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The Continuities Within the Ghanaian Festival Scene: The Performance of Nation Building and Identity Formation

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The Continuities Within the Ghanaian Festival Scene:
The Performance of Nation Building and Identity Formation

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2020

“I am not African because I was born in Africa but because Africa was born in me.”

- **Kwame Nkrumah**

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Introduction

I am writing this essay as a 19 year old student who spent her first 9 years in Ghana, where I was born and raised. In December of 2009, I immigrated to the Bronx, New York into a completely new world. I did not have a language barrier because I spoke English quite well and I lived in a predominately Black and Brown community, so the first-hand impressions did not immediately set me apart. Despite the absence of such initial barriers, this move to the United States shifted my existence in this world as it introduced me to the fact that being African was not celebrated. As I like to put it, being African was not cool in 2009. This denouncement of my heritage did not urge me to assimilate or “Americanize,” instead it urged me to learn more about the source of the phenomenon. My question remained, “what was the source of this tension?” And so, throughout my academic career, I have been dedicated to learning about the history of Africa. More importantly, how such a diverse and beautifully rich set of people and cultures can be perceived in such a dangerously dehumanizing way. And so, in many ways, this essay is to culminate the years of confronting this question personally, socially and academically.

In addition to this decade-long interest in this question, this essay was inspired by my own desire to attend a festival called Afrochella, which was inaugurated in December of 2017. Hosted in my hometown of Accra, Ghana, I and many other Ghanaians in the diaspora made preliminary plans to attend. The festival was appealing to us because the concept had been initiated and hosted by fellow Ghanaians-Americans in the diaspora. Actually, the popularity of the festival coincided with the premiere of the historic film, “The Black Panther” in February of 2018. This movie premiere single handedly reintroduced Africa in a new light, making “Wakanda forever” a renowned catchphrase. It seemed the tensions that struck me when I

immigrated to the United States had started to dissipate. Nonetheless, this project is not an attempt to explore these tensions. Instead, as the author of this project, I utilize the evolution of this tension as a perspective through which I explore my Ghanaian identity and my growing American identity in the United States. In fact, this project highlights the overlapping of these identities and how the emerging contemporary festival culture has created a space for such development. As a historian, I immediately took interest in the development of this emerging festival culture and the factors that have allowed such occurrences. In other words, this project explores the historical timeline of Ghanaian festival culture, specifically assessing the continuities between the historic festivals that have been thoroughly studied and more contemporary festivals such as Afrochella. I am particularly interested in the continuities that enable identity formation during these festivals. Altogether, my research takes a historical lens in that it is keen to chronological changes over time, however it draws from sources of all kinds: history, anthropology, as well as theory.

This chronological lens utilizes two words: “traditional” versus “contemporary”. Before I delve into this thesis, I feel it is important to explore my definition of these terms for the purpose of this project. I will be using the phrase “traditional festival” to refer to the festivals that were celebrated prior to and even during the intense penetration of European imperialism in today’s Ghana. In this way, traditional is another way of capturing the timeline that I am working with in this chapter. These festivals were not just present in one special region, instead they existed in almost all cultures in the region; one can argue that almost every Ghanaian society has its

festival.¹ For instance, the term, “festival,” which translates into “Afahye” in the twi language, can be found in the everyday vocabulary of the Akan people.

Although I am assessing these festivals as authentic sites of *raw* culture, I am aware of the long history of colonization on the coast, both informally and formally. An omission of his long and crucial history will be inexcusable in a project such as this one. European imperialism in the region can be traced back to 1482 with the arrival and building of the first European fort by the Portuguese. This fort, now known as the “Elmina Castle,” was built after fifty years of coastal exploration by the Portuguese, starting from 1482. During this time, the Guinea Trade had been under the possession of a Portuguese trader called Fernao Gomes, who “discovered” the gold trade on the coast. Consequently, he built a trade post, then known as “A Mina” which translates into “the Mine” as it related to the trading of gold in the region. Indeed, it is for this very reason why the region now known as Ghana, was known as the Gold Coast.

Initially set up as a trade port for gold and timber, the fort became a site for the holding of Africans who would be sent off into the new world into enslavement. Upon the fall of the transatlantic slave trade, the 19th century introduced a new form of European imperialism through formal colonization. The British Gold Coast was formed in 1821 when the British government abolished the African Company of Merchants and seized privately held lands along the coast. The British also took over the Danish Gold Coast in 1804 and the Dutch Gold Coast including Fort Elmina in 1821. This process was all part of the Scramble of Africa, which resulted in almost all of Africa being controlled by a small number of European states by 1900. It

¹Irene Odotei. "Festivals in Ghana: Continuity, Transformation and Politicisation of Tradition," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* New Series, No. 6 (2002): 17.

is worth mentioning that the Berlin Conference of 1885 officialized this entire process of colonization.

And so, the festivals that I will categorize as traditional are the ones that existed and were celebrated prior to and during the colonization of the Gold Coast. This is by no means meant to suggest that these festivals have ended, because they are still celebrated. However, I am rather attentive to the history of these festivals. Finding the exact dates on when these festivals were started is a very difficult task and one that can actually be counterproductive, especially because the people of these cultures did not practice written forms of recording history. Still, I use this brief historical setting to capture the timeline which I envision when I refer to traditional festivals.

On the other hand, contemporary refers to festivals that have emerged out of the decolonization era. Specifically in Ghana, this contemporary festival timeline emerges at the turn of the twentieth-century into the twenty-first century. In fact, part of the objective of this project is to explore when and how Ghana joined the cultural revolution that occurred all throughout Africa as a result of decolonization efforts. The decolonization era began toward the end of the second World War, which started in 1939 and ended in 1945. Africans in the various colonies had been recruited to fight on behalf of their colonizers, after which the Africans expressed their dissatisfaction with the regimes under which they lived. This dissatisfaction did not initially urge the Africans to fight for independence, in fact, some urged for more representation of Africans in the government. However, eventually this fight turned into a fight for full independence from the colonizing powers.

Although Ghana gained its independence in 1957, Africa's cultural revolution was actualized starting in the 1960s as many other countries gained their independence. Coinciding with the civil rights movement happening in the United States in the 1960s, there were collaborative efforts to unite Africans and Diasporans on the basis of culture. This collaboration birthed a series of contemporary festivals throughout Africa that have been ongoing since; of course, these contemporary festivals range in purpose and execution.

Moreover, scholars often position contemporary festivals as a break from traditional festivals. Although there are great differences in these two categories, it is a dismissive argument that these two kinds of festivals do not present many continuities. To illustrate these continuities, I have divided this project into three chapters, all of which attempt to explore the concerns expressed in the introduction so far. The first chapter begins my research by analyzing four festivals that existed in distinct African kingdoms in the region now Ghana prior to their colonization. Understanding that these festivals existed in their own respective kingdoms aid your understanding of the claims that I make in this chapter. As mentioned earlier, it is quite difficult to pinpoint the origins of these festivals, so as much as this chapter initiates this chronology, it also sets the tone of the project by disrupting the trend in recent scholarship that homogenizes these festivals.

