Freedom to Sing, License to Insult: The Influence of Haló Performance on Social Violence Among the Anlo Ewe

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Introduction

Contemporary approaches to performance in folklore, ethnomusicology, and anthropology define and explain performance events in relation to their sociocultural and symbolic universe, and according to contextual and human dynamics. Although these studies are capable of generating important information on the relationships between artistic events and the larger world in which they are situated, there still remains the problem of a precise determination of the boundaries of genres. The factor of genre distinction is important because it can increase our understanding of the social construction of performance, or the notion of cultural performance (Singer 1972, MacAlloon 1984). The experience of performance as a social process and the blending of genres are two important characteristics identifying performance in Africa, as confirmed by Margaret Drewal in her review of performance studies in Africa (1991:64). However, work in these two areas is incipient. It is, therefore, the purpose of this essay to further our understanding of performance by exploring the unique ways in which the haló of the Anlo-Ewe not only exhibits social conditions but also structures and qualifies them. In this study the multidimensional aspect of haló will be highlighted and explained both as an aesthetic strategy and as an integral component in constructing the social significance of haló performance. In order to achieve this dual end, the study will focus on selective musico-artistic and social elements that distinguish the performance from other Anlo-Ewe musical or performance types, with focus on performance as a medium for generating and escalating social violence. Finally, the study will summarize haló
performance as celebration and affirmation of life, and as a social experience that draws on artistic framing in the consummation of social reality. This approach will thus increase our awareness of the ontological and symbiotic relationships between performance and its sociocultural environment.

Historical background

_Haló_ is musical-dramatic performance popular among the Anlo-Ewe, from ca. 1912 until its official proscription in 1960.¹ The etymology of the name _haló_ (ha + ló, song + proverb) shows three related definitions that cumulatively stress the social consequences of _haló_, that is, the spectacular, the unusual, the precarious, havoc, danger, or challenge.² _Haló_ can be summed up as a multi-media event, a sociomusical drama that involves songs of insult, dance, drumming, mime, poetry, spoken forms, costume, and a variety of visual icons. Although the music is constructed mainly along Anlo-Ewe models, there are special observances, devices, and techniques that are unique to this genre. As will be elaborated later, these devices and related art forms are employed primarily to effect purposes of aggression and violence, and to establish musical superiority. There are rules and procedures that are shared and observed spontaneously in each performance, and most of these procedures are directed toward achieving coherence in performance and toward minimizing on-the-spot violence.³

A performance usually involves two villages or two wards from one village, and is characterized by direct or comic forms of provocation, aggravation, and sung and spoken insults, which are sometimes exaggerated through dramatic enactments. Each _haló_ context is a highly provocative and emotional one, with the two factions and their supporters competing at

¹ Records from the National Archives also show that several musical genres have previously been banned in other societies in Ghana on the consent of the chief(s) and the colonial officers. The _haló_ ban is in accordance with _Acts of Ghana, Criminal Code Act 29, S 295, 1960_.

² There are three basic definitions: “_halòlò_” (big song), “_haló_” (song-proverb), and _haló_ (it is song!).

³ Violence both takes place on the spot and continues long after the performance.
physical, verbal, and musical levels. The numerous police arrests that result from the performance and its related events are further indications of the grave and wider social ramifications of haló. This search for superiority in both physical and musical domains is also often accompanied by magical practices and related machinations against opponents. These practices also frequently involve the acquisitions of “singing gods” (supernatural powers with whom the sources of musical creativity are identified). In addition, individuals or groups also take precautions by fortifying themselves spiritually against enemy attacks (physical or spiritual). The sociodramatic aspect of haló is thus intensified through the physical confrontations, the musical and verbal exchanges, and involvement with the supernatural realm. The performance can, therefore, be described as a unique context for reevaluating and qualifying social and interpersonal relations. Statistics resulting from recent fieldwork show that about 88% of Anlo-Ewe towns have some history of haló, and that about 40% of factions have engaged in the genre more than once. These figures, the official ban, and the lingering of veiled forms of insult in contemporary practices confirm the social significance of the art form in Anlo-Ewe society.

The most common precipitates of haló are: (1) taking of someone’s wife from a different ward, (2) derogatory remarks on the music of another ward, (3) personal insults communicated directly or vaguely in song, and (4) interpersonal hostilities and aggressive posture due to the factor of social competition. Today there are social and musical incidents that intimate haló, but these contemporary examples are quickly contained by the traditional rulers in order to avoid breaking the law. Since each performance bears a cumulative effect, exacerbates a previous one, and carries consequences of forms of physical confrontation outside the performance context, one cannot simply describe haló as a tension-relieving ritual. The features outlined above would, therefore, suggest unique relationships between the performance and the social milieu, and that violence is central to the definition of haló.

**Anlo-Ewe Social Framework**

The traditional society of the Anlo-Ewe, including government and politics, is generally described as a centralized one, with an official headquarters and a paramount chief. The administrative and political
powers and functions of the paramount office are invoked and acknowledged in ceremonial and parastatal contexts that are related to the welfare of the Anlo state and Ghana nation as a whole. The political and social infrastructure is also articulated and exemplified in the four subdivisions (Dusi or We, Mia, Adontri or Dome, and Lasibi or Klobo) of the Anlo state. Each subdivision has its own head or chief, and these heads owe allegiance to the paramount chief, Awoamefia Togbui Adeladza II, and to his assistant, Agbotaguya (“field marshal”). The Anlo society is basically patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal, and the privileges, responsibilities, and achievements of each to (ward) are articulated and celebrated at social and musical levels. A village or town is further divided into a number of wards, each of which has its own heads or leaders (tokɔmegawo, plur.), male and female. Musical participation is among the main social expectations, and since music is an important medium for construction and exhibiting group solidarity and social achievement, the factor of competition seems to constitute an indispensable trait among the performing groups of the different wards. As we have already noted, the element of competition encourages haló.

