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Nationalist Rituals and the Construction
of Diaspora. The fiftieth anniversary of
Ghanaian Independence in Berlin.



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Abstract

This article deals with the question of how a series of public rituals on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Ghanaian independence can be understood in the context of the social construction of diaspora. In the first section the article briefly traces how the idea of the existence of a Ghanaian diaspora became implemented among Ghanaians in Germany. In the second part it will be shown that due to the pluralist character of the Ghanaian population in Germany, the forms and contents of the examined public rituals were highly contested. Nevertheless, all disagreements about the representation of a Ghanaian diaspora gravitate around the idea that something, namely a diaspora, exists that can theoretically be represented in an adequate way. In this sense, the analysis of the Ghana@50 celebration in Berlin contributes to a better understanding of the social and historical processes by which global discourses on diaspora become a self-evident and banal part of migrants' social reality. In doing so, the article contributes to the debate of whether diasporas should be understood either as realistic entities or ideological constructs. The article examines how the imaginary of diaspora becomes reality through social means.

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On 30 June 2007, several hundred people gathered in the garden of the Ghanaian embassy to celebrate the golden jubilee of Ghanaian independence. The occasion was the so-called *cultural durbar*¹, during which Ghanaian migrants presented traditional clothes, dances and songs from different parts of Ghana. It was the climax of a series of five events co-organised by the Ghanaian embassy and migrant representatives to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Ghana's independence.²



Photo 1: Ghanaian band at the cultural durbar in Berlin (photo: Boris Nieswand)

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- 1 In Ghana, a *durbar* generally refers to a large public ritual with some connection to representations of chieftaincy.
 - 2 Empirically, the article is based on participant observation and conversations with Ghanaians at the cultural durbar in Berlin, the analysis of video recordings of the five analysed events, interviews with three organisers of the series of events, and an internet inquiry on reactions to the event. Moreover, I have known some of the key actors since 2001, when I started doing fieldwork among Ghanaians in Berlin. My familiarity with them and the social configuration of Ghanaians in Berlin substantially facilitated the collection of data and the analysis of the video tapes.

Among the audience were Ghanaian migrants from Berlin and other cities, about 30 traditional Ghanaian authorities living in Germany, members of the diplomatic corps in Berlin, a few executives of private enterprises with business relations with Ghana, and a couple of interested Germans. One of the highlights of the cultural durbar was the parade of about 30 ‘traditional’ authorities in their sumptuous ‘traditional’ attire. This group included the *Togbui*³ of the Hohoe Gbi Traditional Area and the *Tufuhene*⁴ of Akropong, both of whom are migrants to Germany who became enstooled after having left Ghana.⁵ A video-filmmaker was hired by the organisers to produce an official video, and numerous visitors, Ghanaians as well as non-Ghanaians, took photos and filmed the performative highlights of the event. The considerable extent of audio-visual documentation marked the event’s exceptionality and its dramatised character.

The person selected as the chairman, Doctor Busia⁶, was a medical doctor who had come to Berlin as student in the 1960s. In his introductory remarks, he highlighted that this event expressed the migrants’ wish to support their motherland despite living ‘in the diaspora’.⁷ This cultural durbar is particularly remarkable because only 15 or 20 years ago, no diaspora existed in Germany that would have celebrated itself and the Ghanaian nation-state in such a conspicuous way. What has happened in the meantime to make the events of the Ghana@50 celebration appear to be a quasi-natural expression of the migrants’ feelings of national belonging? Before returning to this question, I will make some more theoretical remarks on the link between diaspora and public rituals.

The Construction of Diaspora

When I speak of the construction of diaspora, I want to highlight that migrants from Africa or elsewhere are not a diaspora simply due to the fact that they live outside their country of birth, but that diaspora is a particular political and social

3 The Ewe word *togbui* is a title that is often translated as ‘ruler’, ‘king’ or ‘chief’.

4 *Tufuhene* is a high office in the state hierarchy of some of the pre-colonial Akan states in the South of Ghana.

5 Since Ghanaian traditional authorities receive stools (and not thrones) as insignia of power, the ceremony of inauguration is called enstoolment rather than enthronement.

6 All names except those of prominent political authorities have been changed.

7 Field protocol, cultural durbar, 30.06.07, Berlin.

form which is used to frame and negotiate modes of transnational belonging. In many migrant sending countries around the world, diaspora policies have become an umbrella term for new national policies of incorporation, changes to citizenship rights and identity discourses (Basch et al. 1994; Bauböck 2003; Bernal 2004; Glick Schiller 2005a, 2005b; Levitt and De la Dehesa 2003). It provides countries, but also regions and ethnic groups, with a grammar of identity (Nieswand 2008), allowing one to distinguish between those 'in the diaspora' and those 'at home' as two specifications of the same people.⁸ The notion of diaspora has thereby become a means for adapting discourses of national belonging to the conditions of transnational mass migrations. This process is in no small way related to the fact that sending states have developed instrumental interests in incorporating transnational migrants, including the maintenance of flows of remittances, attracting migrants' human capital and pursuing foreign policy interests through migrant lobby groups in the receiving countries (Bauböck 2003; Fitzgerald 2009).