The second chapter furthers my analysis by exploring Ghana's efforts to revolutionize its cultural scene. Although the traditional festivals were ongoing, they belonged to their respective kingdoms which had now become ethnic groups. Nevertheless, after gaining independence from Britain, Ghana was now a nation and its cultural climate ought to depict this new identity. The target of this chapter is to explore Ghana's efforts to participate in the larger African cultural

revolution through festivals. Therefore, my analysis in this chapter serves as the link between the traditional Ghanaian festival and the contemporary scene.

Lastly, the third and final chapter explores Ghana's actual contemporary festival scene. The analysis draws a connection between independence and the Nkrumah as it redirected the trajectory of festival making in Ghana. In like manner, this chapter acknowledges the changes that have affected the Ghanaian identity as a result of movement within the continent and within the diaspora. I argue that these newer festivals are not a complete break from the older traditional festival, instead they can be viewed as incarnations of the older traditional festival, in that they also assume very important socio-political projects of the twenty-first century. Altogether, I employ contemporary festivals as avenues for culminating identity formation in Ghana as compared to how traditional festivals served ethnic groups, thus illustrating the continuities.

Chapter 1:

Understanding
the
“Traditional” Festival:
Are They all the Same?

1482 - 1957

Introduction

The first chapter of this project fulfils the purpose of initiating the chronology of the Ghanaian festival culture. Actually, I am weary about using “Ghanaian” in this chapter, simply because the timeline of this chronology predates the existence of the nation “Ghana.” Still, it is no doubt that festivals are an integral component to the cultures that now exist in today’s Ghana, and scholars have recognized how integral it is.

Indeed, the brief history of the colonization of Ghana included in the introduction helps us situate the historical and political context of ethnic groupings in the region. Upon the arrival of the Portuguese traders in 1482, the coast of the Gold Coast already had inhabitants, known as the Fanti people. The Fanti are a group of people who fall into the larger makeup of Akans. Akans are one of the five indigenous major groups: the Akan, The Ewe, MoleDagbane, The Guan, and the Ga-Adangbe. The Akan inhabit almost all of the south and west of the Black Volta, the Ewe inhabit the southeast, The MoleDagbane inhabit the north, The Guan inhabit the southern coastal plains, and the Ga-Adangbe inhabit the Accra plains.^{2 3} Within these five major groups are subdivisions, or ethnic groupings, along the lines of common cultural heritage, history, language, and origin. To further illustrate the geographic makeup of these groups, I have included a map of Ghana, according to the various regions.

²Kasia Broussalian, "Overcoming Colonial Vestiges in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana." *Journal of Political Inquiry* 4 (2011): 9.

³Laverle Bennette Berry, and Library Of Congress. Federal Research Division. Ghana: A Country Study. [Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress: U.S. G.P.O, 1995]: 63.

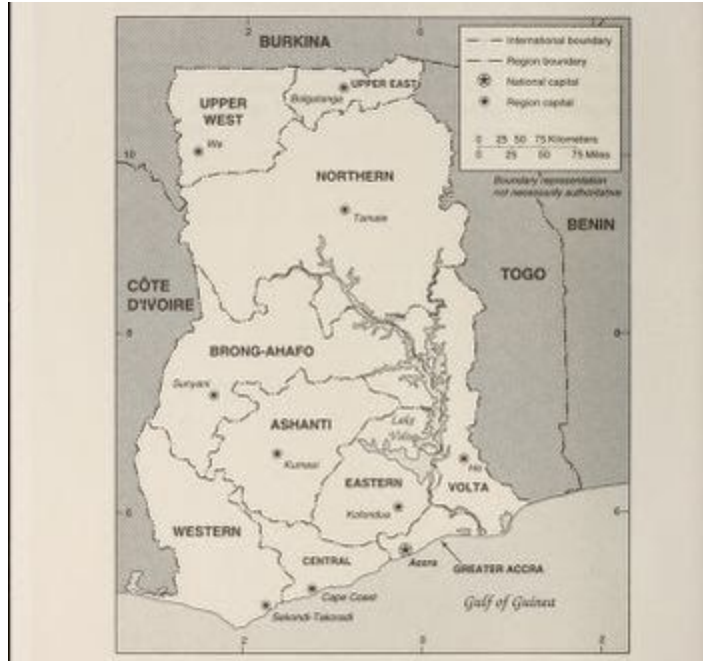


Figure 1. *An Administration Map of Ghana, 1994.*

Berry, Laverle Bennette, and Library Of Congress. Federal Research Division. Ghana: A Country Study. [Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress: U.S. G.P.O, 1995] Pdf. <https://www.loc.gov/item/95018891/>.

Moreover, some comprehension of ethnic grouping is necessary for understanding the objective of this chapter. There existed and still exists a multitude of ethnic groups in the region now known as Ghana. Amongst this multitude are the Ashanti, the Akwapim, the Effutu and the Ga people; this chapter is going to explore festivals that belong to all four of these ethnic groups. The first two groups fall under the larger group known as the Akans, who speak various dialects of twi. Still, it is noteworthy that all four of these ethnic groups formerly belonged to their own kingdoms despite the similarities that exist amongst them. Despite the similarities that exist between these groups, there are great differences as well. In that manner, their respective festivals also have great differences amongst them. Nonetheless, as a young historian, I was dissatisfied with the sense of homogeneity that existed within the scholarship of the traditional

festival culture of Ghana. Historians have acknowledged the numerality of such festivals, however this numerality has fueled a sense of homogeneity. And so, one main objective of this chapter is to illuminate the cracks that exist within the historical study of the Ghanaian festival scene.

Quiet often this homogeneity stems from the immense emphasis that scholarship has placed on the religious component of the festivals: Opoku:1970, Nketia:1975, Arilin:1985, Agovi:1990, McCaskie:1995, Clarke-Ekong:1997 and Lentz:2001. This extensive stream of scholarship is a useful tool for unpacking the role that festivals play in the culture and life of the people of Ghana, and it can serve as a lens for unpacking the other dimensions of the traditional festival in addition to religion. The scholarly emphasis on the religious aspect is based on the conclusion that religion or the spiritual element is the binding factor of these traditional festivals. According to Irene Odetei, who is a historian and a member of the The Historical Society of Ghana, there is a common thread between all traditional Ghanaian festivals, and that was, “the veneration of the ancestors through sacrifices to the stool or some other object of socio-religious importance.”^{4 5} These religious beliefs often referred to *ancestors* and *deities*, which often reestablished a connection between the seat of the king to the ancestors and deities. Furthermore,

⁴ The Historical Society of Ghana was founded in 1951 under the auspices of leading scholars and nationalists such as John D. Fage, A. A. Kwapong, Albert Adu Boahen, J. B. Danquah, Kobina Sekyi, Nana Kobina Nketsia and others. Membership of the society is drawn from historians, archaeologists, linguists and ancillary disciplines, and includes university lecturers and Students from the five public Universities- University of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, University of Cape Coast, University of Education , Winneba, the University of Development Studies , Tamale and teachers in Secondary Schools and Training Colleges . The society ran a journal, *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, which was the leading journal on Ghanaian history. It also published the *Ghana Notes and Queries* and *Teachers Journal*, which also served as a scholarly forum for secondary school history teachers.

