

“Yen ara asase ni”:

EPHRAIM AMU’S PHILOSOPHY
ON NATION BUILDING, HUMAN GROWTH AND
ADVANCEMENT

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Abstract: Ephraim Amu is perhaps one of the most celebrated and distinguished personalities that Ghana has ever produced. Amu is remembered not only as a musician but also as one who championed the cause of African liberation from Western dominance and paternalism, particularly in terms of our cultural emancipation as a people. Whereas the tunes to his numerous compositions are known to a fairly sizeable section of the Ghanaian population, little is known about the message that the songs communicate. This article seeks to bring to the fore Amu’s contribution to nation building, human growth and advancement as evidenced in five of his compositions.

Introduction

The discussion in this article begins with the song that is widely celebrated as Ghana’s unofficial National Anthem. Written in the late 1920s, Ephraim Amu’s ¹ ‘Yen Ara Asase Ni’ raises issues that are still relevant to the social and political wellbeing of the country. On what foundations do we build a nation and what are the values that engender true patriotism? One of such values I shall be looking at is ‘Biakoyá’ (Unity), another of Amu’s composition that goes by that name. Nor was Amu’s concern limited to Ghana alone. In ‘Yaanom Abibirimma’ he calls

¹ For a brief biography of Ephraim Amu see Philip Laryea, ‘Ephraim Amu as a theologian in song - The impact of the vernacular apprehension of Christian thought’, *Journal of African Christian Thought*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (June 2002): 25-37 (36).

on Africans to arise and be counted as people who have a contribution to make. In this song and a couple of others that Amu composed, I examine his metaphor for human progress. In the concluding songs, 'Okwantenni' (Traveller) and 'Bonewre Kentenwene' (Bonewre Kente Weaving), I discuss other African values, as demonstrated in traditional greetings and in the hospitality accorded to travellers. 'Bonewre Kentenwene' is particularly interesting for what it teaches on indigenous knowledge and how such knowledge can motivate and inspire growth in all sectors of human life and endeavour.

**'YEN ARA ASASE NI':
APPRECIATING THE TRUE VALUES OF NATIONHOOD**

Yen ara asase ni, eye aboɔdenne ma yen
This is our own land, it is precious to us
Mogya na nananom hwie gui
Blood did our forefathers shed to obtain it for us.
nya de too ho maa yen.
It is the turn of me and you to continue
Adu me ne wo nso so se yebeɣe bi atoa so
Mere knowledge, cunning and selfishness
Nimdeɛ 'traso nkotokranne ne apesemenkomenya
have destroyed our life
Adi yen bra mu dem
and has affected our love for our land
ma yen asase ho do atom se
Whether our nation will prosper
ɔman no se ebeye yie oo,
or whether it will not prosper
ɔman no se erennye yie oo,

It is an established fact that this depends on
the conduct of her people
Eyɛ sɛnnahɔ sɛ ɔmanfo bra na ɛkyerɛ

Nhoma nimdeɛ huhu gyan
Book knowledge that is vain
anaa adɛnya ara kwa
or property acquired without toil,
ne ɔbrakyew de esɛɛ ɔman
and dishonesty, destroy a nation and defame it
na ɛɔ n'ahohora

Obedience and respect, wishing your fellows well always,
Asɔɔmmrɛ ne obu pa, yɔnko yiyedi pɛ daa,
Unqualified dedication to everyone's needs
Ahofama ntetekwaam' ma onipa biara yiyedi,
These bring peace and progress to a nation.
Enonom na ɛde asomdwoe ne nkɔso pa brɛ ɔman.

Whether a nation prospers
ɔman no sɛ ɛbɛye yie oo,
or whether it does not prosper
ɔman no sɛ 'renye yieoo,
It is an established fact that it is
*Eyɛ sɛnnahɔ sɛ ɔmanfo bra na ɛkyerɛ*²
the conduct of her people will determine.

This song was originally composed in Ewe (the Peki dialect) in 1929. It was in response to a request from one of the pupils of Amu who was then teaching in a primary school. According to Amu, the teacher wanted

² Ephraim Amu, *Twenty Five African Songs* (hereafter TFAS), London: Sheldon Press, 1933, pp. 68-69; Cf Ephraim Amu, *Amu Choral Works Vol. I* (hereafter ACW, Accra: Waterville Publishing House, 1993, pp. 132-133. (English translation by Misonu Amu)

something African to celebrate Empire Day. It was later translated into Twi. It probably became popular when the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation decided to use it as the last item for their programmes. It is recognised by many as the “unofficial national anthem” of Ghana and has been translated into other Ghanaian languages.³ Apart from the Ewe and Twi versions that he himself wrote, Amu is not comfortable with the other translations.⁴ In a letter to Amu in January 1988, J.E. Adjepong described this song as ‘The Ghana National Song’. A letter from the Literature Committee of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana to Amu suggested that Amu increase the number of stanzas ‘in which mention is made of God as our help’. The idea of the Committee was to give the song a ‘hymn touch’ so as to include it in the new Hymn Book.⁵ Interestingly, an English translation of the song appears in the *Asempa Hymns* under the subject entitled ‘Nation and Society’.⁶ I notice that in this translation, line 16 has been varied and ‘God’ mentioned, when in fact neither the Twi version nor the original Peki version does that. Perhaps, in the thinking of the compilers this had to be done so as to give a Christian flavour to a song cherished by many Ghanaians. According to the designer of Ghana’s Flag, Theodeosia Okoh, it was line 3 of Amu’s song, ‘*Mogya na nananom hwie gui*’ (Blood did our forefathers shed), that inspired her to select the colour red. The other colours in the Flag are yellow with a black star in the middle and green.⁷

In ‘*Yen ara asase ni*’ (This land is our own) Ephraim Amu expresses

³ Kofi Agawu, “Conversation with Ephraim Amu: The making of a composer”, *The Black Perspective in Music*, 15: 2, (51-63), 1987, p. 53-53.

⁴ Interview granted to the Media Research Unit, Language and Literature and Music Section of the Institute of African Studies by Ephraim Amu. (n.d.)

⁵ Letter from PCG Literature Committee to E. Amu, 30.03.1992. Letters, sermons, addresses, and diary entries used in this work are unpublished archival documents deposited with the Zimmermann Library, Akrofi-Christaller Institute, Akropong. I have sought permission from the Amu family to use these documents.

⁶ *Asempa Hymns* (with orders for Holy Communion and Mass), Accra: Asâmpa Publishers, 1980, No. 394.