Despite or because of its political relevance, Brubaker (2005) and Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002: 324) argued that the ideological impact of the concept of diaspora would discredit it as an analytical concept. According to these authors, the concept confuses identity discourses with groups in a factual sense. Therefore, it uncritically affirms representations of groups as collectives and overlooks its ideological implications, the internal heterogeneity of the populations it refers to and the specific historicity of diaspora discourses. In this context, Brubaker (2005: 15) advocated not to use diaspora as an analytical term but to make the politics and pragmatics of diaspora an object of empirical study. In Africa it required only a minor semantic shift to adapt the idea of African diaspora, which originally referred to the descendants of the victims of the transatlantic slave trade, to post-colonial migration. Recently, a discourse on 'new diasporas' (Koser 2003) has emerged in several African countries, which in some of its manifestations implies a significant reconfiguration of postcolonial nationalism.⁹ While during the times of decolonialisation it was the primary goal of the new states to nationalise their internally heterogeneous popula-

8 It appears that although the diaspora concept is applied to many very different groups, including Afro-Americans, Irish, Jews, Ghanaians, Armenians, Tibetans and Sri Lankans, Muslim migrant groups such as Moroccans or Senegalese appear to be hesitant to use it because of its Jewish connotation.

9 According to Billig (1995), the distinction between (aggressive and bad) nationalism and (peaceful and good) patriotism is used in Western Europe and North America to banalise those societies' own and demonise the others' nationalisms. In the context of this article, nationalism is used in a very encompassing and analytical way. It simply refers to identifi-

tions living within a territory with arbitrary colonial boundaries, the ‘new diaspora policies’ aim to maintain the loyalty of a geographically scattered population that is expected to be connected by primordial emotions of national belonging.

New diaspora policies have involved formal meetings of migrant representatives with high-ranking politicians, international conferences and institution-building. For example, Burkina Faso established a Conseil Supérieur des Burkinabè de l’Étranger in 1995, Eritrea a Commission for Eritreans Residing Abroad in the late 1990s, Ethiopia a General Directorate in Charge of Ethiopian Expatriate Affairs in 2002, Senegal a Ministère des Sénégalais de l’Extérieur (Gerdes 2007) and Ghana a Non-Resident Secretariat in 2003, Mali a Ministère des Maliens l’Extérieur et de l’Intégration Africaine in 2004, Cameroon a Department for Cameroonians Abroad in 2005 and Sierra Leone Office an Office for Diaspora Affairs in 2007. In addition, several countries have reformed their citizenship laws. While at the time of independence many African countries demanded unambiguous statements of national loyalty from their new citizens – and this meant exclusive forms of citizenship – a number of African states have more recently introduced the possibility of double citizenship. Gambia implemented double citizenship in 1997, Nigeria in 1999, Burundi in 2000, Ghana in 2002, South Africa and Mozambique in 2004, Sierra Leone in 2006 and Uganda in 2008. Some citizenship laws, such as those of Mali or Burkina Faso, already recognised double citizenship before this period, and in other countries, like Zambia, Kenya or Cameroon, public debates about the reform of the citizenship law are currently taking place. From the perspective of the sending countries, double citizenship allow for a higher inclusiveness. It offers migrants the opportunity to remain incorporated as citizens in their countries of origin without limiting their legal opportunities in the receiving countries.

Highlighting the historicity and contingency of the representations of migrant populations as diasporas raises the question of how diasporas come into social being. The 50th anniversary of independence recently celebrated by several African nation-states provides a good opportunity to reflect on the extent to which these events express and shape diasporic nationalism.¹⁰

catory discourses, ideologies and practices referring to nations and nation-states but does not imply a value judgment.

10 Diasporic nationalism is closely related to what is called “long distance nationalism” (Anderson 1998; Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001). However, I want to place specific emphasis on the point that the reference to the social imaginary of diaspora adds a quality to the type nationalism that is not reflected by mere geographical distance.

Ghanaians in Germany

The resonance that discourses of diasporic nationalism encounter among migrants depends on the country of origin's general political and economic climate as well as on the relationship between governments and migrant populations. Migrants who are frustrated by national politics may lack enthusiasm to celebrate 'their nation of origin' in the context of the emigration country or may use national celebrations to express their open opposition to the government of the sending country. Due to the political and economic instabilities that Ghana experienced in the 1970s and 1980s, it was much more difficult for Ghanaians in Germany to relate positively to their country of origin during this period. Moreover, the relationship between the migrants and the embassy was complicated in this period because, in their applications for asylum in Germany, many of them claimed that they had been persecuted by the Ghanaian military government. Since then, Ghana's economic situation has improved significantly, the country is now politically relatively stable, has experienced a profound democratisation process and has regained international recognition. In this respect, the golden jubilee celebrations of Ghanaian independence in Berlin in 2007 took place in a favourable political climate.