⁵ Odotei, "Festivals in Ghana," 18.

the temporality of these traditional festivals often aligned with farming and fishing seasons, whereby the people gathered to communicate with, thank, or plead with the group's god, whom the people found responsible for the success of that harvest.⁶ Although these religious practices are crucial to the success of these festivals, they do not capture the entire purpose and execution of these festivals. Not only that, but the execution of these religious components differ from festival to festival, so it is not enough to homogenize Ghanaian traditional festivals based on the conclusion that they share religious practices.

And so, my exploration is rooted in the motive of assigning agency to the socio-political projects that were undertaken during traditional festivals on the then Gold Coast. That, the history of identity formation on the Gold Coast does not originate with the written histories of the region. Instead, we can learn plenty about identity formation through repeated occasions such as festivals and the continuities of such practices. This identity formation specifically occurs through the gathering of the masses for a purpose. During these festivals, the people participated as a means of expressing their active membership within the respective ethnic groups. So, I explore the ways in which scholars have assigned importance to the *afahye* or the festival to make the argument that a critical look at traditional festivals and its corresponding culture is crucial to understanding identity formation on the Gold Coast. An understanding of the socio-political projects that were undertaken through festivals, especially in the colonial era is useful for synthesizing how the people of the Gold Coast united themselves and also differentiated themselves.

⁶ A. A. Opoku, *Festivals of Ghana* (Ghana publishing corporation, 1970).

Furthermore, I began my research for this chapter with some prior exposure to these concepts. As a result of this prior exposure, I immediately recognized the great shortage that exists in terms of finding written sources of this extensive history. Consequently, it became necessary for me to detach from my usual process of writing history, which often prioritizes written histories that have been peer reviewed by academics. Actually, Eurocentric thinking often gives primacy to written history over any other kind of historical evidence. In this way, to fulfil my aim of reassigning agency, it becomes necessary to not utilize the same writing protocol that has fueled such homogeneity within the scholarship. Instead of relying heavily on written form of history, an alternative is to rely on, “the living, the dead, and the unborn constitute an organic text upon which the nexus of African civilization is built.”⁷ This suggestion implies a need to rely on the execution of the various festivals as a source of knowledge for understanding the building blocks of African society. And so, throughout the chapter, I rely heavily on the practices and rituals of the mentioned festivals as a source of analysis. I find these rituals and practices in pictures and songs, which I will include in this chapter.

In order to achieve this objective of disrupting this sense of homogeneity within the scholarship, I use four festivals as case studies. These four festivals are the Akwasidae,(which originated amongst the Ashanti,) the Odwira, (Akwapim), the Homowo,(Ga) and the Aboadkyer,(Effutu). My selection of these four festivals is not based on any specific criteria. Instead, I aimed for festivals that are well known and have been studied by other historians. My selection does not deduct from the importance of the numerous other festivals from Ghana.

⁷Michael Twitty, "The Persistence of Memory." *The Journal of Negro History* 85, no. 3 (2000): 176.

Appendix I: Festivals in Ghana

Festival	Time	Town or Traditional Area	Region
Hormowo	August	Ga	Greater Accra
Rice festival	January	Akpafu	Volta
Volo	March	Volo	Volta
Lekoyi	March	Likpe	Volta
Akempem	September	Agona	Ashanti
Bohyenhuo	November	Essumeja	Ashanti
Atweaban	November	Ntonso	Ashanti
Damba	April	Dagomba	Northern
Bugum	April	Dagomba	Northern
Kpini-Kyiu	January	Wa	Upper West
Tengbana	January	Tongu	Upper East
Don	May	Bolga	Upper East
Lallue Kpledo	March	Prampram	Greater Accra
Dipo	April	Manya & Yilo Krobo	Eastern
Wodomi	July	Yilo Krobo	Eastern
Bakatue	July	Elmina	Central
Ahoba Kuma	June	Abura	Central
Eguado To	August	Abura	Central
Ahoba Kese	August	Abura	Central
Kotokyikyiyi	March	Senya Bereku	Central
Ogyapa	March-April	Senya Bereku	Central
Apiba	June	Senya Bereku	Central
Fetu Afahye	September	Cape Coast	Central
Danso Abiam	January	Tchimantia	Brong Ahafo
Ntoa Fokuokese	January	Nkoranza	Brong Ahafo
Kurubi	March	Namase	Brong Ahafo
Donkyi	May	Mamase	Brong Ahafo
Odwira	September	Akuapem	Eastern
Adae	Every 42 days	Asante	Ashanti
Apoo		Takyiman	Brong Ahafo

Figure 2. *A list of Festivals in Ghana, when they occur and the region in which it occurs.* Irene Odotei. "Festivals in Ghana: Continuity, Transformation and Politicisation of Tradition," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana New Series*, No. 6 (2002): 34.

Lastly, although this chapter begins the chronology of the entire project, the chapter itself is almost atypical. In other words, there is no clear timeline that narrates when these festivals occurred. However, as mentioned earlier, the cultures in reference here did not utilize written records, and so much of the scholarship that records this history also seems atypical. Fortunately, some of the sources that inform us of some key dates that help us situate a timeline. Not only that, this chapter is comparative and not so concerned with change over time, and so the atypical nature of this chapter does not deduct from the analysis.

The Akwasidae

One can not dive into the history of traditional Ghanaian festivals without understanding the “Akwasidae,” which is celebrated according to the *adaduanan* cycle or according to a 42 days cycle.⁸ This festival, which is pivotal to the Akans, especially the Ashanti Kingdom is key to dissecting the relationship between the power held by the chief and the deities in Akan societies. Odotei presented that in regards to the adae, “a set of rituals focuses on the ancestors and the ceremonial activities which surround the *Ohene* (chief) as the link between the living and the dead.”⁹ This festival begins in private on a Friday, which is called *Adaefofie*, into Saturday, which is called *Memeneda Dapaa*. Odotei accounts for the communication that occurs between the *Ohene* and the stools of former paramount chiefs where he asks for, “their blessing for the living in their spiritual, economic, social, and political endeavours and the prosperity of the community.”¹⁰ Then, on Sunday, the public gathers at the Manhyia palace to commemorate the successful purification of the stools, and that is the Akwasidae.