Forms of Anlo-Ewe musical organization also reflect and support the social hierarchy and patterns summarized above, and ensembles are also formed according to sex, age, occupation, and special interest grouping. The system of government and politics described above does not, however, guarantee a trouble-free society. First of all, the existence of such superstructures represents an overt recognition of the possibilities of interpersonal and intergroup conflicts and other social problems. The division of villages into wards/performing groups is, as noted above, one of the inherent structures that is articulated and transformed into a catalyst that encourages group conflict. Any act, symbolic or real, that infringes on the territorial integrity and group solidarity of one ward is thus quickly interpreted as a challenge or test.

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4 Villages and towns, however, exercise a certain amount of autonomy in many areas of life.

5 See the “Appendix: Guide to Pronunciation and Transliteration” below, for the values of underlined and other letters.

6 See Fiagbedzi 1977 for details on the musical types and social organization.
In familial and interpersonal relationships, disagreements and misunderstandings lead to open quarrel. Apart from the use of verbal insults to correct and direct anger at children, the exchange of insults resides at the core of conflicts among adults. These insults often escalate into physical fights, from which long-term interpersonal hostilities are also generated. Due to the influence of the Anlo-Ewe extended kinship system, a conflict originally involving two individuals thus quickly assumes wider social dimensions. Families are also involved because the Anlo-Ewe system of insulting allows the inclusion of relatives as a form of exacerbating the affective impact of the insult. Although there are guidelines and regulations from village elders and chiefs cautioning that individuals register their complaints for official redress and mediation, individuals can still take the case to an elder who has been endowed with the right to mediate minor differences. This elder, who is also of high moral and social disposition, arbitrates the case with the help of a coterie of other men of good repute. When the case is opened for the village chief, the judgment, referred to as nyadɔ or wɔnudɔ terminates with some form of punishment and retribution, minor and symbolic when compared with the severer result expected when government law enforcement agencies are involved. A final judgment does not, however, rule out the possibility of a repeat of the offense.

One other source of aggression and violence over which the system of rule has limited legal control concerns a situation where individuals attribute the death of a person to the practice of black magic by an imagined or real opponent. In many cases the mishap is perceived as a collective and calculated attempt to undermine and reduce the manpower of the opponent ward. On occasions of some deaths, effort is made to determine the cause or to find a reasonable explanation. The causes and persons behind the death of a person are, however, not easily determined with precision, even in modern civil lawsuits. Today, when a person is drowned, for example, an autopsy in a government hospital is sought. But in spite of medical reports certifying the type and cause of death, the Anlo-Ewe people do not rule out the possibility of the influence of an adverse magical practice by an enemy, who might well be a lifelong friend of the deceased. In this case the death is interpreted as a case of violence, and this cosmological stance is not much different from what has been reported from other parts of
sub-Saharan African societies. In place of a formal system of inquiry into the causes of the death, the people allow (or compel) the suspect murderer to undergo a ritual ordeal known as agbadada. Results of the ordeal, which often confirm the suspicions, are sometimes contested by persons who sympathize with the suspect. Whether the suspicion and allegations are confirmed or not, the factions additionally express their opinions (attacks and counterattacks) through song composition and performance. These performances and singing of songs of insult finally develop into the the haló tradition, which may last for a month or linger up to a year or two.

A Prelude to Haló

In the survey on the Anlo-Ewe politics and government, we saw how individuals take advantage of the medium of song in aggravating situations of conflict. Let us now briefly examine three common causes of haló: wife-taking, interward marriage, and homicide through black magic. While interward marriage is neither forbidden nor sanctioned by any law or regulation, it is considered as an act of threat and challenge to the ward from which the wife is taken. Often these interward marriages raise no issue of contention, but when the incidence increases, then the ward most affected begins to express concern. The concern usually takes the form of the casting of insinuations and veiled attacks in song. The anger, provocation, and challenge are directed toward either an individual opponent or his/her ward as a group. Since the example of marriage across ward boundaries does not represent a particular infraction, there is, therefore, no official channel capable of condemning and punishing the act. The individual thus begins to seek and create his/her own means of vindication and revenge through song.

The employment of song as a medium of redress is a central factor in deciding the gravity, type, and social ramifications of the conflict. This is the case especially when the loyal group of the complainant lends support through a wardwide musical communication of the grievances and aggressive intents. This group support, in turn, aggravates the challenge to

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7 Cf. Heald 1986, Parkin 1986. There are different burial customs observed according to type of death, including that caused by violence.
the other ward, and counterattacks become possible. A wider social dimension of the original conflict is thus created and the entire village becomes an active participant. It is at this juncture that the village chiefs (or chiefs from neutral villages) take the responsibility to call for peace and order, including arrests.

Related to the example of interward marriage is that of wife-snatching, in which a man forcibly takes the wife of another man of a different ward. This is one of the serious threats, challenges, and aggravations against an individual and the ward. Since polygamy is an inherent aspect of the social system and traditional marriages do not require certification from a civil court, traditional authorities are limited in the extent to which they can interfere with such cases. In wife-taking the implications are serious and numerous. The act is perceived as a more direct and assertive form of aggravation that mars the social morale and group prestige of the individual affected. It is also construed as an act premeditated to test, verify, and disdain the collective integrity of the victim's ward. A reaction in a form of counterattack through song performance is therefore the immediate response. There are, however, a few exceptions where, due to the gross outcomes of haló, a group would hold back a counterattack, although this reservation would be construed negatively by the aggressors to their own advantage.