⁷ G. Blay Gibbah, ‘The woman who designed the National Flag’, *The Ghanaian Times*, 8 Jan., 2005, p. 10.

concern for values that make a nation. The opening line stresses communal ownership of land: '*Yen ara asase ni*'. By using the word '*yen*' (the word also means "we" or "us"), Amu had in mind all Ghanaians (the living, the living-dead, and yet-to-be born). Yet it is to the living that he made his appeal for a communal sense of ownership and responsibility towards what he considered to be dear to us: '*eye aboɔdenne ma yen*'. The living hold the land in trust for and on behalf of the living-dead and the yet-to-be-born. In the second and third lines Amu explains how we came to inherit this possession: '*Mogya na nananom hwie gui nya de too ho maa yen*' (It was acquired or obtained through the blood that our ancestors or forefathers shed for us). Land, then, is the connecting bond between the ancestors and the living, held in sacred trust for future generations. That is the reason why in Akan society, as in others in Ghana, land cannot be sold or disposed of without the consent of the ancestors. Its name, *Asase Yaa*, invoked in prayer, suggests that it is part of the Akan spiritual universe and may therefore not be approached irreverently and without the necessary courtesies.

Amu is of the opinion that if our forebears have done their part by obtaining the land for us through their blood and toil, it is now our turn to 'build upon their achievements'⁸: '*Adu me ne wo nso so se yebeɛ bi ato so*'. He is concerned that instead of adding value to what has already been achieved we are rather destroying it. Amu identifies, in particular, three of such negative attitudes: '*Nimdeɛ 'traso nkotokranne ne apesemenkomenya*'. The phrase '*Nimdeɛ ntraso*' literally means 'knowledge that has gone beyond limits, to the extremes or is in excess'⁹. L.A. Boadi thinks Amu's words should not be taken literally. He is of the

⁸ Amu's translation. See Kofi Agawu, "Conversation with Ephraim Amu: The making of a composer", p. 54.

⁹ An expression similar to "*Nimdeɛ ntraso*" is used by Festus during the trial of Paul (Acts 26:24): "*Paulo, woabo dam, nhomanim bebrebe abo wo dam.*" (Paul, you are mad; your great learning is turning you mad).

view that by *'Nimdee ntraso* Amu meant extraordinary claims to knowledge; claims to knowledge that go beyond natural bounds'. 'Such claims', he believes, 'are always accompanied by arrogance and petty haughtiness'.¹⁰ In the first line of the second stanza, Amu uses another phrase *'Nhoma nimdee huhu gyan'*. The explanation to this phrase underscores Boadi's point about *Nimdee ntraso* as a claim to knowledge not backed by experience; that is empty knowledge so-called. This is knowledge derived from studying books or what is commonly referred to as 'book-knowledge' or 'head-knowledge.' In his philosophy of education elucidated in his song, *'Tiri ne nsa ne koma'* (The head the hand and the heart), Amu indicates that the use of the head is only one of the means by which knowledge is acquired. He therefore had no difficulty with such knowledge. He was, however, concerned about a kind of *'nhoma nimdee'* (book-knowledge) he described as *'huhu gyan'*. Christaller defined 'huhu' as 'vain, worthless, useless, [and] good for nothing'.¹¹ The word 'gyan' is synonymous with 'huhu' and means 'empty' or 'without meaning'.¹²

'Nimdee ntraso' means therefore 'cerebral knowledge acquired only for its sake'. Such knowledge does not translate into industry (the use of the hand), nor does it result in the transformation of character (affect the heart). Rather, it leads to two negative attitudes Amu calls *'nkotokranne ne apesemenkomenya'*. *'Nkotokranne'* is cunning or clever deception. Boadi translates *nkotokranne* as 'sophistry, [or] the employment of deliberately specious and invalid argument in discussions of serious matters affecting the state'.¹³ The literal meaning of *apesemenkomenya* is graphically captured in its linguistic composition: 'a liking [*apese*]

¹⁰ L. A. Boadi, *The Poetry of Ephraim Amu*, Sixth Ephraim Amu Memorial Lecture, Accra: Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences, May, 2004, pp. 21-22.

¹¹ J.G. Christaller, *Dictionary of Asante and Fante Language called Tshi (Twi)* (2 vols.), Basel: Evangelical Missionary Society, 1881, p. 193.

¹² J.G. Christaller, *Dictionary of Asante and Fante Language*, p. 154.

¹³ L. A. Boadi, *The Poetry of Ephraim Amu*, p. 22

that one [me] alone [nko] gets [nya] a thing'.¹⁴ Idiomatically, *apesemekomenya* means 'self-interest' or 'selfishness'. It is these negative attitudes that, according to Amu, '*Adi yen bra mu dem ma yen asase ho do atom se*' (have damaged our lives and have resulted in the loss of love for our land). Forty five years after composing '*Yen ara asase ni*', Amu expressed similar concerns in a sermon he delivered at the Peki Training College. Amu:

It is clear enough that we are being inspired by a vision of our own selfish ends; a vision of getting rich quickly... the popularity of the lotto, the increasing practice of misappropriation of money, straight forward stealing and robbery; a vision of quick promotion to high positions, which has brought about undue importance we attach to paper qualification, a vision of easy life and riotous enjoyments leading to our clamour for vanities of life, with their consequent drunkenness and debauchery'.¹⁵

It is clear that it was this 'paper qualification' that Amu meant by the expression '*Nhoma nimdee huhu gyan*'.¹⁶ Ephraim Amu concluded the first stanza of '*Yen ara asase ni*' thus:

¹⁴ J.G. Christaller, Dictionary of Asante and Fante Language, p. 391.

¹⁵ Ephraim Amu's Unpublished Sermons and Addresses (hereafter EAUSA), Vision, Peki Training College, 3.3.1974, p. 3.

¹⁶ Friday October 6 edition of the Daily Graphic, 2006 carried a news item to the effect that 26 second year students of the KNUST had been dismissed for entering the University with doctored results slips. Prior to this, several students in Ghanaian universities had been withdrawn for similar offences. It would appear that students are beginning to exploit the deficiencies in the use of 'paper qualification' as the sole criteria for admission into the various institutions of learning. This situation has arisen probably because of what Amu referred to as the 'undue importance we attach to paper qualification'.

Ɔman no sɛ ɛbɛyɛ yie oo,
 If our nation will prosper
Ɔman no sɛ ɛrennye yie oo,
 or if it will not prosper
ɛyɛ sɛnnahɔ sɛ ɔmanfo bra na ɛkyerɛ
 It is an established fact that it is the conduct of
 her people that will determine.