Moreover, if I was only interested in the religious, I would primarily focus on the private rituals enacted by the king to communicate with the ancestors. However, for the sake of exploring the socio-political arena, I also give attention to the gathering of the people at the

⁸ In Akan societies, the traditional system of timekeeping is based on a six day week. This weekly cycle is known as “*nnanson*” or seven-days, even though there are only six days in this cycle. On the other hand, the Gregorian seven-day week is known as “*nnawɔtwe*” or eight-days. In the Akan language, “*nna*” translates as “day” and the numbers: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten are as follows: *baako*, *meinu*, *meinsa*, *ennan*, *enum*, *nsia*, *nson*, *nwotwe*, *nkron*, *du*. This understanding is crucial, because many Ghanaian traditional festivals follow a repeating cycle that is based on the 42 days mark. This 42 days mark is known as the “*adaduanan*” which means forty days, however it actually comes about every 42 days. This is because the cycle of the *adaduanan* is calculated based on the combination of the traditional Akan calendar and the Gregorian calendar.

⁹ Odotei, “Festivals in Ghana,” 18.

¹⁰Odotei, “Festivals,” 18.

Manhyia Palace. The gathering of the people occurs based on the assurance that the king has fulfilled his duty and has purified the stools of the ancestors. This observation highlights the importance of the Ohene as a historical actor in the tradition of the Akwasidae. What many scholars have not emphasized, is that the king serves as the head of the triangular system which maintained the monarchy. The three actors that made up this monarch were the people, their ancestors, and the king who linked them. Essentially, the Akwasidae is a ritual that commemorates this triangular monarchy; where the Asantehene is tasked with the purification of the stools of the dead kings that preceded him.

R. E. G. Armattoo, a Ghanaian scientist and anthropologist, recounts his experience at Akwasidae in 1949. He mentioned that there were between twelve to fifteen thousand spectators at the Manhyia. The celebration began with the assembly of divisional chiefs in palanquins to jublations and sounds of drumming. Following the procession of the chiefs was the Bodyguard and Sword-bearers, then the Golden Drum and the Golden Stool. Immediately after the golden stool came the Asantehene, Nana Osei Agyeman Prempeh II; he wore a silk Kente and danced to the rhythm of the drum. Indeed, all elements of this procession contribute to the total effect of the Akwasidae festival.¹¹

Aside from the religious importance of the Akwasidae, this festival is still particularly interesting to study as a site of nation building and identity formation for the Ashanti people. In fact, the Ashanti Kingdom is the largest region in Ghana in the 21st century and even more so, it is also the last kingdom to be brought under the control of British colonial power, three decades after the Gold Coast had been officially colonized. This means that the seat of the king

¹¹ R. E. G. Armattoo, "Akwasidae," *African Affairs* 50, no. 198 (1951): 62.

was especially imperative for the Ashanti people in maintaining their strength as a kingdom. The people participated in the festival by gathering at the palace to revive and express their loyalty to the stool, both those who have passed and the present. By so doing, the gathering that occurs during the Akwasidae festival was, and still is a site of identity formation for the Ashanti people. The site of the traditional festival is conducive of “community gathering and unity and place us in the center of our culture and social environment.” It is also a medium of cultural education and intergenerational communication in the community and plays an important role in the preservation of our cultural heritage.”¹² This analysis aligns with my own claim that the Akwasidae gathering at the Manhyia Palace created a space to unify under one mantra in support of the rituals being executed. By joining the masses to exhibit their allegiance to the chief, the Ashanti people expressed their own sense of identity, along the lines of ethnic grouping.

Moreover, the critique that this festival and many others like it has received pertains to its ability to link an intergenerational community when it is founded on a certain belief in ancestors and deities. This curiosity stems from an observation noted by Owusu-Frempong, that is the “strong belief in African religion that human life does not terminate at the death of the individual but continues beyond death.”¹³ What this belief suggests is that, one must believe in this notion of the African religion to approve of the purification of the stool by the king. Furthermore, “the purpose of the Aday festival of the Akan is to go to the resting places of ancestors and commune with them through prayer.”¹⁴ The resting place, in the case of the Akwasidae is the stool. Still, I want to present the possibility that the significance of the stool is not synonymous for the king

¹²Yaw Owusu-Frempong. "Afrocentricity, the Aday Festival of the Akan, African American Festivals, and Intergenerational communication," *Journal of Black Studies* 35, no. 6 (2005):731.

¹³ Owusu-Frempong, "Afrocentricity, the Aday festival of the Akan," 732.

¹⁴ Owusu-Frempong, "Afrocentricity," 732.

and his subjects alike. Besides, it is the King who is tasked with the purification of the stool, and not his subjects. So, it is arguable that the importance of the stool to the Ashanti people is rather political and not only religious. As the seat of the monarch, the people may see this stool as a symbol of political power.

Accordingly, Odotei argues, “the structuring of the festival is often a reflection of the traditional political system and constitution of the community.”¹⁵ In this instance, the significance of the stool during the Akwasidae festival is inherently political, and so is the position of the king, as one who leads this structuring of the festival. This political power is delegated by the people he leads and the ancestors before him. From this, one can derive the claim that the Ohene’s political power is reinforced by his ability to host a successful *afahye*. In fact, the site of the *afahye* is one of the few occasions where the people of the region interacted with their king and the stool. This assertion is not meant to deduct from the religious significance of the stool, because the chief does not go to the graveyard of the former chiefs to communicate with them, instead they use the stool as a symbol of remembrance and ancestral power.¹⁶ However, the assertion suggests that the significance of the stool to the people in itself is also a political project. My assertion is also supported by Owusu-Frimpong’s observation that the stool is not simply used as an everyday piece of furniture, but it has a significant role in the socio-political arena of Akan life, and this importance is illuminated during festivals.

To emphasize the importance of symbolism during the Akwasidae, I explore its cultural reincarnation as an adinkra symbol, which many scholars have defined as a Ghanaian writing system. adinkra are often symbols, which through stylized pictures conveys the philosophy of the

¹⁵Odotei, "Festivals in Ghana," 19.

¹⁶ Owusu-Frimpong, "Afrocentricity, the Adaye festival of the Akan," 732.

Akan, as well as their culture. Furthermore, these symbols serve as a tool of communication that expresses the values and beliefs of the Akan people. Essentially, adinkra symbols are forms of writing that contribute to the remembrance of certain ideas. Therefore, the stool as an adinkra symbol speaks to its cultural relevance, which can be differentiated from its religious significance. For instance, the Kotoko (porcupine) stool of the Ashantis symbolizes the readiness of the Ashanti Kingdom to strike from all angles when attacked. In like manner, the Sika Gwa Kofi, the Golden Stool, embodies the gold and splendor of the Asantehene; which is meant to convey the socio-economic stability of the Ashanti Kingdom.¹⁷ Through such symbolism, the Akwasidae is evidently a space where history is preserved and reproduced.

Besides, the political significance of the stool was emphasized in 1896, when the British colonial rule demanded the stool after the capture of Kumasi, the Asantehene, Prempeh I, offered himself up for banishment instead of the stool.¹⁸ The severity of this issue peaked in 1901, when a war broke out when Sir Frederick Hodgson, the governor of the Gold Coast demanded the stool to sit on. The occurrence is described in a New York Time article from 1900.¹⁹ George P., Hagan, a social anthropologist argued that although every political unit in Ashanti kingdom, either by division, vicinage, village or lineage, has a stool a symbol of the authority of its leadership, the Golden stool serves as the political authority, under which all other stools fall under.²⁰

¹⁷ J. E. T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, George Appiah, and Melvin Nartey, "The philosophy Behind Some Adinkra Symbols and their Communicative Values in Akan." *Philosophical Papers and Review* 7, no. 3 (2016): 25-26

¹⁸ Owusu-Frempong, "Afrocentricity, the Adaye festival of the Akan," 737.