Another example concerns the manner in which individual song composers from the different wards perceive themselves in relation to others. Apart from competition at the group level, there is also competition among individual composers due to the search for musical superiority, a situation that increases tension among these composers from different wards. These composers often take opportunity of the song medium to project their individual images through boast, challenge, and provocation. For instance, the following is an excerpt from a pre-haló song:

EXAMPLE 1
A
1. Miga tsɔ gbɔsusu mianɔ glodzo domme o
   You should not glory in your bigger number
2. Adidi le vie ha wo edada wo kudɔ An ant is tiny but performs its mother’s burial

3. Be “Aklia mate go gbe Says “Aklia which you cannot drag outside

4. Ne hawovi te wo kpo dzi natee If you peer drags you uphill, drag him/her downhill”....

5. Miva made rakontee nami Come, let me explain things to you

6. Mia dze sii be heŋɔ xoŋɔ ye So that you know I am, indeed, an experienced composer.

B
...nukömm, kese sie wɔxɔ adiba le....
...Gazing, like a monkey from whom pawpaw has been snatched....

In Ex. 1 line A1 there is direct reference to the larger size of the opponent ward; this reference is constructed to provoke the opponent. In line A2 the composer and his group accept their status as encoded in the analogy and metaphorical construction. Line A3 introduces a boast of strength, and line 4 completes it by asserting an ability to match an enemy in a duel. In line A6 the composer boasts of his skills and experience, which are calculated to exacerbate anger. The whole text is carefully constructed in such a way that it speaks to the individual (composer for the other ward) and the whole enemy group; this use of second person plural is a common technique in haló, which masks the individual addressed and at the same time provides a context for wider interpretation at the ward level.

B is a momentary interjection of an insult in a normal song composition, a technique common in the non-haló corpus. The unexpected appearance of this text, although brief, carries much weight and potential for inciting haló because of the depth of the insult (personal physical features are among the most affective and incisive according to the haló and general Anlo-Ewe system of insult). This example of exchange of aggressive gestures finally leads to full-scale haló with diverse and grave consequences for both individuals and the society as a whole. Although the composer is basically negotiating his identity among the many vying for social recognition, the situation gets out of hand as they vent anger and trade tirade, boast, and insult through song. For example, the above

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9 This is a quotation and appropriation of the qualities of a particular “drinking” name. The psychology and power in the ahanonjɔ or drinking name performance is fully described in Avorgbedor 1983.
excerpts were partly responsible for the two-month *haló* between two wards of a particular village in 1957, which lasted for three months.\(^{10}\)

Once a *haló* is begun, a vicious cycle is initiated, with each subsequent performance exacerbating anger and violence, until mediation by official intervention. In some cases two factions cease on their own accord without an intervention from a third party. Even when overt hostile activities have ceased, however, violence is continued in the spiritual realm, where opponents secretly practice black magic against each other. This post-*haló* activity is also true of those *haló* events that were formally ended. Deaths are associated with these evil practices, and further suspicions are generated. These suspicions lead to further violence, in both the spiritual and physical domains, and suspects may be made to undergo a ritual ordeal, as described earlier. Songs are again an important social vehicle through which suspects are addressed indirectly. Although *haló* is no longer a sanctioned medium for expressing revenge, the composition and performance of songs of insinuation continue as an integral part of the regular musical tradition. For example, examine the following contemporary non-*haló* song text:\(^{11}\)

EXAMPLE 2

A

...Kpev\textdegree be ny\textdegree nu adzet\textdegree woe
Kakam d\textdegree ye nu dua me haa
Ye wots\textdegree ye\textdegree fe nyav\textdegree o
Gahe yi d\textdegree e asia me, Malata....

...Kpev\textdegree says the witch
She is provoking me, in the town
And she took the evil report about me
Into the market, Malata....\(^{12}\)

B

Kinkaviawo, nye dzum loo
Ny\textdegree nuvia ye dzum a
Ny\textdegree nuvia na ye dzum le atsiawo te
Be yeme see oo hee....

Kinka performers, (she) is insulting me
The girl was insulting me really
The girl was insulting me under the tree
(She) thought I did not hear it....

\(^{10}\) This particular example comes from Seva, the author’s hometown; other examples are available in Kukuiah 1979.

\(^{11}\) This song text is an excerpt from the author’s dissertation (Avorgbedor 1986). The text was collected among urban Anlo-Ewe performing groups in Accra.

\(^{12}\) Malata is a popular open market in the sector of Accra known by the same name where many Ewe women do their trading.
Kinkaviawo medi tsa yi afeawo me
Atago kple dada wono monye kpoom
Moji mo nawo wo katâ woto mo deka
Atago mo lobô ye do wode gbe....

Kinka performers, I visited the house
Atago and her mother were looking into my face
Their faces looked similar, they all had the same face
Atago with long mouth spoke her native tongue....

**Performance Strategies and Modes of Aggression**

*Song Composition and Performance Style*

*Halô* is a multimedia event that begins with formal composition and learning of new songs (they may include contrafacta). Since songs constitute the primary medium of communicating insults, care is taken at the level of creativity and performance. The textual material of each ward composer is built mainly on selections of negative private histories and biographies, specific insults about the individual opponent’s physique, and fictive constructions. Ward elders are largely responsible for providing information on individual biographies, and the composer works out the material, drawing on the regular Anlo-Ewe melody, drumming, and general performance models. Since the nature of *halô* assumes the form of attack and counterattack, there is greater pressure on composers to come forth with fresh songs in response to attacks or previous performances by the opponent group. The compositional process also follows the general practice of intense night rehearsals where the songs, dance, dramatization, and drumming type are first learned in secrecy. This secret dimension of the rehearsals is closely guarded in the *halô* context because of the highly provocative nature of the textual material—a targeted individual would want to disrupt the practice sessions prematurely and out of revenge, thus also undermining the aesthetic element of surprise that is part of the Anlo-Ewe musical tradition.¹³

Before a new song is performed publicly in the normal musical situation, a special session known as *havôlu* is held in secret. In this session allusions, metaphorical references, and facets of personal biography and

¹³ For further information on this aspect of the debut of new ensembles, see Ladzekpo 1971.
history not commonly available, which are contained in the song texts, are explained to members of the performing group. In the context of haló the havɔlu is re-created with added dimensions of meaning and affect; it is then known as as hagɔmedede (lit., exposing the inside of song), which will be elaborated later.

