwia w'ase.  
 Woaye ama dondo afono Tigare  
 Woaye ama m'afidie yi, ayi kokosakyi.  
 Tawia, bo mmoden ara na koyi no asotire  
 Kyere no se enne dee obiara se enko yie  
 Aduane nni ho a, mmofra ntena fie.  
 Abusuapanin hwe na daakye yeammo wo bayie  
 Yehu adowa mmobo ama yeadi nkwan hunu.  
 Odi sika boto na yerewe dwanfunu.  
 Yebo yen ho mmoden ara nanso yennyaa baabunu.  
 Yen boto to retete.  
 Yen mpaboa ase awe  
 Yeanom nkwan Fofie  
 Yesu koraa a, wonte  
 O! Nti yesu koraa a, wonte?  
 Okay! Enkye nkye wo n'afe.  
 Woate, woate?

## English Translation

Uncle Tawiah receive this message  
 Oo Tawiah, receive this message  
 Let it be known to your elder brother that  
 We are indeed suffering, it is not going well  
 It has now come to real struggle  
 x2

As to whether he is the elder or the younger,  
 We do not even know  
 But you go and tell him  
 Because they are both called Atta.  
 x2

Uncle Tawiah receive this message  
 Oo Tawiah, receive this message  
 Let it be known to your elder brother that  
 We are indeed suffering, it is not going well  
 It has now come to real struggle  
 x2

As to whether he is the elder or the younger,  
 We do not even know  
 But you go and tell him  
 Because they are all called Atta.

x2

The centipede was asked to meet puff adder  
Ei! Fellow citizens, whether it is the centipede that didn't come or the puff adder that didn't come,  
There we are dying in the middle of the pathway.  
We are afraid of black cloth  
Let's go and put on white calico,  
People, it is not yet night;  
Yet we cannot trace the location of the white calico.

One-able-to-sew-stones, my cloth is torn,  
Let's go give it to One-who-does-things-well,  
The needle he/she would use to sew it, the eye of the needle has gotten mixed up

One-able-to-sew-stones, my cloth is torn,  
Let's go give it to One-who-does-things-well,  
The needle he/she would use to sew it; the eye of the needle has gotten mixed up

So, Uncle Tawiah receive this message  
Oo Tawiah, receive this message  
Let it be known to your elder brother that  
We are indeed suffering, it is not going well  
It has now come to real struggle  
x3

As to whether he is the elder or the younger,  
We do not even know  
But you go and tell him  
Because they are all called Atta.  
x2

They say this battle was not yours;  
Yet they employed sweet talk, sweet words, sweet conversation and sweet music to drag through people's intestines.

We have pushed you, and you have now finished climbing the tree;  
When you pluck, you eat it alone.  
The mouth that is used to contract a loan is not the same mouth that is used to repay it.  
Some have eating to their fill, yet others are really suffering.  
Some have developed bulgy cheeks; others have fallen-in cheeks.  
Remember, for Abenaa sugarcane is not sweet from the bottom to the end of the stem.  
Wherever an animal is tied;  
It is at that same place that it is released.  
Just as the tail of the cattle will not remain at its bottom forever,  
So will it not remain permanently in the hands of the traditional priest!  
The cane that was used to whip Takyi, is the same cane that will be used to whip Baah in the future.  
When someone leads you to see life, you don't lead him to go and see death.  
A time will come when the gourd will be required to speak for itself.

So Tawiah receive this message  
Oo Tawiah, receive this message

Let it be known to your elder brother that  
 We are indeed suffering, it is not going well  
 It has now come to real struggle  
 x2

As to whether he is the elder or the younger,  
 We do not even know  
 But you go and tell him  
 Because they are all called Atta.  
 x2

They say, the truth must be said as it is.  
 When you dance to 'akapoma' articulate it well  
 If your stomach is aching  
 And you do not react to it by showing your teeth who  
 will sympathize with you?  
 You have taught us how to retrieve monies from our debtors  
 Whatever you said is what I am demonstrating  
 Yet the crab is crawling, while the children are also crawling  
 Who is the one to lead in the crawling exercise?

It's not going well; do you hear?  
 Yo! Class one teacher who is a man of himself, Gbagbladza,  
 I am dumb founded making me find it difficult to sleep when I go to bed.  
 Our elders once said, 'hunger is painful'.  
 Look at how the father is satisfied and the children are hungry?  
 You have money but you are spending it on kebab;  
 How do you push a vehicle with this?  
 One is not required to precede the truth with the expression 'excuse me'!  
 If you have nothing to offer your mother-in-law, you don't go ahead to steal from her.  
 You have caused Tigare to be fed up with dondo.  
 You have caused my trap to catch the vulture;  
 Tawiah try hard to let him know,  
 That currently, what everybody is saying is that it is not well.  
 Children do not stay in the house when there is no food.  
 Family head, be careful so that in future you may not be referred to as a wizard.  
 We have sympathized with the antelope only for us to feed on bad soup.  
 He is feeding on gold whilst we are feeding on the carcass of the sheep.  
 We have been doing our best yet we cannot find a virgin woman.  
 The bottom of our pockets are tearing apart  
 The sole of our shoes are worn out  
 We have drunk soup on a Fofie (Friday)  
 Even when we cry he doesn't hear  
 So when we cry doesn't he hear?  
 Alright, things will come to a head in due time  
 Do you hear; do you hear?

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