¹⁹ "The Trouble in Ashanti.: One Tribe Resists British Efforts to Get the Golden Stool." *New York Times (1857-1922)*, Apr 10, 1900.

<https://search.proquest.com/docview/96036689?accountid=31516>.

²⁰ George P. Hagan, "The Golden Stool and the Oaths to the King of Ashanti," (1968):1.

In addition to the symbolic significance of the stool, there is plenty to learn from the culture of the Akwasidae, including dress, music, and dance. As Armattoo recounted, the Asantehene wears the Kente during the Akwasidae. The kente is woven cloth which dates back to the 18th century, and it is made of colors and patterns that convey different meanings. Indeed, various colors have distinct associations:

red with danger, war, death, disaster, sadness, anger, seriousness, struggle and sacrifice; blue with affection, love, calmness, tenderness, harmony, peacefulness, and spiritual sanctity; yellow and gold with richness, prosperity, long life, royalty, and success; green with fertility, growth, newness, vitality, and spiritual rejuvenation; black and dark brown with death, melancholy, and spiritual energy; gray with poverty, disgrace, and spiritual blemish; and white with purity, virtue, innocence, success, freedom, joy, and spiritual vitality.²¹

From this excerpt, it is evident that symbolism was also carried in color. Meaning, the colors worn by Asantehene on the Akwasidae holds a message that is clear to all participants of the festival. Not only that, the kente is an art form that embodies history, social and political values, and beliefs.

The Odwira

Furthermore, the strict emphasis on the spiritual component of traditional festivals often implies a homogeneity between the various festivals. However, that implication is far from accurate, despite the existence of a common belief in ancestral intervention in many of these festivals. To disrupt this notion of homogeneity, I explore another festival, the Odwira festival.

²¹ Joseph K. Adjaye, "The Discourse of Kente Cloth: From Haute Couture to Mass Culture," in *Language, Rhythm, and Sound: Black Popular Cultures into the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Joseph K. Adjaye and Adrienne R. Andrews, (Pittsburgh, Pa: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997), 27. www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7zw866.6.

The Odwira Festival is traced back to 1826, after the 19th Okuapimhene of Akropong, Nana Addo Dankwa won a battle (Katamansu) against the strong Ashanti army.²² The festival was used to rally the people of the Eastern region to identify with the Akwapim stool and with the region. In that space, they reasserted their identity as the people of the Eastern region and as Akwapims. From simply studying the religious rituals of the Odwira, one may assume that the Odwira festival is simply another example of an Akan festival, but it is evident that this festival was initially meant to establish a difference between the two kingdoms.

Not only that, but I present the suggestion that a deeper analysis of the Odwira festival reveals its socio-political importance that occurs through remembrance and memory building. The Odwira festival is not only a site for communication with the ancestors of Akwapim, in addition to that is the celebration of the battle victory. To distinguish themselves from their Ashanti rivals, the people of Akwapim re-emphasized their identity by celebrating the Odwira festival and reliving that victory. By so doing, the Odwira can be argued as a form of nation building because it has evident socio-political importance to the Akwapim people. The socio-political significance in this festival differs from that of the Akwasidae, because apart from being a site for community gathering, intergenerational communication, and cultural preservation, the Odwira festival was a medium for memory preservation. Although the mentioned groups, the Ashantis and the Akwapims both fall under the umbrella of the Akan people, they found ways to distinguish themselves and establish distinct identities. The Odwira

²²Herbert M. Cole, "The Art of Festival in Ghana," *African Arts* 8, no. 3 (1975): 13.

serves as the perfect space for comprehending such distinctions among a people that are often grouped together.

In this space, the gathering of the Akuapem people in celebration of the Odwira signifies that they are in agreement of and in support of the political power held by their kingdom. This kind of gathering allows them a new way of expressing their membership within this particular society. In this way, the people are forming and reasserting their identity as Akwapims. Within the Akwapim people, the Odwira united them based on the memory of that particular victory against the Ashanti.

Still, despite the speciality of the Odwira to the Akwapim people, the Ashanti people have actually adopted the celebration of the festival as well.²³ Obviously, in the space of the Ashanti kingdom, the Odwira festival does not signify the victory of the Katamansu battle, but it was adopted to celebrate the great political power of the Ashanti people over the course of centuries. Within the Ashanti people, it was a space for commemorating continuous political power. This political power allowed them to keep their independence from the British longer than all other kingdoms and it allowed them to win battles against other kingdoms. Hagan argues that during the Odwira in the Ashanti region, the Asantehene expresses a special invocation to the Golden Stool:

"Friday, Stool of Kings, I sprinkle water upon you,
 may your power return sharp and fierce.
 Grant that when I and another meet (in battle) grant it be
 As when I met Denkyira; you let me cut off his head.
 As when I met Akyem; you let me cut off his head.
 As when I met Domma; you let me cut off his head.
 As when I met Tekyiman; you let me cut off his head.
 As when I met Gyaman; you let me cut off his head.

²³ Hagan, "The Golden Stool," 1.

The edges of the year have met,
 I pray for life.
 May the nation prosper. May the women bear children.
 May the hunters kill meat.
 We who dig for gold, let us get gold to dig, and grant
 that I get some for the upkeep of my kingship"²⁴

The above invocation makes mention of several battle victories , including the Denkyira, Akyem, Domma, Tekyiman, and Gyaman, all of which are various regions with their own kingship.

These mentions place great emphasis on the importance of remembrance during these traditional festivals. The invocation also makes mention of the economic needs of the people, which in this instance is gold; gold is critical for the upkeep of the Ashanti political power. Altogether, this invocation fuels my claim that indeed, the Odwira festival is a site for celebrating political power; for the Ashanti people who credit their source to the Golden stool, they make mention of it in the invocation.

The Homowo

Another festival that presents a different perspective to the study of traditional Ghanaian festivals is the Homowo Festival. Odotei categorizes the Homowo as a festival that focuses on deities, however noting the thin line between ancestors and deities, “for, in the spiritual world, the gods and ancestors are said to work together for the good of the community.”²⁵ The Homowo is said to have originated from a deadly drought that hit the Ga people and led to a famine. The legend says the drought occurred while the Ga people were migrating to their present settlement,

²⁴R.S. Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, London, O .U .P .(1927):138. In George P. Hagan, "The Golden Stool and the Oaths to the King of Ashanti," (1968): 2.