The song component of the integrated art form is in the traditional through-composed form, consisting of hadada and tatɔtɔ, performed in an ABA format. In the standard drumming types such adzida, kinka, or dunekpoe, two song types are usually employed: a group of shorter and repetitive ones for the full-scale drumming, and a group of extended ones with a minimal amount of repetition (either of segments of a line unit or whole phrases). This second category, known as hatsiahawo, is performed in both haló and ordinary contexts during the segment of the drumming known as hatsiatsia (lit., main song and stylization).

In hatsiatsia, as the name suggests, only the extended song types are performed, to the accompaniment of bells (gankogui and atoke) and gesticulation. Due to the highly coded contents, a minimum of sound and dance accompaniment enables the audience to focus attention on the text. The structural design and procedures involved in hatsiatsia are also manipulated toward an effective transmission of the song to the audience. A select group with lead singers (male and female, in pairs) perform the songs during hatsiatsia counterclockwise, within the performance arena circumscribed by the audience. The counterclockwise movement presents shifting visual orientation and enables different pairs (lead singers) to take turns in presenting personal renditions of the same song. This spatial and visual design is also underscored by the hamekoko (gestural interpretation) of the lead singer, and in haló additional narrative and dramatic devices are employed to enhance the communication of insults and to accent humor.

Additional strategies are adopted in the haló hatsiatsia: temporarily halting the performance to allow the insertion of spoken comments, and most importantly the verbal exegesis of the song texts, including

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14 See Anyidoho 1983 and Avorgbedor 1986 for full description of the song form.

15 Hagbe or melody is also important in the overall consideration of the effectiveness of the song.

16 See Avorgbedor 1985 for details.
explanation of allusions and metaphorical constructions. When this segment resumes and the *halóga* (the bell accompaniment identified with *haló* songs) sounds, both performers and audience are usually fully alert and their emotional levels and expectations heightened. Lead singers provide vivid and verbal interpretations (*hagomedede*) of the song texts and improvise new text and comments. This is the moment when exaggerations are also appropriate, coupled with selective enactment or dramatization of specific scenes. At this stage audience reaction is influenced most by humor, satire, and exaggeration. Depending on the weight of the false allegations and insults, the opponent may react violently and in physical confrontation with the singer. This highly volatile nature of *haló* is explained in part by the nature of the rules and protocol that factions must observe in order to ensure smooth performance and to support the overall aesthetic impact of the music. These rules and procedures, unique to *haló*, are described below.

*Performance Rules and Procedures*

There are no written rules in this oral tradition, but performers and factions observe certain formalities in a spontaneous fashion at interward and intervillage levels, as stated earlier. The most significant of these formalities can be reformulated as:

1. The target opponent or a close relative must be physically present to provide the audience
2. The warring groups must perform in turns
3. The audience must be demarcated from the performers/performance arena by a rope to guard against unexpected and violent reaction from audience
4. The target opponent, or surrogate, must stand on a raised platform or chair to facilitate identification when his/her insults are being performed
5. The two groups must perform before an impartial judge, usually a chief from a neutral village
6. The songs must be “buried” after a winner has been determined

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17 These rules are often broken when opponents can no longer contain their anger.
and differences settled

In order to allow maximum effect and attention from the opponent group, simultaneous performances are discouraged, except in a few cases where a counterattack is also strategically calculated to subvert the efficacy of each group’s performance. In this case the two groups would perform, in disregard of convention, either in the same spot or in each ward’s own public arena. Such simultaneous performances thus deprive each other of the necessary audience; hence the purposeful encouragement of disorder and defiance at this level of the conflict. Fieldwork investigation also documents cases where targeted individuals were incensed to such a degree that they broke through the line safeguarding the performers from the audience, sometimes with a weapon. The rule that opponents must identify themselves as listed above not only tests the tolerance levels, but also allows the rest of the audience to judge the relevance and applicability of the insult or biographical text. The involvement of a third party in resolving the conflict also explains the factor of musical competition and hence principles of musical excellence.

Haló events take varying lengths of time, sometimes up to a year to resolve. While the conflict may dissolve naturally without any formal cessation, the convention is for the two warring groups to perform before a predetermined judge in a different village. After pronouncing the winner, the village chief (invariably the judge) then symbolically buries the songs in the ground and warns both parties to cease from haló acts. The two groups are fined and sanctions imposed. The ritual also portends great personal disaster should one resume the performance of haló songs at any time thereafter. Incidents of previous arrests, ritual sanction, and the government ban combine to provide an effective deterrent for anyone who might want to resume the performance of haló, either the total event or the just the songs. The elements that are considered in determining a winner include a wide range of musical, poetic, dramatic, and social factors. In the case of the latter, the criteria involved may not be wholly relevant and may therefore influence the ultimate decision from the judges. The proper observance of the rules and procedures outlined above are also essential to the quality of the outcome, and they also influence decisions in the several

18 Sometimes an opponent group mounts a simultaneous performance to heighten the moment of challenge and aggravation.
Increasing the Affective Impact of Insult through the Multimedia

In general many of the techniques, materials, and devices employed in haló are unique and are capable of inducing specific social responses. The integration of the related art forms is also a special feature of haló, as mentioned earlier. We shall now briefly examine samples of these characteristics, noting their impact on audience response and social violence.

Poetic Devices

Scholars have commented on the importance of the skillful employment of poetic speech in African communities; the Anlo-Ewe are not excepted (Anyidoho 1983, Peek 1981, Yankah 1991). Among the Anlo-Ewe the spectacular musical and socio-dramatic context of haló provides further justification for the use of highly artificial or decorative language. Judges of haló performance therefore pay great attention to poetic language in addition to elements such as good voice quality, level of participation, ensemble coordination, specialized musical skills, and judicious employment of set devices and structures.