A profound change that was reflected in the events was that Ghana has become an emigration country during the last decades. Since the mid-1970s Ghanaians have increasingly dispersed over the high- and medium-income countries of the globe (cf. Bump 2006; Peil 1995; Van Hear 1998). Between 5 and 20 percent of the Ghanaian population is estimated to live outside their country of birth, which amounts to 1.4 million persons (International Monetary Fund 2005: 7; Peil 1995: 365). The social relevance of transnational migration affects Ghana in many respects, including the way the Ghanaian nation is imagined. In this sense, the Ghana@50 celebrations in Berlin and elsewhere offered a public occasion at which representatives of the Ghanaian nation-state as well as migrants could express and negotiate both continuity and changes in their understanding of what the Ghanaian nation is.

Before the 1970s only a relatively small group of Ghanaians lived in Germany, of which students formed a large part.¹¹ Their share declined from 30 percent in the late 1960s to about 2 percent in the 1980s and 1990s.¹² Over the last years, an increase in

11 Until 1966, some hundreds of Ghanaian students were sent by the Nkrumah government with scholarships to both parts of Germany.

12 Statistisches Bundesamt Deutschland cited after Martin (2005: 313).

numbers of students has again become noticeable¹³, but students still do not make up more than 4 percent of the total Ghanaian population in Germany.¹⁴ Between 1977 and 1993, the (official) numbers of Ghanaians in Germany rose from 3,275 to almost 26,000.¹⁵ For many of these migrants the German asylum law was the legal entry door to Germany. Between 1980 and 1993, 3,348 Ghanaians on average were annually registered as asylum seekers in Germany.¹⁶ This meant that Germany was by far the major destination country for Ghanaian asylum seekers in Europe during this period.¹⁷

Although the asylum procedure offered an opportunity to acquire a temporally limited permit of stay, only few Ghanaians were granted political asylum. A safe legal status was far more often achieved by other means.¹⁸ In 1993, article sixteen of the German constitution, which guaranteed the right to asylum, was changed and induced a profound decrease in the numbers of asylum applications. As a result, the proportion of asylum seekers in the Ghanaian population decreased from 30 percent in the 1980s to 1 percent in 2000.¹⁹ The official number of Ghanaians fell from about 26,000 in 1992 to 20,500 in 2006.²⁰ The negative balance of resident documented Ghanaians is related to several factors, such as the decrease in immigration from Ghana due to German anti-migration policies, the naturalisation of Ghanaians²¹, the increase in undocumented migration and the on-migration of migrants to other countries within the European Union (Lindley and Van Hear 2007). The asylum claims lost importance as an option for immigration to Germany after 1993, and the relationship between the embassy and the migrants became more relaxed. Moreover, due to the active diaspora policies, initiated by President John Agyekum Kufuor's government, which took over power in 2000, the appraisal of migration from the

13 Statistisches Bundesamt Deutschland (2006).

14 Statistisches Bundesamt Deutschland (2006).

15 Statistisches Bundesamt Deutschland (2005).

16 UNHCR 2001 and own calculations.

17 Between 1980 and 1993, 49 percent of Ghanaian asylum seekers in Europe were documented in Germany (UNHCR 2001).

18 Between 1989 and 2000, only 0.26 percent of the Ghanaian asylum applicants were granted asylum (Bundesamt für die Anerkennung ausländischer Flüchtlinge 2002). A frequent way of securing one's legal status was marriage with a German or with a foreigner with a secure legal status in Germany.

19 Statistisches Bundesamt 2005.

20 Statistisches Bundesamt 2006.

21 6,855 Ghanaians were naturalised between 2000 and 2007 alone (Statistisches Bundesamt 2008).

sending country's perspective changed significantly. The policies included significant changes in the definition of citizenship rights (Mohan 2006; Nieswand 2009; Owusu 2003) and the creation of new opportunities for Ghanaian migrants in receiving countries like Germany for recognition and political participation in Ghana.