It is important to observe the progression of thought. The song began with *asase* but in the concluding section, another word, *ɔman*, was introduced. ‘*Asase*’ means ‘a portion or tract of land belonging to an individual or community’.¹⁷ ‘*Ɔman*’ on the other hand refers to ‘the body of inhabitants of a country [nation or state] united under the same government’.¹⁸ ‘*Ɔman*’ therefore connotes not only land but also the people that inherit the land. The idea also involves intangible realities such as the socio-cultural ties, the religious norms, and the laws and values that unite people and foster a sense of community and belonging. Whether *ɔman* (a nation) will prosper or not, ‘*ɔmanfo bra na ɛkyerɛ*’ (is shown by the conduct of the people). It is the manner of life, behaviour or conduct of a people that guarantees the welfare of the nation. This, for Amu, is ‘*asɛm a eda hɔ*’ (literally, a fact/matter that is evident). The contracted form of the expression is ‘*sɛnnahɔ*’, a word which means ‘precedence’ or ‘that which has been preserved’. ‘*Sɛnnahɔ*’, therefore, means ‘an established or self evident truth’. Amu’s statement, ‘*sɛ ɔman bɛyɛ yie a ɛyɛ sɛnnahɔ sɛ ɔmanfo bra na ɛkyerɛ*’ (whether a nation progresses or not depends on the conduct of its citizens), is, thus axiomatic.¹⁹

¹⁷ J.G. Christaller, *Dictionary of Asante and Fante Language*, p. 430.

¹⁸ J.G. Christaller, *Dictionary of Asante and Fante Language*, p. 305.

¹⁹ Sixteen years before Amu wrote “*Yen ara asase ni*”, concern had been expressed regarding destructive elements and lifestyles in the society.

In the opening lines of the last stanza Amu mentions attitudes and behaviour that destroy a nation; '*adenya ara kwa*' (acquiring property without toil) and '*ɔbrakyew*' (a life that is crooked, perverse and dishonest). In contrast, lifestyles considered necessary for the peace and progress of a nation are also mentioned: '*Asoɔmmre*' (literally, soft ears), '*obu pa*' (good respect), '*yɔnko yiyedi pɛ daa*' (wishing prosperity always to one's neighbour or friend), '*ahofama ntetekwaam*' *ma onipa biara yiyedi*' (an unqualified self-sacrifice in order to serve the needs of everyone).

These ideas are further developed in a song he called '*Biakoyɛ*' (Unity), in which two virtues that enhance social progress, '*yɔnkodɔ*' (neighbourly love) and '*biakoyɛ*' (unity) are discussed. '*Biakoyɛ*' was composed for the first union convention of the Akuapem Singing Bands held in Akropong in August 1933. It is now used as the union song for all Singing Bands in the Presbyterian Church of Ghana.²⁰ The concern of the poet here is love and unity:

In his book entitled, "*Bere Adu*" (The time is at hand), J.J. Adaye identified "*ɔbra pa*" as the first medicine for correcting deviant social behaviours. He writes:

Mise aduru a edi kan a esen atwahwe ne ɔbra pa. ɔbra pa a meka ho asem na mehwehwe se me nkurɔfo pɛ akyi kwan ne ɔbra a esee ti bɔne, anihaw, apesemenkominya... Eyinom mu biara mma oman nkɔso pa, na esiw ade pa biara kwan. Minim se saa bɔne ahorow yi na emma yentumi nkɔyen anim no.

I am of the opinion that the first medicine, which is to be preferred to a quick working medicine, is good conduct. The good conduct I refer to, and wish my people to desire and long for, is good conduct that destroys evil intentions, laziness...selfishness. These negative lifestyles undermine the progress of a nation and obstruct the path of anything that is good. I know that these are the evil things that prevent us from making progress.
(my translation)

See, J.J. Adaye, *Bere Adu* (The time is at hand), Accra: Waterville Publishing House, 1969, p. 53. (First published by the Basel Mission Press, Salem, Akropong, 1913).

²⁰ Agyemang, Fred, *Amu the African: A study in vision and courage*, Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1988, p. 78.

Yede yen adwene ne nneyee,
 With our minds and deeds,
yen nantew ne yen ahokeka
 our way of life and zeal
kyere se yonkodo ʼε.
 we show that oneness is proper and worthy.
Yesu hyee,
 It is a command of Jesus,
yebetram ʼnne ne da nyinaa
 we shall live by it today and forever
Yonkodo ye, biakoye ye,
 Neighbourly love is good, unity is good
na egye yen ani, ehye yen den,
 It refreshes us, it encourages us
ema yenyin, ko yen anim
 It makes us mature and progressive
sakra yen koraa
 It transforms us through and through
*Enti momma yenkura mu daa*²¹
 and so let us hold on to it at all times

(My translation)

As shown in the first three lines, love for one's neighbour must be clearly manifested in our mind, intentions or opinion (*yen adwene*), our deeds and actions (*nneyee*), the way we conduct ourselves and in our way of life (*yen nantew*), the way we stir ourselves or our zeal (*yen ahokeka*). The reason Amu gave for thinking this way was because 'Yesu hyeee' (Jesus commanded it), an apparent reference to Jesus' teaching in Luke 10: 25-

²¹ E. Amu, *Amu Choral Works*, pp. 68-70.

27, a passage Amu must have read in Twi:

Na hwe, mmarakyerefo bi sɔre gyinaa hɔ sɔɔ no hwɛɛ sɛ: Kyerekyerefo, menyɛ den na manya daa nkwa? Na ɔka kyereɛ no sɛ: Den na wɔakyerew mmara no mu? Wokan no den? Na obuae sɛ: Fa wo koma nyinaa ne w'adwene nyinaa dɔ Awurade wo Nyankopɔn; na dɔ wo yɔnko sɛ wo ho.

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? How do you read?" And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself."

In a culturally pluralistic country like Ghana, Amu's call for neighbourly love and unity is important. To emphasise the significance of these virtues Amu employed the biblical mandate of Jesus; 'love your neighbour as yourself.' Jesus' answer to the question posed to him by the lawyer indicated that Jesus was aware of the enmity between the Jews and their neighbours, particularly the Samaritans. He must have known that the Jewish definition of 'neighbour' did not include Samaritans and non-Jews generally. Jesus' 'Parable of the Good Samaritan' (Lk. 10: 29-37) was therefore meant to challenge Jewish presuppositions on neighbourliness and how Jews ought to live with their neighbours. The Samaritan showed love and compassion by attending to the Jew and thereby giving him something that Jews denied Samaritans. The parable teaches that a person's life is enriched only insofar as it is shared with others, particularly those she/he considers as strangers.

It was while Amu was training in Abetifi that the significance of *yɔnkodɔ* (neighbourly love) dawned upon him. It was here that he learnt how to

live with neighbours who did not belong to his ethnic group. This experience greatly influenced Amu and shaped his outlook on life. He testifies in his own words:

When after 1915 we had to go to the other side of the Volta, that is Abetifi to train, and then we mixed with people who were not Ewes at all, that began to give me some ideas about other people in this same country. And therefore mixing with other tribes made us real citizens of the Gold Coast, and we felt that we were members of the Gold Coast.²²

Becoming a 'real citizen of the Gold Coast' for Amu meant transcending the world that he had known and in which he had been nurtured in, to a larger world. He kept his mother tongue Ewe, but in addition learnt Twi, the language that would give him access to the rich traditions and culture of the Akan people and enable him to communicate to a large majority of Ghanaians. By loving his Akan, Ga and other neighbours and thereby sharing in their worlds, Amu's horizon was broadened. As a result he became richer and his humanity was enlarged to the extent that he could be described as 'the National Institution'²³, an accolade which suggests that Amu embodied in himself the cherished values of the Ghanaian personality. He could be described in this sense as the representative Ghanaian. When therefore he testified that '*yɔnkodɔ ye*' (neighbourly love is good) he was only sharing what he himself had experienced.