Analysis of selected song texts, such as Example 4, shows the following prosodic features: proverbs and idiomatic expressions, metonymy, hyperbole, analogy, ideophone, reduplication, parallelism, rhyme, assonance, alliteration, onomatopoeia, apostrophe, and the use of graphic imagery in narrative lines. Proverbs are manipulated in three ways: whole quotation, paraphrase, and original. Interpreted within the cultural framework, the proverb exhibits the wisdom and language skill of the artist, and it also widens the cognitive and affective dimensions of the proverb context.

While the proverb is employed sparingly and at strategic moments to allow maximum aesthetic and incisive communication, the role of simile and related glosses resides at the core of Anlo-Ewe tradition of insult. The simile is employed in the intensified form of insult and insulting known as dzuvafọfo, subtechniques of which are referred to as dzumamla (lit.,
weaving of insult) and *dzutɔ dɛ aµɛ ɣu* (lit., linking insult to another person). The insult phraseology and performance structure also approximates the pattern common to the Anlo-Ewe nickname system known as *ahanonkɔ*. For example, here are two verbal insults, *A* first performed by one aggressor, and then *B* by two persons (an aggressor and his/her supporter in insulting a third person):

**EXAMPLE 3**

**A:**
1. Emɔ ðevè wɔ ñe kagae k lud açʊpodzi ene  
   Your smelling face like that of a dead vulture at a garbage dump
2. Ekɔ tsralawɔ ñe Klu fe abɔ ene  
   Your tall neck like Klu’s arm

**B:**
1. Emɔ ðevè wɔ  
   abe kagae kud açʊpodzi ene
2. Ekɔ tsralawɔ  
   abe Klu fe abɔ ene

Since the insult pattern is shaped by them, the artistic constraint of the song mode pattern *A* is favored. In addition, these samples are subject to further linguistic and poetic elaboration: for example, item 2 might be rephrased for added impact: *ekɔtsrala/ne ’kpoenabube Klu tɔe* [Tall neck / if you see it you will think it’s Klu’s] (see other examples in 4A-B, 5). Both the *dzutɔ dɛ aµɛ ɣu* and the *dzumamla* (especially by a supporter) serve to widen the social dimension of the conflict through the linking process and the supporters’ involvement. In *halɔ* performance these devices and structures are explored and intensified. Although the song and dramatic modes predominate, the immediate social relevance of the performance encourages the interjection of verbal comments and insults. Thus after a song a two, a pause is observed to allow the re-creation of spoken insults in the pattern described above.20

**EXAMPLE 4**

**A:**
...Axxx tsɔ awa gbɔlo  
Axxx then took raw penis
Gakplɔ nyɔnuwɔ do  
Then pursued the women

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19 See Avorgbedor 1985 for further information on the name system.

20 Due to the highly sensitive matter contained in the song texts all personal names mentioned have been replaced with letters of the alphabet followed by xxx.
Very soon he will become a thief
Bxxx tall thin like uncircumcised penis
Twisted like a dead avɔkli on a sand-top
Angled buttocks
Thin narrow inner face
Like a monkey’s inner face
He himself courted song
You should visit Cxxx to beg him
I wouldn’t allow my song to insult Bxxx’s family
She herself became useless
Open wide her vagina to the whole town
Everybody was having sex with her
She is to be pitied.
Bxxx! You deserve pity
Her mother Dxxx she had sex with men for long
People locked her up in Xavi
Having sex with her own brother
They even had a child in it
The firstborn is her brother’s
This then became a shameful deed
Yes, they gave birth to Exxx
S/he came to goku
Yes, they gave birth to Bxxx[i]
She fell on old Abɔ
Kplaxkplaxa (onom.), she raced after penis
“Stick” got broken in her vagina
Bxxx’s one leg got wrapped around the penis
Then she began to tell her lovers
“The deaf does not hear sweetness”
Thick penis gets vagina swollen
She named the penis thus
“Long-necked stick
You are too sweet”
“Mohtertown” (i.e. vagina) made me this way
I shall only die in it

B :
...Alētɔ neɔɔ mlâ
Axxx be alētɔ neɔɔ mlâ
Mialē alea miadzo
Wōlē ale la
Hedzra na Awusatɔwo
...let the “sheep owner” walk fast
Axxx says let the “sheep owner” walk fast
So that we can catch the sheep and go
He caught the sheep
And then sold it to the Hausas
The “foreign” one identified the sheep
Then they caught Gxxx and tied a rope
around his waist
Then led him to Mr. Cxxx
It turned out to be court arbitration
Axxxx took up defiance
He then implicated his wife
They then jailed Dxxx in Keta prison
Hausas had sex with her
She is now pregnant
She then returned from prison to Axxx
Bxxx! You really are a big fool
Deep narrow face, resembling an owl’s
Face bla bai (untrans.) resembling a
monkey’s face
There’s no wisdom in his face
It’s Axxx Axxx who sang about Exxx that
Exxx married a woman
He did not have bridewealth
He got the woman from Fxxx
Gxxx stupid one
Married a certain type of woman for us
Fishbasket doesn’t stay long in a room
Gxxx started a “train,” I will drive it
Hxxx narrow deep face, I will drive it
Hxxx long dry face, I will drive it
Gxxx face klo luei (untrans.) I will drive it
Say “h h u u,” I will drive it
Exxx says let me answer for him to hear
Thief and borrowing become shame
xxxs, yyys explain it
Elders, answer me
Call Ixxx for me to insult a while
Ixxx dirty face, diviner with black magic
He carried the switches on his shoulder
Singing about Jxxx
I mention Kxxx in song
Ixxx! Attention
Have you forgotten your grandmother?
Isn’t it Lxx’s mother the big benefactor?
Does not flatulate without bushes burning
Your grandfather Mxxx was a rough careless
The argument for conflict-escalation is also supported by specific practices. For example, when the factions are invited by a “neutral” village to perform in order to judge the competition, the loser carefully considers elements of bias. When traces of bias are discovered, whether they can be validated or not, the loser may initiate a second round of haló in retaliation against the judges and their loyal ward. A cycle of haló is thus triggered...
and participants increased. In one case studied, the losers not only protested
the judgment in song but also took the judges to a district court. The case
was dismissed, and the two factions were warned against further violence.
In another situation the man who pronounced one faction a winner through
the presentation of a white flag was made to undergo a curse for the rest of
his life.21