The founding of the Ghana Community in Berlin in 2002 is an example of how Ghanaian diaspora policies affected organisation-building among migrants (Nieswand 2008). In the late 1980s an association of Ghanaian migrants existed, called Ghana Union. Its focus was self-help against the restrictive German migration policies under which Ghanaian asylum seekers in particular suffered at this time. Since there was mutual distrust between the embassy and the migrants, the Ghana Union had an important function as a representative body of Ghanaians and a mediator between migrants and German state institutions. The former president of the Ghana Union summarised the situation by stating, 'They [the migrants] had the feeling or they were told that if (...) you are asylum seeker you have said something wrong about your government so you can't come to your embassy (...) and the embassy did also not come to them.'²²

This work of the Ghana Union was exclusively oriented towards the receiving country. In the mid-1990s, when the relations between the embassy and the migrants had improved, the Ghana Union terminated its activities. In 2002, a new voluntary association of Ghanaians in Berlin was founded, called Ghana Community. In this period, it was the Ghanaian embassy itself that stimulated the formation of diaspora organisations among Ghanaians in Germany. A representative of the embassy explained as follows: 'We are still working on that the people need representatives in every German city in order to work on their behalf.'²³

Subsequently, it became a central purpose of the newly founded Ghana Community to mobilise audiences that could fill the diaspora-slots that emerged in the context of Ghana's policy of migrant inclusion. The Ghana Community played an important role in organising a meeting with President Kufuor when he visited Germany in June 2002, arranged a discussion with the Ghanaian Minister for Economic Planning and Regional Integration in August 2002, met with the Senior Minister John Henry Mensah in 2006, and became active in the course of the Ghana@50 celebrations in March, June and July 2007. Although the transnational orientation

22 Interview, 11.04.02, Berlin.

23 Interview, 09.08.02, Berlin.

of the Ghana Community was induced by developments in Ghana, it also reflects changes in the opportunity structures for migrant activism in Berlin.²⁴

Parallel to the activists in the national unions, an elite also emerged among Ghanaian pastors in the larger German cities during the last decades.²⁵ As will be shown below, the emergence of different and partly competing migrant elites has caused tensions when it comes to the question of how Ghanaians in Germany should be represented.

The 50th Anniversary of Ghanaian Independence in Berlin

The Ghana@50 celebrations were a multi-sited event. Aside from the central celebration in Accra on 6 March 2007 (Lentz and Budniok 2007), they also took place in many other cities with significant Ghanaian populations in Western Europe and North America. The ritual landscape of the event, which emerged in interaction between the ritual centre of the celebrations and its different peripheries, allowed groups to participate in the events independent of their place of residence and gave space to adapt the celebrations to local demands. By supplying the embassies with financial resources to support celebrations in some receiving areas, the Ghanaian government actively encouraged migrants to take part in the event.²⁶ Despite the transnational character of the ritual landscape, the flow of information between the ritual centre and its peripheries was asymmetrical. This means that Ghanaians in Accra took little notice of the activities in Berlin. In the periphery, this asymmetry created an imbalance between the meaning structure of the event, which referred to the ritual centre of Accra, where Independence was declared on 6 March 1957, and the factual incorporation of the event into Ghana, which remained rather marginal. In fact, the most relevant audience for the Ghana@50 celebrations were not Ghanaians in Ghana but those in Berlin. Nevertheless, much of the excitement about the event was created by the consciousness that the anniversary of independence was being celebrated by Ghanaians in several countries and cities around the globe.

24 In the early 2000s only an umbrella organisation of African migrants was supported but no national associations.

25 In particular, Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal forms of Christianity dominate the religious field of African-initiated churches in Germany.

26 Interview protocol, Moses Opong, 25.06.08. Mr. Opong is an influential representative of the Ghana Community who played an important role in the organisation of the events.



Picture 2: Participants and Journalists documenting the event audio-visually in Berlin (photo: Boris Nieswand)

Altogether five events took place in the framework of the official Ghana@50 celebrations in Berlin between March and July 2007. Each event varied in character, took place at a different location and targeted different audiences. The series of events started with the grand opening of an exhibition of Ghanaian commercial products on the premises of the embassy on 1 March.²⁷ This event in particular was aimed at potential German clients but also attracted Ghanaians and other curious onlookers. On 6 March, the actual anniversary of Ghanaian independence, a formal reception was held at the embassy. It targeted mainly the diplomatic corps of Berlin, including a German minister of state. Further, a selection of public figures among Ghanaian migrants was invited to the event. Most participants wore conventional evening dresses but several Ghanaians, including the ambassador himself, put on *kente* clothes or other African dresses. The design of the event, including the catering

²⁷ Video transcript, Exhibition, 1 to 7 March 2007, Berlin.

and the live music, was prepared to satisfy the demands of the reception's illustrious clientele.

Complementary to this exclusive event, a public party was organised by the Ghana Community and co-financed by the embassy on 7 March at the *Rathaus Schöneberg*.²⁸ Altogether a few hundred Ghanaians and non-Ghanaians attended. Well-known Ghanaian musicians based in Berlin entertained the guests. The audience included first-generation Ghanaians of different age groups and different socio-economic status, second-generation Ghanaians, Afro-Germans, non-Ghanaian Africans as well as Germans. The dress code was casual. At the beginning, the ambassador stressed the historical significance of the event, pictures and film shots of the independence celebrations in 1957 were shown and the national anthem was played. In the course of the evening the party became increasingly informal. Due to the climatic conditions in Germany the cultural durbar, as fourth event, was postponed to 30 June. The series concluded with an interdenominational church service held on 1 July. In the following, these two events will be at the centre of attention.