It is *yɔnkodɔ* (neighbourly love), however that fosters *biakoye* (unity). The two belong together. Amu detested anything that had the tendency of compromising the unity and cohesion of a community whether it was for political reasons or ecclesiastical convenience. A greater part of his life

²² Interview granted to the Media Research Unit, Language and Literature and Music Section of the Institute of African Studies by Ephraim Amu. (n.d.)

²³ Condolence paid to the family of E. Amu by Mr. P. V. Obeng, 1.07.1995.

was spent in uniting the Ewe people who had been divided as a result of the creation in 1921 of the British and French mandated territories, thus splitting Ewes between the nation states of Ghana and Togo.²⁴ It was in pursuance of Ewe reunification that Amu named her second daughter Misonu, meaning “be united.”²⁵ Amu’s concern for unity was again shown when he intervened as head of family of the Saga Community of Peki Avetile to avert what he thought would disturb the peace of the community. Amu thought that the Methodist Church and the Church of Pentecost were enough for the community, and so when ‘a self styled pastor’ attempted to plant another church he felt this was not necessary since ‘the Saga Community is far too small to admit of the establishment of several Christian denominations.’²⁶ Amu had judged right; denominationalism could lead to the fragmentation of the community and this could undermine a fundamental precept of the Christian faith, ‘that they all may be one’ (Jn. 17: 21). Uniting the community may well serve the purpose of the church, and for Amu this was important. Unity should be the hallmark of every society. As noted by J.J. Adaye, ‘*Ɔman biara a wɔda nsow wɔ biribi pa biara mu no, biakoyɛ di wɔn mu hene*’ (Every nation whose trademark is found on anything that is good has unity as their king).²⁷

In lines 6-10 Amu focuses on the benefits of *yɔnkodo* (neighbourly love) and *biakoyɛ* (unity):

Yɔnkodo ye, biakoyɛ ye,

Neighbourly love is good, oneness is good

²⁴ Adu Boahen, Ghana: Evolution and Change in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, Accra: Sankofa Educational Publishers, 2000, p. 181. See also Fred Agyemang, Amu the African, pp. 143-144.

²⁵ Agyemang noted that the desire to see the Ewes reunite was so dear to Amu that he named his third child and second daughter Misonu, meaning 'be united.' This was confirmed in my interview with Prof. Gilbert Ansre, 6.09.2004.

²⁶ See Letters from Amu addressed to a 'self-styled' pastor, 11.02.1987, 7.07.1987.

²⁷ J.J. Adaye, Bere Adu, p. 54.

na egye yen ani, ehye yen den,
 It refreshes us, it encourages us *ema*
enyin, ko yen anim
 It makes us mature and progressive
sakra yen koraa
 It transforms us through and through
Enti momma yenkura mu daa
 and so let us hold on to it at all times

Neighbourly love and unity bring gladness and cheerfulness which lead to the strengthening of the bond of fellowship. Above all, neighbourly love and unity lead to maturity, progress and transformation; *ma enyinin, ko yen anim*. Here, Amu may be alluding to the letter to the Ephesians in which Paul teaches that unity in the Christian faith is fostered when the gifts of the individual members are recognised and put to use ‘for building up the body of Christ’. The fruit that this bears is Christian maturity. But even this is not complete until we attain ‘the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ’ (see Eph. 4: 1-14).

‘YAANOMABIBIRIMMA’: A WAKEUP CALL TO AFRICA

Amu held these ideas on the values that enhance community and nationhood to be valid not only for his native Ghana, but also for all African nations. Amu’s concern for the welfare and progress of aman (pl. of *ōman*)(the nations of Africa) is expressed in ‘Abibirimma’ (People of Africa). The song was inspired by Rev. Christian B. Gati, Amu’s teacher and headmaster of the Peki-Blengo Presbyterian Middle Boarding School. According to Amu, Rev. Gati had the opinion that Africans were backward in their development and as such they needed to do something for themselves so they could catch up with other countries. He said the song could be remembered as the ‘Gati song’.²⁸ The song goes thus:

Yaanom Abibirimma e, Yee!
 Fellow Africans
Monye aso... Asem ben?
 Attention! What is the matter?
Montee nea aba yi ara?
 Have you not heard what is happening?
Yen aso rete o, aye
 We are listening
Monhuu nea aba yi ara?
 Have you not seen what is happening?
Yen ani rehu o, aye
 We are looking
Yete o, yehu o, yefa ho adwene o.
 We hear, we see, we are pondering over it
Aman nyinaa reko agya yen oo,
 All nations are leaving us behind
Aman nyinaa rehu agya yen oo,
 All nations are seeing ahead of us
Yetu yen nan a, yebeko bi o
 If we move we shall advance
Yesua ho nyansa a, yebehu bi o.
 If we learn we shall also know
Yaanom, Abibirimma e, Yee!
 Fellow Africans
Monyere mo ho o, yereyere no biara.
 Make the effort! We are making the effort
Monyere mo ho o, yereyere no pa'ra.
 Make the effort! We are indeed making the effort

²⁸ See Interview Amu granted to the Institute of African Studies, U.G., Legon.

Aninguase! Aninguase mfata Abibirimma o...

Disgrace, disgrace does not befit Africans

Yereyere yen ho dennen na aman reko a,

We are struggling hard to move along

Yeafra mu bi o.

with other nations

*Abibirimma e, Abibirimma e*²⁹

People of Africa, Sons of Africa

The first section of the song (lines 1-7) is a dialogue. '*Yaanom Abibirimma e!*' is a yell. It is a call (with a tone of urgency) to *yaanom*. According to Christaller '*yaanom* is used in addressing one's own people',³⁰ and it is obvious those Amu had in mind were the abibirimma (African peoples). The response, '*yee*', (the context in which it has been used suggests it is a 'shout of determination') shows that the call has been heard.³¹ Then follows a question: '*Asem ben?*' (What is the matter?) Amu draws attention to what is happening and asks his audience whether they have not seen or heard it. In each case the response is positive: '*Yen aso rete o*' (We are listening) and '*Yen ani rehu o*' (We are looking). But beyond this they are pondering what they have seen and heard: '*yefa ho adwene*'.

In the next section of the song (lines 8-14) Amu gives indication of the event he is referring to and calls on his hearers to respond appropriately:

Aman nyinaa reko agya yen oo,

All nations are leaving us behind

²⁹ E. Amu, *Twenty Five African Songs*, pp. 65-67; Cf. E. Amu, *Amu Choral Works*, pp. 143-137. (English translation by Misonu Amu).