The examples above suggest that violence and aggression are
escalated and continued in diverse forms, even many years after the actual
performance of haló. The official procedure of reconciling factions through
the imposition of fines by the district and traditional courts is the last resort
for ending conflicts. These legal and ritual formalities in controlling haló
and its associated violence and aggression are not totally safe and reliable.
While they provide checks on the direction and extent of individual and
group involvement in conflict, they do not guarantee total peaceful
coexistence. They do not prevent individuals and groups from internalizing
conflict and aggressive behavior. Hostilities, inhibited for a time, are
carefully expressed during discussions of affairs that involve cooperation
between the two factions. Preliminary results of a comparative analysis of
non-haló and contemporary song traditions indicate that without the existing
instruments of restraint, the genre could still be a popular medium for
initiation and escalating conflict.

Speech-Song

The Anlo-Ewe distinguish between the normal mode of singing,
hadzidzi, and special half-spoken forms collectively referred to as hamelo
(lit., in-song-proverb). This half-spoken or rhythmically patterned genre is
employed strategically in normal music-making to (1) diversify the musical
and aesthetic import, and (2) serve as a slogan and a special cue that
provides an identity for the music as well as for the performing group. The
hamelo is a brief tonal and rhythmic construction interjected during the
hatsiatsia section. In Ewe, which is a tonal language, tone is phonemic: the
meaning of a word depends upon one of three basic tone levels, with

21 The particular individual on whom a curse was supposedly placed entered exile
in the Ivory Coast, then returned and died three or four years ago.
variations between them. The musical and phonemic properties are therefore essential in the construction of the *hamelo* and other forms from the speech-song continuum, as elaborated below.

In *haló* the dramatic and communicative impact of *hamelo* assumes special consideration, and its performance includes mime and gesticulation, all intended to highlight and transport the semantic and musical meaning to the audience (in this case the opponents involved in the conflict). Because of the purposes of provocation, challenge, and the exacerbation of conflict in *haló*, the *hamelo* takes on a more direct and denotative meaning, especially when interpreted further through the media of mime and dramaturgy. In normal musical contexts, the *hamelo* is constructed and performed with parameters that present allusive and ambiguous references. Since the musical contest and contexts of *haló* involve direct confrontation with a target opponent, the references are explicitly formulated and directly communicated through the use of personal names and features unique to the opponent. Here is one illustration:

**EXAMPLE 5**

A Leader: X fi ago ta  (X stole and wore a velvet)  
Group: Duawo mikpoe  (All towns[people], look at him)

B Leader: Yxxx vōku vōku loto  (Yxxx scrotum, scrotum rotund)

Group: Edzi be yeawo todoto do  (It wants to burst)

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22 See Ansre 1961 for full information on the Ewe language.
HALÓ PERFORMANCE

C  Leader: Yxxx, Yxxx, Yxxx ta gã tsitsi dududu (Yxxx, Yxxx, Yxxx big head, rheumatism *dududu* (untrans.))

```
Y x x Vo - ku Vo - ku  lo - to
```

Group: Fia ka fome vie? (What kind of chief is he?)

```
E - dzi - be yea - wo to - go - to - go
```

The semantic construction of the insult is also made more effective and hence more provoking by the ingenious use of such prosodic features as assonance (*ta gã, fia ka, lòtò, vōku, wò*) and reduplication (*dududu, todotodo*), as illustrated above. The speech-song mode, therefore, not only diversifies the musical moment aesthetically and structurally, but also allows the alternative interpretation of insult, and heightens the drama necessary for an incisive communication of insult.

**Drum Encoding and Visual Display**

In normal Anlo-Ewe music performance visual icons or special carvings known as *dufozi* are sometimes displayed to enrich the performance. They also direct the audience’s attention to specific segments of song texts that are represented in a concrete form and as part of the *dufozi* complex. In *haló* such visual forms (including a group’s insignia or flag) are moldings of personal insults, albeit in exaggerated forms. Insults may also be graphically coded into the inscriptions on flags. In one case, in addition to the verbal depictions and suggestions in the *hamelos*

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23 The use of the concrete medium to emphasize a message is documented in Avorgbedor 1985.
above, an icon in the shape of a scrotum was employed and manipulated to underscore the insult. The rhythmic or musical content of these verbal forms is also usually supported by the accompanying drum ensemble. For example, the leader (antecedent) part is initiated by the master drum, and the group (consequent) part is taken by the support drums. The rhythmic or musical framing generates musical interest, while the mime and gross icons add humor, drama, and interpretive commentary.