Cultural Durbar

In September 2006, a representative of the Ghanaian embassy contacted the president of the Ghana Community in Berlin.²⁹ Together they developed the idea of a public event in which migrants should showcase cultural traits of the 10 administrative regions of Ghana. It was to be organised by migrants who themselves originated from the respective regions. Given that Ghanaian migrants to Germany are not a statistical cross-section of the Ghanaian population, demographic problems emerged. In the case of four regions it appeared difficult to find migrants in sufficient numbers to form a regional team. Therefore, it was decided that two clusters had to be created which were to represent more than one region. The three northern regions³⁰, from which few migrants in Germany stem, were integrated into a single group. Additionally, the under-represented Western Region was merged with the Central Region.

28 *Rathaus Schöneberg* is the town hall of one of the administrative districts of Berlin.

29 The accounts are based on interviews with four persons who were involved in the organisation, my own participation in the cultural durbar, the study of the video documentation and the analysis of internet articles about the events.

30 The three northern regions of Ghana are Northern Region, Upper West Region and Upper East Region.

Each of the altogether seven groups was supposed to represent its region by providing some basic information, by performing typical songs and dances and by dressing in typical clothes. In addition to the regional performances, the spokesman of the Eastern Region was asked in his capacity as a member of the German House of Chiefs³¹ to gather ‘traditional’ Ghanaian authorities in Germany to join a procession and to pour libation.³²



Figure 3: Ghanaian traditional authorities pouring libation (photo: Boris Nieswand)

In order to showcase Ghanaian culture, the organisers had to share a more or less common understanding of Ghanaian culture. On the one hand, this common understanding referred to a set of shared national symbols. These included the Ghanaian flag, the national anthem, an idealised narrative of the political history of Ghana

31 The German House of Chiefs perceives itself as a representative organ of Ghanaian ‘traditional’ authorities living in Germany.

32 Interview protocol, Charles Asamoah, 28.10.08.

and visual representations of the territory of Ghana. On the other hand, Ghanaian culture was also understood as the non-cultural political frame in which certain regional cultural differences co-existed. The representation of the regional cultures was portrayed by ethnic markers, such as clothes, dances and songs, of the majority populations in a given region. In this sense, cultural diversity meant, above all, diversity of regionally dominant 'native' ethnic cultures. Minority and migrant groups as well as other more recent forms of internal diversity were not represented in this framework.

While being Ghanaian in the first sense meant sharing certain symbols with other Ghanaians, in the second sense it implied belonging to one of the socio-cultural subunits which constitute Ghana. In the end credits of the official video of the event, these tensions between the different notions of culture were addressed by the slogan 'one nation, different cultures', in which the status of culture was ascribed only to the ethnic cultures but not to the cultural expressions of the nation itself. However, the attempt to represent Ghana as a composite of formally equal ethnic-regional cultures required particular efforts and precautions.

The organisation committee placed much attention on representing the regional 'cultures' in an even-handed way. The duration of the presentation of each group was assigned proportionally to the number of regions a team had to represent. Therefore, the performance of the relatively small group of migrants from the three northern regions of Ghana was significantly longer than that of the Ashanti Region, in which the largest number of migrants participated. Moreover, the regional teams' order of appearance was drawn by lot beforehand. Although a standardised format of the performances was meant to reduce conflicts, it created competition between the groups. Some members of those groups which were represented by small and relatively unobtrusive teams felt illegitimately dominated by the stronger and noisier groups, such as the Ashanti Region.

In particular, the role of Asante Twi, which was used besides German and English as the language of communication by the masters of ceremony, and the quantitative and acoustic dominance of Asante during the durbar became a target of criticism. One of my non-Asante informants complained that he found that the use of Asante Twi and the, according to his view, noisy and dominant performance of the Asante, were inadequate at an occasion that was to celebrate Ghana's independence.³³ In a similar vein, some internet user wrote critical comments in an online article about

33 Field Protocol, 30.06.2007.

the Ghana@50 celebration. One informant summarised the criticism as follows: 'It's Ashanti culture [that was] portrayed. (...) Ashanti culture cannot represent Ghanaians in general.'³⁴

The suspicion that the Asante try to dominate other ethnic groups is a political narrative in Ghana which goes back to the pre-colonial history of the Asante Empire. These comments are a bit surprising in the context of the cultural durbar in Berlin because the organisation committee was particularly careful to identify and involve actors from different regions and ethnic groups on a more or less equal footing despite the fact that this balance did not reflect the demographic composition of Ghanaians in Germany. In this sense, the effort to represent Ghanaians in Germany as a miniature copy of the population in Ghana had the side-effect that it encouraged the import of Ghanaian controversies about the power relations between ethnic groups. Nevertheless, contestations and debates about modes of representations are a normal and integral part of all public representations of Ghana as a multi-ethnic plural society. The strong norm that ethnically different populations should be represented in equal terms almost necessarily entails the objection that some groups are not represented as such. Therefore, the criticism does not devalue the norms of Ghanaian cultural pluralism, but tends to underline it. The organising committee's care to create procedures that would allow for a balanced representation documents their awareness of the respective norms and the potential criticism they evoke.