²⁵Odotei, "Festivals in Ghana," 18.

they immediately resorted to fishing instead of farming although their land laid on the coast. As they tilled the land, they prayed to *Ataa- NaaNyommo* (God), and other ancestral gods until it rained. After the drought, the people were able to harvest again, and as a result, they celebrated. And so, the word "Homowo" actually means hooting at hunger; it derived from two Ga words, *homo* meaning hunger and *wo* meaning to hoot at.²⁶ As Odotei mentioned, the rituals of such festivals were forms of communication between the living and their ancestors or deities, with a chief serving as the middleman.

The Homowo, like the Odwira festival is a space for celebrating and commemorating resilience. In this case of the Homowo, the Ga people celebrate their resilience, not against another kingdom but to appreciate their own strength through a difficult time. Still, one difference between these two festivals is that the Odwira celebrates victory over political and military power, whereas the Homowo celebrates victory over a natural disaster. This is a difference worth noting because it changes the execution of these festivals. Here, food is important, not necessarily due to taste, but on the basis of its capacity to feed the people during their fight against the famine. Indeed, when Ga families gather in their Ga ancestral homes on the Coast to eat, the intent is to participate in the sharing of a ritual meal with their ancestors and symbolically offer the meal to their gods, particularly through the pouring of libation.²⁷

In addition to the religious components of these festivals, I am interested in the physical space that is occupied during these festivals. The physical space refers to the actual space where the festival takes place, but also the movement of people during this festival. For instance, during

²⁶Regina, Kwakye-Opong, "Clothing and Colour Symbolisms in the Homowo Festival: A Means to Sociocultural Development," *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences* 4, no. 13 (2014): 112.

²⁷Kwakye-Opong, "Clothing and Colour Symbolisms in the Homowo Festival," 112.

the Homowo festival, beginning on Thursday, the “homecoming” process begins, where Ga people who live outside their ancestral homes that are located in the city of Accra and the major towns along the coast return. This homecoming process is key to understanding the Homowo because the execution of this festival is attached to the coastland in Accra, where the ancestors of the Ga people settled. Not only do the people return, but the communal rituals of the Homowo festival are distinct to the region. Hence, the physical occupation of the region suggests that the Homowo festival is not just that of the Ga people, but it is that of the coastlands in Accra.

Furthermore, the Homowo presents an interesting take on policy. According to A. B. Quartey Papafio, there are policies that govern this festival season. To begin, the Ga people are not allowed to demand a debt till after the Homowo festival. Secondly, no summons will be taken against anyone, and no oath sworn will be entertained by any stool holder till the Homowo is brought to an end. And, no one is to make or lay any claim against any person or persons till the celebration days of the festival are over.²⁸ All these restrictions are protected by penalties upon breach. My analysis of these restrictions suggests that the Homowo festival is meant to reestablish order among the Ga people. During this time, harmony among the people is prioritized and protected, this indeed is a socio-political project.

The Aboakyer

To provide yet another perspective in addition to the Akan and the Ga people, I study the Aboakyer festival. This festival originated among the people of Winneba, in the central region of Ghana; they are also called the Efutu. Robert W. Wyllie, an anthropologist, gives a detailed

²⁸A. B. Quartey-Papafio, "The Gã Homowo Festival," *Journal of the Royal African Society* 19, no. 75 (1920): 228.

account of the procession of the Aboakyer, which occurs during the last days of April into the first week of May in Winneba. According to Wyllie, the festival occurs through a three day span, from Friday to Sunday. On Friday, the competing Asafos, engage in communication with their gods for protection for the hunting quest they will soon embark on. It is worth mentioning that a ban is placed on wansam (bushbuck) hunting four weeks prior to the Aboakyer festival. The hunt begins early on Saturday, between the Asafos, who compete for the first catch. This competition exists because the first catch which has ritual significance, even though more than one wansam is usually caught. The challenge is to present an alive wansam to the Omanhene (paramount chief) who places his feet upon the live animal before it is sacrificed.²⁹

This hunt is central to the success of the afahye because it commemorates the migration of the people, from the ancient Western Sudan Empire, with the guidance of two brothers and a god named Otu. Upon arrival, Otu requested the sacrifice of a young member of the Royal family every year to their god. Finding this request too hard to fulfil, the people of Winneba appealed to sacrifice a wild cat instead. Oral history maintained that the attempt to hunt down the wild cat caused many deaths. This led to the second appeal to sacrifice a mature bush buck, which has been translated into a deer in written work. The god is now known as Penkye Otoo because they settled the god at a place called Penkye.³⁰ Once the wansam has been presented to the Omanhene, the victorious Asafo is responsible for carrying it to the priest of Penkye Otoo. After it is sacrificed, the successful Asafo carries it to the grove of Penkye Otoo, where it remains until dusk, when it is kept in the house at the edge of the grove until Sunday. Until the

²⁹Robert W. Wyllie, "The Aboakyer of the Effutu: A Critique of Meyerowitz's Account," *Africa* 37, no. 1 (1967): 81.

³⁰Wyllie, "The Aboakyer of the Effutu," 82.

wansam is brought out again, people engage in traditional drumming, dancing, and singing as forms of celebrating the success of the hunt and the capture of the wansam. The sacrifice is brought to an end on Sunday afternoon, when the wansam is killed and strewn around the grove as offerings to Penkye Otoo and to lesser Effutu gods and the ancestors. Still, the festival is not over until the competing Asafos reconcile the ongoing hostility by coming together in public to dance and sing in the streets.³¹

Still, one can not fully comprehend the Aboakyer without understanding the concept of the Asafo as a crucial aspect of the Effutu society. The Asafo is an ancient warrior organization that exists in Akan societies; the organization was formed as a combat force in times of war. Initially, the sole purpose of the Asafo was to defend the society and its property, however they are complex entities who held political, military, social and religious power. For instance, the Asafo has the power to enstool and destool a chief.³² In the case of the Effutus, there are two Asafos of the state, the Dentsin or the Tuato. These two Asafos are responsible for competing for the first catch during the Aboakyer festival.

The Aborkyer festival introduces us to a new dynamic, whereby the kind of competition that takes place is internal and not external. In the previous festivals, such as the Odwira, the people celebrated their success against other groups, however the Aborkyer competition occurs between the two Asafos, who belong to the same group. Interestingly, the execution of the Aboakyer differs from other festivals in Akan societies in that it encouraged the strength of its

³¹ Wyllie, "The Aboakyer of the Effutu," 82.

³² A. A. Turkson, "Effutu Asafo: Its Organization and Music," *African Music: Journal of the International Library of African Music* 6, no. 2 (1982): 4.

people to be displayed, which created hostility, however the festival is not over until a reconciliation occurs.

Altogether, a simple conclusion to make is that all four of the festivals are not just sites of religious performances. That, although there are religious components to all four of the festivals, which would often lead to the establishment of homogeneity among the festival culture, a comparative analysis illuminates the great differences between them. Actually, even within the spiritual rituals, which play a prominent role in the execution of the named festivals, there exist great varieties in how they are attended to.