Drum encoding in these examples takes on special advantages for many reasons. For one, in ordinary musical contexts a master drum would take the liberty to reproduce the name of a friend or an important person present at the performance. The person so called immediately receives special attention from the crowd, and his social prestige is temporarily elevated. In *haló*, the situation is reversed, and the performance leaves a lasting negative impression on both the individual opponent and the larger audience. A second reason is that each musical type among the village groups has its own drum vocabulary. Whatever additional vocabulary is invented, accepted, and played often thus becomes an integral part of the standard vocabulary. In addition, people easily remember or identify these vocabularies; the negative ones from *haló* music consequently assume wider social impact. It is, therefore, a strategic way of exacerbating anger and insult whenever insults are reformulated into drum codes. The range of insult represented in *haló* is limited only by the creative skills of composers, singers, and aggressors, and in the performance there is deliberate attempt to provoke an opponent to the highest degree. Exaggerations of physical features and family history, as well as scatological texts of insult, therefore constitute the core of *haló* texts. For example, examine the following complete song text:

**EXAMPLE 6**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ha fe nya ku le eme agbe le eme</td>
<td>The matter of song involves both life and death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miyɔ Axxx nam madzu kpɔ</td>
<td>Call Axxx for me to insult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Axxx atala gbabee</td>
<td>Axxx with thin flat legs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akliwo fu abɔdzɔdzɔ</td>
<td>Bony loins and hanging and loose arms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Axxx klii ɗo kpeta sesi</td>
<td>Axxk <em>klii</em> shows a hard buttocks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Axxx hameloe dzrowo hee</td>
<td>Axxx it’s “song-deed” that you wished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kanvas ke ɗe ne duie nye ma?</td>
<td>Canvas (shoes), Is that how you wear it?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

24 The Anlo-Ewe grade their drums at three basic pitch levels.
Afkpodzi mede anyigba o
High heel does not touch the ground (canvas)

Kanvas gobo towoemavayi hee
It’s oversized canvas-wearer passing by

Axxx emo lakpee
Axxx small narrow face (no direct transl.)

Axxx nỳ nu kɒm
Axxx gazing

Màdi kesevi fe mo
Like the face of certain small monkey

Axxx do hanye
Axxx caused my song

Bxxx be hanye lae ma li dzo de Afegame
Bxxx says my songs set fire in Afegame

Afegameviwo di kodzo de ǹunye
Afegame people called a meeting on me

Wotsi alōmado de ye ǹu
They were sleepless on me

Miadzi uu, hagbe mele eme nami o
We’ll sing it long, you’re (plur.) not born with song

Axxx fiadigbo yae ṣu hafia
Axxx useless chief became chief of song

Axxx menye fia o
Axxx is not chief

Axxx tso mumevivi xo fia na Adɔтриawo
Axxx obtained the chiefhood for the Adɔтри through lie

Adɔтриawo tsi mavo dzi
The Adɔтри remained disturbed

Axxx ṣu fia gafovi mele esi o
Axxx became chief but did not have an announcer

Eyaha nagbọ hanya
Should he also talk about song?

Yee wole mavo via de de asi na Axxx
Then they put some regalia into Axxx’s hands

Yiha nanye kpɔkpɔm
For him to be looking at

Axxx emo yalui yae ble Adɔтриawo
Axxx’s face—(insult) he is one who deceived the Adɔтри

Fiadigbo fe dẹe
That’s a useless chief’s job

Cxxx be nu menya wọna na Adɔтриawo o
Cxxx says the Adɔтри are incapable of anything

Meganọ edzi mave ha dzi ge
Don’t force me to start a song

Mava dze agọ le fiawo dzi o
To infringe the laws of the chiefs

Tanye nu kplọ lo le tọ me
(Proverb) A wise head dragged crocodile underwater

Bxxx be makle fiawo madzu Axxx
Bxxx says “Let me inform the chiefs to insult Axxx”

Bxxx be mele do na amegawo
Bxxx says “I entreat the elders”

Dxxx lee enu le do nawo hee
Dxxx (elder) I bow for you

Exxx taflatsee
Exxx (elder) I seek your permission

Cxxx be mele taflatsee nawo le keke etsi daa
Bxxx says “I see your permission” from the distant land of the dead

Madzi aha via de de gu nawo
To find some drink for your pocket

Axxx yae gbọ ha fe nya
It’s Axxx who talked raised the matter of song

Axxx aklito gɔdzɔ yae gbọ ha fe nya
Axxx ragged loins spoke the matter of song

Amega Fxxx kple Gxxx hawo
Elder Fxxx and Gxxx’s company

Bxxx be mege taflatsee na mi hee
Cxxx says “I seek your permission really”
Adzoafia kple Hxxx Cxxx be
Manye treyî mano miakôme
Madzi ha viâde madzu Axxx
Aklîto gedî madi drako
Axxx akîlîo biô madi dzogbeko
Xeblanawo kple Vezô
Ixxx hawo mele do nami hee
Dzoku tefe me voame o
Axxx be meðe taflatsee nawo hee
Jxxx kple Kxxx
Lxxx be medo ago nami hee
Mele agboawonu kple ha
Cxxx de taflatsee madzu Axxx
Made Axxx gome miase hee
Axxx menye duametwo o
Axxx be fia xo ge yele
Tøgbuiwo tø Tefle
Tøgbuiwo tø Tefle ke
Gava do de Fenyi
Wønôa nudzrawo wøm
Woamo Fenyitôwo dufia fe nyinoeyôvi
Tøgbuiwo tsi gbesi
Ye wole tøgbuiwo he dzra na Vetatówo
Vetatówo womese egôme o
Kaka woaxo dzinu etoâo Fenyitôwo do
Fenyitôwo de egôme na Vetatówo
Vetatówo melô o
Ye wole tøgbuiwo he dzra
Na Exitôwo fekaflî zigbôzi etô
Ye wole tøgbuiwo he dzra na Dzodzetôwo
Adzoafia he xo
Mxxx ke fiafitôe ye wotso ãaâa dze
Wodze ãaâa la wotso gbeka gaa de
De ali na tøgbuiwo
Ye wole tøgbuiwo he bla de dzogbetiawo