Although ethnic markers referring to the context of Ghana were employed in the course of the durbar, it is remarkable that cultural diversity only played a subordinate role in the context of the Ghana@50 celebrations in Accra itself. Instead, the relationship between government and opposition was the most important line of division (Lentz and Budniok 2007). This difference between Ghana and Germany makes it even more obvious that the display of cultural opulence in the emigration context was a gesture of self-confirmation and a counterweight to migration-related devaluations of cultural identities experienced by Ghanaians in Germany. The cultural durbar's implicit reference to a German public became clear to me due to the fact that I was personally invited to Berlin by the organisers; something which the respective persons had done neither before nor afterwards.

34 <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/diaspora/artikel.php?ID=126448&comment=2983292#com>

Interdenominational church service

Tensions emerged between the organisers of the cultural durbar and those of the interdenominational church service which took place on the following day. The initiative for the church service was in this case also taken by a representative of the embassy who contacted Pastor John, the chairman of the council of African pastors in Berlin. Subsequently, the latter gathered six pastors with different denominational backgrounds to form an organising committee. All of them were involved in the service in different capacities. For the main sermon a prominent Ghanaian guest preacher, Pastor Mensah from London, was invited. The service was well attended mostly by Ghanaians of different social and denominational backgrounds, including the ambassador and his wife and several Ghanaian pastors.

During the sermon Pastor Mensah developed a narrative in which he drew a close connection between the Ghanaian political elite's commitment to Christianity and the achievements and failures of the Ghanaian nation-state. In this framework, the success of being the first colony south of the Sahara to gain independence was ascribed to the firm Christian belief of the fathers of Ghanaian independence: 'History tell us that it was only through Christianity that we gained independence.'³⁵ In contrast to the success of becoming the first colony in Sub-Saharan Africa to gain independence, the post-independence crisis was interpreted as the political leaders' weakness in resisting the offenses of evil: 'The Big Six³⁶ started so well. Only because of offenses they broke up and everything deteriorated. (...) Today is a time in which the political leaders are fighting political leaders. Church members are fighting church members. Pastors are fighting pastors. (...) If we want to come together we have to be aware of these offenses because they destroy our unity.'³⁷

Depicting Ghanaian independence as a Christian event challenges secular self-representations of the Ghanaian nation-state, which place particular emphasis on representing Islam and Christianity in an even-handed way. Although Kwame Nkrumah, the first Ghanaian president, to whom Mensah referred, wanted to become a Catholic priest in his early years, he later became a strong supporter of secularism. As early as 1957 the Ghanaian government passed a law that prohibited political organisations based on religion and ethnicity. In this respect, Pastor

35 Video transcript, Interdenominational Church Service, 1 July 2007, Berlin.

36 The Big Six were leaders of the United Gold Coast Convention which led the political struggle for Ghanaian independence.

37 Ibid.

Mensah's interpretation that Christianity played a central role in the course of Ghanaian independence is a religious appropriation of national history rather than an academic account.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the interdenominational church service was the only event in the framework of the Ghana@50 celebration in Berlin in which failures of the Ghanaian nation-state were directly addressed. They were neglected in the other events although they were important reasons why so many Ghanaians left the country. Obviously, the more unpleasant parts of history were considered to be disturbing factors in a context that was supposed to celebrate the Ghanaian nation. Only the Christian teleology, in which interventions of evil are interpreted as temporal disturbances that are overcome in the end by the righteous believer, allowed for the inclusion of these aspects of Ghanaian history.

In the run-up to the church service, the embassy made explicitly clear to the key organisers of the cultural durbar that they should not interfere in the organisation of the church service.³⁸ This precautionary measure reflected the fact that, as noted before, two different elites who act as representatives of Ghanaian migrants and who receive their authority from different sources have developed in the recent past. One group gravitates around the Ghana Community, which is dominated by migrants who feel some attachment to what could be called a Nkrumahist type of Ghanaian nationalism, one that highlights the compatibility of 'traditional' culture and the 'modern' nation (Nkrumah 1961). It is characterised by older pan-Africanist ideas (Du Bois 2003) which suggest that the emancipation of African nations depends on developing a positive and self-conscious relation to their own cultural tradition.