Furthermore, an analysis of these festivals beyond the religious components allow us to comprehend how the institution of ethnic grouping survived prior to and during Western influence. The three groups in mention, the Akans, the Gas and the Effutus, all have distinct ways of identifying themselves under a kinship. Formerly belonging to their own respective kingdoms, the various ethnic groups used the space of the festival to identify themselves and build. Indeed, that is what I have coined as socio-political projects, that these festivals not only created room for community gathering and unity, but they were a medium through which cultural education and intergenerational communication took place. In like manner, the practices of these festivals allowed for the preservation of cultural heritage as well as memory. The lack of written alphabetic history does not suggest a silencing of the past. Instead, the various groups kept their histories sacred through these festivals by transmitting knowledge and experiences to future generations.

Thus, moving forward in this project, the findings made from these festivals will be used to assess the continuities that may exist in Ghana's festival culture. Prior to Ghana's colonial era,

festivals were an integral part of the various kingdoms. Then, during the colonial era, when these kingdoms were summed up to be the Gold Coast, still these festivals were crucial to the evolution of identity formation for the various ethnic groups. Looking forward in Ghana's history, the question is, how did the decolonization era continue this trajectory of community gathering, cultural education, culture and memory preservation as well as a need for "homecoming."

Chapter 2:

The Decolonization Era:
How did Independence Redirect the
Ghanaian Festival Scene?

1945-1977

Introduction

As explored in the previous chapter, prior to and during the drenching colonization of what had now become Ghana by European imperialism, festivals served as spaces for cultural preservation. I arrived at this claim by highlighting the different socio-political projects undertaken during the various festivals, which also aimed at disrupting the homogeneity that exists within the scholarship on traditional Ghanaian festivals. This middle chapter furthers the overall project analysis by exploring the decolonization and independence era and assesses the state's role in redirecting the festival scene in the new nation of Ghana.

Ghana's road to independence began towards the end of the second World War. It was during this time when many African colonies had become fed up and began to voice their dissatisfaction with their colonizers. And so, between May 1945 and March 1957, various African nationalists contributed immensely to gain Ghana's freedom, making it the first independent nation in sub-Saharan Africa. Then, after independence, Ghana's prime minister and first president, Kwame Nkrumah became an instrumental figure in remodeling the cultural scene of this new nation during his time in office from 1957 to 1966. These years were crucial in changing the landscape of Ghana's cultural scene.

In addition to analyzing Ghana's approach to the changing dynamic towards culture, this chapter also takes a comparative approach to analysing the kind of festival culture that emerges out of the independence era in Ghana as compared to other African nations who also attained independence in the mid-twentieth century. It is no doubt that culture and the arts were viewed as vehicles to complete independence, especially through the Pan-Africanism movement.

Pan-Africanism as a concept was coined by Henry Sylvester William, a Trinidadian author at the beginning of the 20th century. The corresponding movement took hold in 1919, when the first Pan-African conference was organized by the W.E.B Du Bois in Paris, France. The term essentially urged for the unification of Africans, both on the continent and in the diaspora. Within this larger vision were those who urged for the return of Diasporans back to the continent, an example being Marcus Garvey, a great Jamaican journalist.

Furthermore, out of this larger movement of Pan-Africanism came a festival that sought for the unification of Black Art. Occuring in 1966 in Dakar Senegal, 1977 in Lagos, Nigeria, and 2010 in Dakar once again, the World Festival of Black Arts changed the landscape of festival making in Africa. Nonetheless, although Ghana was proactive in remodeling its cultural scene, and Nkrumah was very much at the forefront of the Pan-Africanism movement, Ghana never hosted the emerging World Festival of Black Arts. Instead, Ghana adopted a National Theatre Movement that prioritized an internal cultural reform. At that, this chapter explores Ghana's road to independence, centering Nkrumah both as a politician but also as a cultural reformer. There are a few questions to be answered in this chapter, with the main question being, "How does Ghana's festival scene change based on the emerging efforts of Pan-Africanism during decolonization and post-independence? And, "How do these efforts further or redirect from the socio-political projects undertaken by the traditional festivals of the first chapter? Lastly, knowing that Ghana did not host the World Festival of Black Arts, I am interested in tracing Ghana's footprint at these larger festivals.

Thus, to fulfil the purposes just listed, I begin the chapter by historically situating Ghana as a British colony and mapping out its road to independence in 1957. Out of this process of

decolonization emerged Kwame Nkrumah as a pioneering leader not only in Ghana, but throughout Africa and in the diaspora. So, my analysis narrows in on him and his administrative efforts in changing the cultural landscape of Ghana. Keeping in mind the ongoing changes in Ghana as a new republic, I assess how his efforts confront these challenges. This analysis leads to the National Theatre movement, which was initiated by Nkrumah as the official approach to redirecting Ghana's new culture. To complete this analysis, I explore the first and second World Festival for Black Arts and attempt to trace Ghana's participation in these festivals.

The Decolonization of the Gold Coast

The decolonization of Ghana effectively began with the creation of the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC), a nationalist movement started in August 1947 by Ebenezer Ako-Adjei, Edward Akufo-Addo, Joseph Boakye Danquah, Kwame Nkrumah, Emmanuel Obetsebi-Lampsey and William Ofori Atta. The convention became known as the Big Six. The Big Six joined together to fight for self-government from the colonizing British empire, however their efforts were not radical in trying to completely dismantle the structure of European imperialism in the region. For instance, one of their immediate demands was the replacement of chiefs on the Legislative Council with educated persons.³³ This was found on the basis that the educated men were more likely to be respected under the colonial administration. It is noteworthy that the British colonial government ruled through indirect rule, giving some power to paramount chiefs to rule their distinctive kinships, under the supervision of appointed officers.

³³John A. Arthur, *The African Diaspora in the United States and Europe: The Ghanaian Experience* (Routledge, 2016), 6.

Consequently, the replacement of chiefs with educated men did not remove colonization, it simply removed the power assigned to paramount chiefs.

According to Karen Fields, indirect rule:

provided for a two-tiered structure, in which black and white rulers would occupy separate but interdependent compartments. The British regime would assign to African rulers many tasks of the new state- the census, tax collection, public works, law enforcement, and so on, in a gradually expanding list. At the same time, in all aspects consistent with colonial law and order, and not “repugnant to British law and custom,” the old way of life and its “native law and custom” would continue in the villages, with the blessing of the regime.³⁴

This excerpt from Fields lays out clearly the framework of indirect rule, in which the traditional rulers of Ghana had now been assigned a position in the European imperialist complex.

Consequently, the fight against colonization also threatened the political structure that has been created under colonial rule. This commentary is important because Nkrumah, alongside many of the leaders of decolonization in the Gold Coast, spoke against the chieftaincy. However, this denouncement was not pronounced towards the culture, it was pronounced against the political structure created for the chieftaincy within the umbrella of the British colonial rule.