Adzoafia and Hxxx, Cxxx says
To be ritual calabash in front of you
To sing some songs of insult for Axxx
Long ragged loins like an anthill
Axxx long pointed loins like a desert anthill
Xeblanawo and Vezô
The company of Ixxx I entreat you
(Aproverb)...(untrans.)
Axxx says “I beg your pardon)
Jxxx and Kxxx
Lxxx says “Lend me your ears”
I am at the gate with songs
Cxxx seeks permission to insult Axxx
To reveal Axxx’s background for you to hear
Axxx is not from the town
Axxx insists on becoming a chief
Your grandfather came from Tefle
Your grandfather came as far as from Tefle
Then came to Fenyi
He was tricky
Had sex with Fenyi chief’s female calf
Your grandfather was lost in the wilderness
Then they caught and sold your grandfather
to the Veta people
Veta people did not understand this
As soon as it was three months Fenyi
people appeared
Fenyi people explained it the the Veta people
Veta people did not consent
Therefore they caught and sold your
grandfather to the people
Then they caught and sold your grandfather
to the Exi people
Then they caught and sold your grandfather
to the Dzodze people
Adzoafia (interim chief) then retrieved him
Adzoafia got and sent your grandfather to
Fiagbedu
Mxxx, a thief, then he became insane
In his insanity they tied a big rope
Around your grandfather’s waist
Then sent him to the wilderness
Then tied your grandfather to a tree in the
Conclusions

The types of violence accompanying haló performances are summarized in the following: physical confrontation, including the use of a weapon; destruction of personal property; and magical practices to overcome or destroy an opponent, both physically and spiritually. While activities in the spiritual realm cannot easily be identified objectively, reports of cases linking singer-composers’ deaths to such practices are overwhelming. Since much of the violence is perpetrated in the spiritual realm, government courts focus on cases with more overt manifestations, such as evidence from song texts or physical injury. While the Anlo-Ewe kinship and legal systems seek to provide a congenial environment for interpersonal transactions at the familial and societal levels in order to preserve the peace, the phenomenon of haló both transcends and challenges the efficiency of such systems; it also brings up the challenge of defining the boundaries of artistic license.

In haló, we come across the interplay of humor, play, the ugly, and satire. These techniques are situationally patterned to enhance both the goals of musical superiority and the affective and incisive communication of insult. While the technique of humor and comedy is generally employed to temporarily minimize the level of tension generated in haló performance, it is also attention-structuring. Humor and comedy are particular aesthetic devices employed to diversify and elevate the artistic experience, and the
effectiveness of these devices in social conflict has been acknowledged by some scholars (Bateson 1972, Burma 1972). The following observation makes the point clear (Burma 1972:201): “In conflict, the involved parties make use of a variety of techniques to gain ascendancy or temporary advantage. Since subtle barbs often strike more telling blows than gratuitous insult or rational argument, not infrequently these techniques include humor, satire, irony, and wit.”

In sum, we can conclude that haló is a unique socio-musical drama that draws on a variety of artistic channels for the sake of incisive, aggressive, and superior communication of insult and musical affect. The genre maintains a link with the total culture by drawing on and extending the musical and artistic parameters already available among the Anlo-Ewe culture and society. In addition, social process is exhibited and updated through the musical performance and the social consequences also reflect on the role and status of the music. These examples thus confirm the previous speculations about musical and social relationships, and expands on the nature of performance. Focus on haló as a social reality, rather than as merely a symbolic and routine act, allows us to delve deeper into the web of social relations in which performance is situated. While language use is at the core of the performance, the Anlo-Ewe example also shows several ways in which musical excellence is achieved, as well as the mixing of the fictive and the real. The investigator of haló is also presented with a rich source of data offering new insights into verbal art and the performative in Africa. This study therefore bears many implications for new perspectives in performance studies, including those of sociolinguistics, ethnomusicology, and ethnonaesthetics. Evidence given above should also urge caution toward those analyses that describe and see the ends of performance as simply tension- or conflict-resolving. The ideas and issues raised in this essay seem rather to support perspectives that acknowledge the continuity of tension and conflict, as properly observed by Igor Kopytoff (1961) in a study of a Congo society. The field study of haló also raises many problems that pertain to field theory and practice. For example, new techniques, strategies, and procedures developed and employed during the field investigation provided certain types of significant information that

25 Some of the studies that have focused on symbolic and ritual employment of verbal aggression include Avery 1984, Brempong 1978, Eckert 1980, Flynn 1977, Herndon 1971, and Kleivan 1971.
would not otherwise have been available through traditional channels (cf. Avorgbedor 1990-91). The full potential of haló as a resource for building new hypotheses and analytical perspectives in performance studies remains to be explored.26

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References


Avorgbedor 1990-91 ______. “Some Contributions of Haló Music to Research

26 The fieldwork from which this essay derives was made possible by a grant from the H.F. Guggenheim Foundation, 1988-89.

**Bateson 1972**  

**Brempong 1978**  

**Burma 1972**  

**Drewal 1991**  

**Eckert 1980**  

**Fiagbedzi 1977**  

**Flynn 1977**  

**Heald 1986**  

**Herndon 1971**  

**Kleivan 1971**  

**Kopytoff 1961**  
Kukuiah 1979  

Ladzekpo 1971  

MacAloon 1984  

Parkin 1986  

Peek 1981  

Singer 1972  

Yankah 1991  

**Appendix**

**Guide to Pronunciation and Transliteration**

[ø]  As in caught.

[f]  Air passes through a narrow opening between the lips, as in blowing out a candle (voiceless bilabial fricative).

[v]  Similar to above but voiced (bilabial fricative).

[ɣ]  Air passes through a narrow bridge formed by raising the back of the tongue toward the soft palate (voiced velar fricative).
[ŋ]  A velar nasal, similar to English ng as in “sing.”

[d]  Similar to the Spanish “r”; the upper case is Đ.

[ny]  Pronounced as in French gn, as in “igname.”

[dz]  As in English “pads” or as j in “jam.”

[ts]  As in English “mats” or as ch in “cheer.”

[gb]  Pronounced at the soft palate through a simultaneous closure of the lips and relaxed simultaneously without aspiration (voiced labiovelar stop).

[kp]  As above but voiceless.