The members of the second elite group in Berlin, who tend to be younger than the members of the first group, create their claims by being pastors of migrant-initiated churches. In particular, the pastors of (neo)-Pentecostal congregations propagate a pronounced anti-traditionalist idea of religion (Meyer 1998; Nieswand 2010, pp. 15-17). In the past, dissent has evolved about the exercise of ancestor-related ritual practices, such as libations and public rituals connected to chieftaincy. These are interpreted as idolatry by (neo)-Pentecostal Christians (Darkwa Amanor 2009; Meyer 1998, p. 189) while the Ghana Community perceives them as legitimate expressions of cultural traditions. In order to address these conflicts, the Ghana Community organised a public panel discussion in 2005 to debate the relation between tradition and religion with a neo-Pentecostal pastor who rejected ritual references to the

38 Interview protocol, Moses Oppong, 25.06.08.

ancestors. But the public debate, rather than solving the conflict, only entrenched the fronts between these two groups.

Against this background, the embassy's intervention to separate the interdenominational church service from the cultural durbar aimed to reduce tensions between the two groups. It allowed each of them to generate their own public space and to enact their own hierarchy. In this sense, the fragmentation of the Ghana@50 celebration was a means of limiting conflict.

Conclusion

The Ghana@50 celebrations in Berlin offered Ghanaian migrants the opportunity to participate in a diaspora ritual that connected Ghanaians in different localities. In this way it was part and parcel of the process of constructing a 'Ghanaian diaspora' in Germany and filling it with experiential knowledge. In general, two different meanings of the term diaspora can be distinguished in the Ghanaian context. On the one hand, the diaspora is, in particular in the context of development activities (cf. Nieswand 2009), represented as a semi-autonomous extraterritorial sub-unit of the Ghanaian nation-state. In this sense, Ghanaians are divided into two entities: those at home and those in the diaspora. Subsequently, specific traits can be attributed to the category of diasporic Ghanaians, such as being affluent, and appeals can be made, for instance to support the motherland.

On the other hand, the diaspora can also be represented as a miniature copy of the homeland. In this case, it is not the difference between the diaspora compared to the homeland population that is the centre of attention, but its essential sameness. The regional presentations in the context of the cultural durbar in Berlin clearly referred to the second meaning. However, the practical problems inherent in creating the image of essential sameness revealed the limits of the equation. Nevertheless, the efforts to evoke the impression of essential sameness had the side-effect that those aspects of the life of Ghanaians in Germany that refer to the social and political conditions of the receiving country were excluded from representation. The differentiation between the first and second generations and their different relations to the Ghanaian nation-state, for instance, was not made an issue although it is one for many migrant families. Moreover, receiving-country related inequalities among migrants, e.g. concerning their legal or their socio-economic status, were not addressed. Of

course, it would be misplaced to expect a migrants' celebration of national independence to convey a complex representation of a given population. Nevertheless, the conspicuous absence of receiving-country related issues, the idealised representations of Ghanaian history and culture as well as the non-reference to political divisions in Ghana contributed to giving the events and the imaginary of diaspora that was conveyed by them a particularly depoliticised character, which is remarkable given the turbulence that the country has gone through since its independence.

On a more theoretical level, the empirical case provides the possibility to reflect on the relationship between the described series of public events and the question to what extent rituals³⁹ contribute to the integration of a community, in this case, a diaspora group. This question refers back to Emile Durkheim's (1994 [1912]) argument that ('primitive') religious rituals are a means for integrating society and recommitting its members to collective values. In his view, societies or groups depend on devices like rituals by which they can periodically restore a sense of community that would otherwise dissolve. In this sense, rituals were considered a cohesive countermeasure to the centrifugal social forces of individualisation.

Subsequently, Durkheim's argument became heavily criticised in social anthropology and the neighbouring disciplines (e.g. Beattie 1970; Goody 1977; Moore and Myerhoff 1977; Tambiah 1985 [1969]; Turner 1969). According to Clifford Geertz (1973 [1966]: 124) and Victor Turner (1969), rituals not only reproduce society, as Durkheim suggested, but might also have catalytic effects on social change. Etzioni (2000) challenged Durkheim's emphasis on integration and the peaceful restoration of coherence in the understanding of rituals. He highlighted that public rituals of ethnic or religious groups can even reinforce social tensions and conflicts.

Generally, Durkheim's critics argued that the relationship between rituals and social integration is empirically more complex, fragmented, dynamic and contingent than he suggested. Nevertheless, the question remains as to what made Durkheim's argumentation so influential. One reason is that he draws a connection between the experiential quality of rituals and the formation of groups. As cognitive anthropologists have argued more recently (e.g. Bloch 1998; D'Andrade 1996), knowledge and memories acquired by complex, multi-sensual and habitual social experiences work in some respects more effectively in human brains than pure cognitive knowledge.

39 The concept of ritual will be used in a wide sense. It refers to public and dramatised collective performances that employ conventional social forms in order to convey a – more or less explicit – message both to the group of performers themselves and to their audience(s).

Since public rituals often involve the chance to experience something as part of a group, they distinguish themselves from other sources of knowledge about groups.