³⁰ J.G. Christaller, *Dictionary of Asante and Fante Language*, p. 578-589.

³¹ J. G. Christaller, *Dictionary of Asante and Fante Language*, p. 586-587.

Aman nyinaa rehu agya yen oo,
All nations are seeing ahead of us

Yetu yen nan a, yebeko bi o

If we move we shall advance

Yesua ho nyansa a, yebehu bi o.

If we learn we shall also know

Yaanom, Abibirimma e, Yee!

Fellow Africans

Monyere mo ho o, yereyere no biara.

Make the effort! We are making the effort

Monyere mo ho o, yereyere no pa'ra.

Make the effort! We are indeed making the effort

The concern expressed here is that '*aman nyinaa reko agya yen*' (all nations are advancing beyond us) and are seeing things we do not see: '*aman nyinaa rehu agya yen*'. The only way to advance is to learn the art of advancement itself. This is what Amu meant by the phrase '*Yesua ho nyansa*' or '*yefa ho adwene*' (If we learn its art, craft or skill). Learning here is not about being like the advanced countries as it is about how they became advanced. As noted in an earlier work, Amu was convinced that seeking to be like other countries was the bane of Africa.³² In our quest to become like Europeans we have been reduced to mere consumers and have no confidence in ourselves and what we produce. Amu expressed his concern quite forcefully:

An African looks at a well finished article made by the European as compared with the same kind of article of his own crude make. He looks at the working of a machine

³² The point was made in the 7th Ephraim Amu Memorial Lecture by the author in a paper entitled, 'Theological Landmarks in the life and Thought of Ephraim Amu' jointly organised by the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences and the International Centre for African Music and Dance, University of Ghana, Legon at the Christ the King Hall, Accra on 26 April 2005.

constructed by the European and he is baffled; he sighs, and nods, or does both and says: “*Ei, ei, ei*, these white men (sic), they have the whole world under their feet; serve, we must serve them.” We are lost in amazement, forgetting that we too are made in the likeness of God and that if only we would wake up from our sleep of inferiority and pull ourselves together and resist the disturbance caused by outside pressure, we could do equally wonderful things, perhaps not in making machines or guns, but something far more wonderful than these, something inspired by God to take us nearer perfect freedom.³³

Amu’s argument is clear; the source of our growth and development is not the *Imago Europae* (the Image of Europe), rather it lies in the image and likeness of God, the *Imago Dei* in which Africans also share. To be made in the image of *Ɔdomankama Ɔboadee* (the creator God) means that we have been endowed with the creativity that *Ɔdomankama* possesses. Our ability and inspiration to create therefore stem from the divine plane where the entire cosmic universe is created and sustained. The fundamental issues of growth and human advancement are therefore not about science and technology transfer, important though these may be; they are theological since they deal with how human beings relate to the transcendent God. Since human growth and advancement are dependent on God, it is necessary to study the mental processes, the thought forms and the intellectual framework within which such relationship is nurtured. It is instructive that Amu links advancement to the development of language. Amu believed that it is through the use of Africa’s indigenous languages, especially the reading of the vernacular Bibles that advancement truly occurs. He is clear on the issue:

³³ EAUSA, *Vision and Courage*, Achimota College, 18.7.1937, p. 6.

The kind of Africa we expect to emerge tomorrow depends entirely on the kind of foundation we are laying today... Let as many of us as are aware of the great responsibility of laying the foundation for future Africa and for the future world, let us form or renew the habit of reading the Bible in our own language, praying and meditating daily, so as to be able to build a Christian Africa, and by so doing contribute our worthy share in building a Christian world.³⁴

Amu's vision of Africa is one built on Christian values. He believed that the only way to tackle Africa's underdevelopment was for the continent to repent.³⁵ And repentance for Amu meant nurturing a new attitude and self-image and an orientation that is deeply rooted in a positive application of the past and from which identity is derived. Amu's view implied turning from the fruitless search for solutions in cultures other than one's own and turning to one's treasured heritage as a guide to the way forward.³⁶

In another song, '*Mommyenkɔ so mforo*' (Let us keep on climbing) Amu further develops his idea on nurturing such an attitude, and illustrates it with a metaphor of climbing a hill. The song was composed in March 1947 in response to a request made for the celebration of the Anum Presbyterian Middle School. In this poem knowledge is likened to the summit of a hill and the acquisition of knowledge to the struggle that we go through in getting to the top of a hill. It is likely Amu may have in mind the difficulty he went through as he climbed the Kwahu Hills on his way

³⁴ EAUSA, *The Bible in the Homely Speech*, Achimota College, 22.11.1942.

³⁵ Philip Laryea, 'Theological Landmarks in the life and Thought of Ephraim Amu'.

³⁶ Philip Laryea, 'Theological Landmarks in the life and Thought of Ephraim Amu'.

to Abetifi, the highest habitable place in Ghana ³⁷, to be trained as a teacher and catechist. He may also have drawn inspiration from two other institutions with which he was associated and which incidentally were on hilltops; Presbyterian Training College, Akropong-Akuapem and University of Ghana, Legon. These are citadels of learning from where Amu must have acquired knowledge.

Momma yenko so mforo, yereforo, yereforo

Let us keep on climbing, we are climbing, we are climbing,

Momma yenko so mforo,

Let us keep on climbing,

Adesua ye kokoa yereforo

Acquisition of knowledge is the hill we are climbing

Adesua ye koko a yereforo,

're struggling to get to the top.

apere aben atifi.

Let us keep on climbing

Momma yenkoso mforo,

We are climbing,

Yereforo, yereforo,

Let us keep on climbing

Momma yenko so mforo,

and struggle to get close to the top

mpere mmen atifi,

The top of the hill still lies far in the distance

Koko no atifi da so wo akyirikiryiri.

We are still climbing

Yegu so reforo

but we are not close to the top yet

³⁷ Abetifi is 2080 feet above sea level.

nso yennya mmen atifi ara ε,
 Let us keep climbing
Momma yenkɔ so mforo
 with patience and utmost exertion,
abotɔase ne ahoyere mu,
 a steady and focused mind,
adwene-mu-da-hɔ
 and a strong vigilance
ne ɔwen dennen mu,
 Let us keep climbing
Momma yenkɔ so mforo,
 and struggle to get to the top
mpere mmen atifi
 The top of the hill of learning
Adesua koko no atifi
 is where we are struggling to reach.
*na yerepere ara akɔ akodu hɔ.*³⁸
 (My translation)

Adesua (learning) is the hill that Amu calls upon his audience to climb. The task is demanding and his hearers struggle to get close to the top even when it is far out of sight: '*Koko no atifi da so wɔ akyirikyirikyiri*' (The top of the hill lies far in the distance). To get to the top they need 'abotɔase ne ahoyere' (patience and utmost exertion), '*adwene-mu-da-hɔ*' (a steady and focused mind), and '*ɔwen dennen mu*' (persistent vigilance). A basic principle is established here; learning involves the heart and the mind. But it also requires diligence and persistent vigilance as well. In view of this fundamental Christian outlook, even when Amu does not mention God, the centrality of God is not absent from his mind. The

³⁸ E. Amu, *Unpublished Music Manuscript* (hereafter UMM).

ideas in 'Mommyenko so mforo' are consistent with those expressed in 'Tiri ne nsa ne koma' in which Amu makes a case for holistic learning in which the heart, head and hands are all used. Learning, then, is about total commitment to a cause. It must not be rushed, rather it must be loved passionately as one would love the Lord. Learning is not for the double-minded person since it demands 'adwene-mu-da-ho' (a steady and focused mind).