What appears most supportive of the relevance of Durkheim's argument is that religious and political actors themselves employ rituals in order to animate ephemeral ideas and ideologies and seem, thereby, to apply a Durkheimian theory of ritual (Douglas 1986: 35). Nationalism is a well-documented example that demonstrates the relevance of public rituals outside the religious sphere. In particular, nineteenth- and twentieth-century nationalists all over the globe employed rituals to invent national traditions, increase the state's legitimacy and socialise the population according to nationalist ideologies (Hobsbawm 1983: 9). Although the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century type of chauvinistic nationalism has become discredited in parts of the world, nationalist public rituals can still be found in most nation-states. Beyond the case of nationalism, most collective identities in contemporary pluralist societies have some ritualistic expressions. Even pluralism itself can be an object of ritualisation, as numerous public celebrations of urban multiculturalism document.

However, the fact that actors to some extent believe in the power and relevance of public rituals means neither that social integration has to be the main goal of public rituals nor that rituals necessarily fulfil the ascribed function. Durkheim's critics have drawn attention to the fact that there is empirical variety in the forms, goals and effects of rituals. Since theoretically it can neither be presumed nor ruled out that rituals have an impact on the integration of groups, this must be empirically investigated. Whether the described public rituals contributed to the integration of the Ghanaian diaspora is more complicated than a Durkheimian approach would suggest. It was shown that the differentiation into several events and the pluralistic representations during the cultural durbar increased the inclusiveness of the Ghana@50 celebrations in Berlin. Nevertheless, these integrative features are only one side of the coin because the intersection in terms of the form and content of the rituals remained very superficial. While in the cultural durbar regional ethnic cultures and traditional authorities were main markers of Ghanaian identity, in the church service the country's changeful relationship to Christianity was the main issue. While the party on 7 March expressed an idea of an inclusive grassroots nationalism, the embassy's official reception conveyed an image of a state-centred and representative nationalism.

Due to the diversity of contents and interests alone, the series of public rituals did not even theoretically have the ability to produce something similar to a shared belief in a corpus of collective values. Obviously, this insight only surprises if we assume

that diasporas distinguish themselves from other groups in pluralistic societies or if we think of rituals as homogeneous exceptions from the rule of social heterogeneity and fragmentation. Not specifically on rituals but regarding the case of pluralist societies in general, John Rawls (1987: 10) argued that the idea of a 'political community must indeed be abandoned, if by such a community we mean a political society united in affirming a general and comprehensive doctrine' or a shared corpus of values. The case shows that even if the political discourse on diasporas evokes the impression of a political and cultural community, Ghanaian migrants in Berlin cannot be considered as such nor do the series of nationalist rituals substantially contribute to it.

Following Rawls (*ibid*) further, it could be argued that the organisation of the Ghana@50 celebrations implies a minimal 'overlapping consensus' on a meta-code of negotiation, such as that a fair and equal treatment of all relevant groups should be assured. It appears very obvious that these and some other abstract pluralistic values were shared by the key actors in the Ghana@50 celebrations. However, there is little empirical evidence that the ritual significantly contributed to the reaffirmation of this 'overlapping consensus' or that this consensus greatly helps to understand why Ghanaians started to perceive themselves as a diaspora and to represent themselves publicly as such. Much more important as goal than integration was the minimising of tensions as a driving force behind the fragmentation of the events. However, if the integration of Ghanaians as a diasporic group can only to a limited extent be considered the outcome of the Ghana@50 celebrations, the question emerges: Were there other social effects that are likely to be overseen by focussing on integration?

In my view, the answer to this question links up to the idea of construction of diaspora that was presented at the beginning of the paper. Despite the described differences in the representations of a Ghanaian diaspora, all of them referred in one way or another to the idea that a diaspora exists as an external reality and theoretically could be represented in an adequate way. What this term diaspora means, what the main characteristics are and how they should be symbolised remained contested. In this sense, it is not cohesion and only to a superficial extent a weak overlapping consensus that is at the centre of the multi-vocal and fragmented series of events, but the reality of diaspora as such. These public occasions, as an intended or an unintended consequence, add lived experience to the abstract political process of reconfiguring Ghanaian nationalism, of which the construction of diaspora is part. It is evidence of the fact that a Ghanaian diaspora exists that can be represented and act in different ways. However, since it leads neither to community formation in the

strong sense nor to collective action of Ghanaians in Germany as such, the reality of diaspora is of a rather shallow quality that, once established as a shared resource of knowledge, can be developed further, but which is much more likely to remain in this stage of superficial and vague existence. Aside from the problems that no consensus can be achieved among Ghanaians about shared norms and values, the means of constructing a diaspora are limited by the fact that the Ghanaian state has no or only very little means of power to enforce certain ideas of diaspora, to socialise the migrants according to an ideology and to sanction deviation from the norms on the territory of the receiving countries.

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