'OKWANTENNI': TRUE HOSPITALITY, TRUE KNOWLEDGE.
 Akan traditional greetings form the background in 'Okwantenni' (Traveller), a song in which Amu celebrates the traveller. 'Okwantenni' was composed on 18 September 1943. The poem is about the greetings and hospitality accorded a person who has returned from a journey.

Okwantenni, okwantenni, okwantenni,
 Traveller, traveller, traveller
Mo ne nantew, due ne obre.

Congratulations for the journey, consolation for your tiredness.

Okwantenni, okwantenni,
 Traveller, traveller,
Mo, mo, mo, mo okwantenni,

Congratulations, congratulations, congratulations, traveller.

Mo, mo, okwantenni,
 Congratulations, congratulations, traveller
mo ne nantew

well done for the journey

Okwantenni, okwantenni,
 Traveller, traveller,

Onam ne kwan,

He is on his way,

akwaaba oo,

you are welcome,

Ye ma wo akwaaba oo

We say, welcome

Akwaaba, akwaaba,

Welcome, welcome,

Ye ma wo akwaaba, ye ma wo akwaaba oo,

We say welcome, we say welcome,

Ehanom bɔkɔɔ, 'hanom bɔkɔɔ, ehanom bɔkɔɔ,

This place is quiet and fine.

Akwanso sem sen?

Any news from your journey?

Ehanom bɔkɔɔ, hanom bɔkɔɔ.

This place is quiet and fine

ɔkwantenni, ehanom bɔkɔɔ ara,

Traveller, this place is quiet and fine,

Ehanom bɔkɔɔ ara.

This place is quiet and fine.

Akwanso sem sen?

What news do you carry from your journey?

*ɔkwantenni akwaaba oo.*³⁹

Traveller, you are welcome.

(My translation)

In Akan society, *ɔkwantenni* (a traveller) is received with the greeting, *akwaaba*. The word is a contracted form of the expression ‘*akɔ aba*’ (literally, you have gone and come back). Idiomatically, *akwaaba* means ‘welcome’, a ‘form of salutation to one arriving after a temporary absence’.⁴⁰ Another greeting the traveller receives is ‘*Mo ne nantew, due ne ɔbrɛ*’. The first part of the expression congratulates the traveller

³⁹ E. Amu, *Unpublished Music Manuscript*.

⁴⁰ J.G. Christaller, *Dictionary of Asante and Fante Language*, p. 277.

on account of his/her walking or journey. The second is a consolation for any mishap the traveller might have experienced on the journey. As part of the welcome, news about the place of arrival is related to the traveller by the host: 'Ehanom bɔkɔɔ' (Literally, this place is 'cool') meaning, 'all is well here'. The word 'bɔkɔɔ' could be interpreted to mean 'soft', 'gentle', 'comfortable' or 'quiet'.⁴¹ The traveller is in turn asked to narrate news of the place of embarkation and any events that occurred during his/her journey.

The fundamental idea here is the welfare of the individual and the unity and wellbeing of the community. For Amu, this was not just an idea, it was something that he had experienced and to which he was committed. In a sermon he preached in Achimota College in 1942 Amu noted how important the celebration of hospitality is for him:

You will soon be leaving here for your homes when homely words of welcome from all the members of your houses are awaiting you--- "*Kwesi Asare o-pɔɔ*". A-tuu-. They may be expressed in Ewe, Ga or Hausa or some other language. But in all truly African homes one always expects these homely words of welcome and in my own experience, this kind of welcome is one of the thrilling things the members of your houses have in store for you when you arrive home. Words beautifully expressed in highly polished language may fail to mean anything to us, but the homely speech cannot fail to reach our hearts.⁴²

Amu's description of greetings as "homely words of welcome" is important. Greetings in African languages have a home as well as a

⁴¹ J. G. Christaller, *Dictionary of Asante and Fante Language*, p. 36.

⁴² AUSA, *The Bible in the Homely Speech*.E

community touch because they come from “all the members of your houses”, that is, houses belonging to the community in which one lives. Because they possess a home and a community touch, “homely words of welcome” in African languages stir the heart. For Amu, this is one of the most thrilling things that can ever happen to any individual. This in effect goes to buttress the point that felicitations in African languages convey ideas that the so-called “highly polished language[s]” of European origin fail to express. It is clear that for Amu language is not about techniques in communication, nor is it about linguistic niceties in highly refined language. Such use of language may only appeal to the mind. The cognitive function of language, however, is necessary and may indeed be desirable, but the ultimate goal of language is the human heart. It is in this connection that we appreciate Amu’s point about the “homely words of welcome.” They are intended to assure the individual(s) of the love and commitment of the kinship group and to foster a sense of security conducive for the unity and wellbeing of the community. J.H. Nketia sums up the value that Amu placed on hospitality:

[Amu] had just come back from his trip to Britain. He had just come back, you know. And on his return he came to Akropong to greet us. And he came to a morning service in his usual *Batakari*, wearing *fugu*. He had a white handkerchief tied to his wrist. And when he had the opportunity of talking to us, he talked about what he had on his wrist. And then he opened that up and showed us beads. He talked about the beads and said he treasured the beads because they were put on his wrist when he came back, and that was how his people welcomed him. The symbolism of the beads, you know, something they treasure, and Amu, somebody coming back being looked at in this way as a kind of precious bead that has returned and so forth. That

was the thing he talked about, not about his music. So that made a big impression on me. Why was he talking about this? We know him to be a musician. But it also told us something about the values that motivated him and so forth.⁴³

Whereas in 'Okwantenni', Amu discusses Akan traditional greetings and homage that is accorded a traveller, in 'Bonwerɛ Kentenwene' (Bonwerɛ Kente Weaving)⁴⁴ he focuses on the experience of a traveller:

Akyinkyin akyinkyin ama mahu nneema,
Walking about has enabled me see things.

Akyinkyin akyinkyin ama mate nsem a.

Walking about has enabled me hear stories.

Asante Bonwerɛ Kentenwene menhuu bi da o.

But I have never seen how kente is woven at Asante Bonwerɛ.

Asante Bonwerɛ Kentenwene mentee bi da o.

neither have I heard how kente is woven at Asante Bonwerɛ.

Kwame Onimadeɛyɔ,

Kwame Who-knows-how-to-do-things,
ne kɛntewene na abɔ me gye.

has frenzied me with the way he weaves his kente.

Ne nsa ne nan ne nsɛdua sɛ wogyigye ni:

His hands, his feet, and the weaver's shuttle create music which goes
like this:

⁴³ Interview granted to the author by Prof. J.H. Nketia, 19.08.2004.

⁴⁴ E. Amu, *Twenty Five African Songs*, pp. 84-87. The English translation is mine.

Refrain

Kro kro, kro, kro,

Kro kro, kro, kro,

Hi, hi, hi, hi,

Hi, hi, hi, hi,

Krohi, krohi, krokrokro

Krohi, krohi, krokrokro

Hi, hi, krohi, krohi kro

Hi, hi, krohi, krohi kro

Na aye me de o, aye me de o

has made me happy, very happy

Bonwere kentenwene ne!

Kente weaving at *Bonwere*

Aye me de o, abo me gye.

Has made me happy and has frenzied me.

Kentenwene dwom yi afa madwene dennen

This song on kente weaving has occupied my thoughts deeply

Babiara a meko me reto no dennen

Everywhere I go I sing it passionately

Na nnipa a wohuu me nyina

Everyone who met me

hui se asem da me so

saw I was carrying a burden.

Na me ho yeee won nwonwa

I amazed them

ma wo be kyeree me

such that they crowded around me.

“Eno Ohuonimmobob”

“Mother Who-shows-mercy-and compassion”

be faa me koe ko soee ne fi,

took me into her house to lodge with her,

na ɔpataa me ara bisaa me ma anante se:

comforted me and asked of my mission:

Ɔhuonimmɔɔ ante ma ase ara de

The one-who-shows-mercy-and-compassion did not understand me

nanso ɔbɔɔ mmɔden yɔɔ ho bi ara maa me.

and yet she tried to do something for me.

Ɔmaa me nkatekwan pa bi di mee pa ara.

She gave me groundnut soup which I ate to my satisfaction.

Na ne dew maa me werefi me dwom no kakra.

Its deliciousness made me forget about my song for a moment.

Ɔmaa me babi pa da ε

She gave me a good place to sleep in,

ɔdasum' pε mabɔ dagye,

and in the middle of the night I had a nightmare

Kente nwene dwom kro yi ara

about this kente weaving song,

na mereto:

I was singing it:

Mankye Bonwere ho,

I did not stay long at Bonwere,

na mesan me baa fie.

and returned home.

Medwom no ye nnipa pii de na wɔpε atie,

Many people liked my song and wanted to hear it.

Ɔmaa mani gyeε pii se manya bribi pa reko.

I was happy that I had gone to a place of importance.

Na meduu fie pε

As soon as I got home

mekɔɔ ahemfi anante-se bɔ.

I went to the palace to give reasons for my journey.

Mmrante ne mmabaa

Young men and young women

ne nkwakora, mmrewa ne mmɔfra,

old men and old women and children

Wɔbaɛ, beboɛ,

all came and stood there,

Wɔn nyina ara bekyeree me so:

The crowd pressed on me:

Although the traveller has seen and heard much in course of his travels, what he encounters at *Bonwerɛ* is a completely new experience. He is overwhelmed and enthralled by music from an orchestra comprising the hands, the feet, the shuttle and loom of a weaver, Kwame *Onimadeɛyɔ*. He is preoccupied with the music to the extent that he sings it passionately wherever he goes. The song drives him into ecstasy. This is manifested in his actions and those who meet him feel he is carrying a burden. He is besieged by a crowd that has been mesmerized by his music, until he is rescued by *Eno Ohuonimmɔbɔ* (Mother who-shows-mercy-and-compassion) who takes him into her dwellings. This is the traveller's response when *Eno* asks of his mission:

*Awo, Hm! Meye osuani a mefi suku kunini a ɛwɔ Akropɔn
no mu, na metee senea Bonwerɛ kurow yi agye din wɔ
kentenwene mu, na wɔagyaw yen kwan yi, maba se mehwe
nea metee wɔ ho no. Menya meduu kurow no mu pe, ofia edi
kan a meduu ho mu no, metee, na mehui sɛ ɔpanyin Kwame
Onimadeɛyɔ renwene kente”⁴⁵*

She said, “My son, what is the matter?” I replied: “Old lady, Hm! I am a student from the renowned school at Akropong, and I have heard about

⁴⁵ These words, spoken rather than sung, come at the end of the second stanza of the song.

how this town of *Bonwerε* has received fame and honour because of its kente weaving industry, and now that we are on vacation I have come to see for myself what I heard. As soon as I got to the town, in the very first house, I met, I heard, and saw old Kwame Who-knows-how-to-do-things at the loom weaving kente”.

As the traveller narrates his mission he mentions Kwame *Onimadeεyɔ*'s name and that drives him into yet another frenzy. He begins to sing:

Kro kro, kro, kro,
Kro kro, kro, kro,
Hi, hi, hi, hi,
Hi, hi, hi, hi,
Krohi, krohi, krokrokro
Krohi, krohi, krokrokro
Hi, hi, krohi, krohi kro
Hi, hi, krohi, krohi kro
Na ayε me dε o, ayε me dε o
has made me happy, very happy
Bonwerε kentenwene ne!
Kente weaving at Bonwerε
Ayε me dε o, abɔ me gye.
Has made me happy and has frenzied me.

Ohuonimmɔbɔ cannot comprehend what is happening, but she proceeds to accord her guest the courtesies that one would normally offer any stranger; food to eat and a place to sleep. No sooner has the traveller fallen asleep than he begins to sing in his sleep. He is having a dream. His host and her neighbours are aroused from their sleep. The incident is narrated by the traveller himself:

*Eno Ōhuonimmɔbɔne ne sipamfo nyina nyan baɛ, begyinaa me dan a meda mu no ano, retie me dwom no. Na mo ara monim anadwo dwom ne ne de. Ekwɔ wɔn so ara yiye, maa me gye a mabɔ no sann wɔnbi, na sɛ mefrɛ dwom no a, na wɔn nyina gye so: “kro, kro, kro”.*⁴⁶

Mother-who-shows-mercy-and-compassion and all her neighbours woke up and came and stood at my door, listening to my song. And you all know how pleasant songs sound during the night. It sunk deep into them, such that the ecstasy in which I found myself made them merry. And anytime I called the song they all respond: “kro, kro, kro”.

The traveller does not stay long at *Bonwerɛ*. He is happy to have undertaken a journey to such a place of importance. As soon as he gets home he goes to the chief's palace to give a report and to explain why he undertook the journey. At the gathering are *mmrante ne mmaba, ne nkwakora, mmrewa ne mmɔfra* (young men, young women, old women, old men and children), each pressing to hear what the traveller has to say. The following is a description of what took place:

*Mese, nnipa a wɔboaa hɔ, ofi biara mu, anka ɔtwe anka adowa. Enna mehwee komm na mese, ei! Nnipa dodow yi amaneɛ ben po na wɔbɔ wɔn a, ebe sɔ wɔn ani? Ende, edi me me Bonwerɛ Kentenwene dwom yi ara. Na mede mahyehye so, na ôkyeame no asom, na ɔmanfo no agye so. Na efi hɔ, wofa kurow no mu benkum ana nifa, apuei ana atɔɛ a, wo bete: “kro, kro, kro”*⁴⁷

⁴⁶ This is spoken at the end of the third stanza.

⁴⁷ The words are spoken at the end of the fourth stanza.

Those who gathered came from every household, not one was left out. I observed the scene quietly and said to myself, what message do I have to give to this gathering to make them happy? The only message I could give from my journey was my *Bonwere* song. I then started to sing, it caught the ears of the chief's spokesman, and the crowd also responded. From there it spread to every part of the town, from the left to the right, and from the west to the east, the people were singing the song: "*kro, kro, kro*".

'*Bonwere Kentenwene*' is more than a traveller's tale. It is about one in search of knowledge. The characters in the plot and the setting in which they are placed are therefore carefully chosen to convey this idea. There is first, *okwantenni*, (the traveller) who is described as *osuni* (a learner, scholar or student) from the distinguished school at Akropong (an obvious reference to the Presbyterian Training College where Amu was teaching when he wrote this song). Apart from being a student, the traveller is portrayed as a person of experience who has learnt much through exposure to other worlds than his own. And yet what he saw at *Bonwere* amazed him. It is most probable that Amu was recounting his own experience.

Akropong and *Bonwere* are significant in this story. Whereas Akropong is a renowned teacher training institution in Ghana, *Bonwere* 'is a town in Asante famous for weaving high class native cloth'.⁴⁸ Akropong incorporates aspects of indigenous education in its curriculum and represents to a large extent western style education. *Bonwere* on the other hand represents oral, indigenous and non-formal education. From the narrative it is revealing that Amu did not set Akropong against *Bonwere*,

⁴⁸ Ephraim Amu, *Twenty Five African Songs*, p. 84.

as if one was to be preferred to the other. Akropong is noted for its excellence in formal education and so is *Bonwere* for its fame and honour in weaving kente. The two traditions can borrow from each other. In this instance the narrator's preoccupation is on what Akropong can learn from *Bonwere*. It is here that the other character in the story Kwame *Onimadeeyo* becomes important. It is intriguing that Amu chose to call the weaver *Onimadeeyo*, an appellation which literally translates, 'He-knows-how-to-do-things'. It is significant to note that the appellation connotes '*nimdee*', a word that Amu wrote about in two of his songs, '*Tiri ne nsa ne koma*' (Head, hand and heart) and '*Yen ara asase ni*' (This land is our own). Perhaps it is in this character, Kwame *Onimadeeyo*, that we see clearly illustrated Amu's philosophy of *nimdee trodoo*, (true and perfect learning). A learning that involves not only the head, but also the hands and the feet as evidenced in the weaving of Kente. It is instructive that in this story we have *osuani* (a student) being introduced to another sphere of learning. The scenario created by the weaver as he worked on the loom with both hands and feet, against a varied display of threads of all shades and colours, must have been a great delight to watch. Besides the music, (this became the preoccupation of the traveller) Kente⁴⁹ is also created.

Although it is noted for its rich display of colour, the value of *Kente* goes beyond aesthetics. Kwaku Ofori Ansah has this to say about *Kente*:

In its cultural context of use, *Kente* is more than just a cloth. Like most of Africa's visual art forms, *Kente* is a visual presentation of history, philosophy, ethics, oral literature, religious belief, social values and political thought...*Kente* is used not only for its beauty but also for its symbolic significance. Each cloth has a name and a meaning and each of the numerous patterns and motifs has a name and a

⁴⁹ *Kente*, a beautifully woven cloth of varied colours, is a great source of cultural pride. Besides the national flag, kente gives a sense of identity to the Ghanaian.

meaning. Names and meanings are derived from historical events, individual achievements, proverbs, philosophical concepts, oral literature, moral values, social code of conduct, human behaviour and certain attributes of plant and animal life.⁵⁰

Kente has over 12 different colours each with a symbolic meaning. Yellow is associated with the yoke of the egg and symbolises sanctity, preciousness, spiritual vitality and fertility; pink signifies the female essence of life; red is linked with blood and sacrificial rites; and blue is associated with the sky symbolising the abode of the Supreme Being. *Kente* has over 54 different names each with its own design depicting a social, political or historical event.⁵¹

Amu must have known what he was doing when he mounted the pulpit in *Kente* cloth. He must have known that *Kente* is not simply about *avosasa* (the wearing of cloth), a matter considered by his church as trivial and of no theological significance.⁵² A friend even tried to persuade him to drop the idea and put on European attire instead.⁵³ By appearing in *Kente* cloth Amu made a fundamental statement about his African Christian identity and also drew attention to the contribution that Africa can make in furtherance of human advancement on the world scene. To acknowledge therefore the fame and honour of *Bonwɛrɛ* as Amu did is to affirm the importance of indigenous knowledge and indigenous wisdom. In this regard educational institutions like Akropong can learn from indigenous and oral communities like *Bonwɛrɛ*. It is possible to see how all this fit in with Amu's philosophy of growth and advancement. There is a lot already in our traditional institutions that can motivate and inspire

⁵⁰ Kwaku Ofori Ansah, *History and Significance of Ghana's Kente Cloth*, Maryland: Sankofa Publications, 1993. (Wall Chart in the Zimmermann Library, ACI, Akropong),

⁵¹ Kwaku Ofori Ansah, *History and Significance of Ghana's Kente Cloth*.

⁵² Philip Laryea, 'Theological Landmarks in the Life and Thought of Ephraim Amu'.

⁵³ Ephraim Amu's diary entry, 16.07.1933.

growth in all sectors of African life and thought. 'Kente' is the evidence that this is possible.

Conclusion

The point has already been made that at the core of Amu's 'Cultural Activism' was his Christian conviction. Although these songs we have examined are classified as "patriotic" and were composed to draw attention to African indigenous values, wisdom and knowledge, it can be argued that their tenor and general import articulate Christian views and concerns. This confirms Amu's stand that there is much in African culture and tradition that mirror Christian truth and ideals. We have been looking at values that are foundational in nation building. Neighbourly love and unity were two of such values that were studied in detail. We noted that for Amu growth and advancement did not lie in copying or imitating other cultures and civilizations, but rather in nurturing and building upon the thought forms that shape these cultures. We observed that such indigenous knowledge within our own cultures can be used to enrich the system of education that we have inherited from our colonial past. An example to demonstrate that this is possible was given using Amu's experience of the *Kente* weaving industry in *Bonwere*.