Indeed, the efforts of the UGCC were criticized for being passive. This was primarily due to the underlying fact that the UGCC did not push for the complete destruction of the British colonial government. As a result, the efforts of the UGCC dwindled after their imprisonment by the British authorities from 12 March to 12 April 1948. However, Nkrumah stood by his vision for Black nationalism and publicly broke from the UGCC during its Easter Convention in 1949. It was after this separation that he created the Convention People’s Party(CPP) on 12 June 1949.

³⁴ Karen Elise Fields, *Revival and Rebellion in Colonial Central Africa*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 31.

Moreover, it is important and noteworthy that Ghana's decolonization efforts actively disapproved of the politicization of traditional chieftaincy. As discussed in the previous chapter, chieftaincy was the traditional ruling system that was used prior to the dominance of European imperialism. The people of the region fell within the boundaries of their ethnic group, which was managed by their king, or paramount chief. Indeed, paramount chiefs exercised their power, or one can say, performed it during traditional festivals. However, this dynamic was greatly affected on March 6th 1957, when Nkrumah declared Ghana into existence. Like never before, the people of Ghana were expected to commune under one identity. This expectation was groundbreaking because although the people of the Gold Coast were together as a colony, they belonged primarily to their respective groups, who were former independent kingdoms.

Kwame Nkrumah and His Cultural Policy

Kwame Nkrumah's determination to Ghana's independence was greatly influenced by his experience in the diasporic world, both as a student and as a Pan-Africanist. An attempt to explore the Nkrumah administration must take heed to his educational and political journey, especially in the Western world. After earning a teacher's certificate from the Prince of Wales' College at Achimota in 1930, Nkrumah arrived in the United States, ready to begin his academic career at Lincoln University in October of 1935. In 1939, Nkrumah completed a Bachelor of Arts degree in Economics and Sociology and another in Theology. At the University of Pennsylvania, Nkrumah earned a Masters in Education and another in Philosophy. Apart from advancing his educational career in the United States, Nkrumah spent his summers in Harlem, a center of Black life, thought and culture. In other words, Nkrumah was exposed to the racial dynamic in

America. And, I would suggest that this exposure was crucial to Nkrumah's trajectory as a force for Black independence. In May of 1945, Nkrumah moved to London to further his education at the London School of Economics as a PhD candidate in Political Science. However, he withdrew after one term and later enrolled to study law at Gray's Inn.³⁵ All this while, Nkrumah went by the name Francis Kwame Ngolomah. It was not until 1945 when Nkrumah took the name "Kwame Nkrumah." This marked Nkrumah's entry into his life's work of Black nationalism.

I did not include Nkrumah's academic history to give him accolades, however as a historian, this history was useful in situating Nkrumah's later purpose as a politician. It is noteworthy that in addition to his great academic ventures while in the United States and in Europe, Nkrumah simultaneously spent his time on political organizing. The prime example being his efforts among the principal organizers and as co-treasurer of the Fifth Pan-African Congress in Manchester in 1945.³⁶

The Fifth Pan-African Congress was especially influential in the fight for independence because it came immediately after the second world war. The 1945 congress was of dire importance for African leaders who were fed up and ready to express their dissatisfaction toward European imperialism, especially after their men had fought in the second world war. The chosen leaders of this mass movement were: W.E.B. DuBois as the chairman, Nkrumah as the secretary, and participants such as Jomo Kenyatta, Nnamdi Azikwe and Hastings Banda. Altogether, this brief synopsis of Nkrumah's early political journey in the Western world is crucial to

³⁵Kwame Botwe-Asamoah, *Kwame Nkrumah's Politico-Cultural Thought and Politics: An African-Centered Paradigm for the Second Phase of the African Revolution* (Routledge, 2013), 3.

³⁶ Botwe-Asamoah, *Kwame Nkrumah's Politico-Cultural Thought and Politics*, 9.

comprehending Nkrumah's later political and cultural work on the continent upon his return to the Gold Coast in 1947.

Upon Nkrumah's separation from the UGCC in 1949 and his founding of the CPP, Nkrumah organized a campaign of nonviolent protests and strikes from January 1950, which led to his imprisonment. Still, his party persisted and in 1951, during the Gold Coast's first general election, the CPP won despite Nkrumah's absence.³⁷ Upon his release, he rejoined the government and became the first prime minister of Ghana in 1952 through independence in 1957. I have excluded much of the historical context of Nkrumah's political efforts from 1947 when he returned from London to 1957 when Ghana gained independence. This exclusion is mostly because this chapter is not deeply concerned with Nkrumah as a freedom fighter. Instead, I am interested in his cultural policies as a Ghanaian nationalist and as a Pan-Africanist.

Moreover, Nkrumah's cultural policy has been thoroughly studied by Kwame Botwe-Asamoah, an African theorist and professor. Asamoah's book, *Kwame Nkrumah's Politico-Cultural Thought and Politics: An African-Centered Paradigm for the Second Phase of the African Revolution* is a profound study that critically analyzes Nkrumah's "politico-cultural philosophy" as Asamoah puts it.³⁸ This study explores the relationship between his politico-cultural policies and the larger trajectory of Africa's post-independence cultural revolution. Asamoah's study is of great use because it recognizes the limitation on finding Nkrumah's actual vision for Ghana's culture in any comprehensive discourse as it is not found in

³⁷Marika Sherwood, "Kwame Nkrumah: The London Years, 1945–47.," *Immigrants & Minorities* 12, no. 3 (1993): 182.

³⁸ Botwe-Asamoah, *Kwame Nkrumah's Politico-Cultural Thought and Politics*, 37.

any official government documents. However, we both agree that Nkrumah's speeches are a great source for exploring his political and cultural thought.

Very early on in his writing, Asamoah argues that the political project of Nkrumah's presidency was to commune Ghana and its people as a nation. This push was made evident by Nkrumah during his independence speech and it played out in his efforts. After independence, particularly in the early 1960s, this nationalist front was deemed necessary for Ghana to fully rid itself of colonial strains of oppression and exploitation.³⁹ Asamoah makes reference to Scholars such as Diagne and Toure, who suggest that the colonial exploitation of the African society, specifically in Ghana, created a disruption in the cultural development of African societies. In other words, colonization forced the individual kingdoms into the Gold Coast, which harmed the development of the distinct cultures in the region. So, to eradicate the remnants of colonization, Nkrumah sought for a cultural revolution that would further his vision for a united front. Besides Nkrumah's writings, his speeches serve as a great source for gaining insight into Nkrumah's cultural agenda.

Independence Day Speech: March 6th 1957

On March 6, 1957, Kwame Nkrumah gave his famous independence speech which officially declared that the Republic of Ghana had been established and the Gold Coast was no more. The new nation was no longer under the authority of Great Britain, instead the Convention People's Party (CPP) was the seated party. Nkrumah's independence speech is a useful source

³⁹Botwe-Asamoah, *Kwame Nkrumah's Politico-Cultural Thought and Politics*, 47.

for understanding the ideals on which this new nation was built on and what it meant for the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa, which was still colonized.

Nkrumah's words from his independence speech have been widely circulated. It was in this speech that Nkrumah said, "We are going to demonstrate to the world, to the other nations, that we are prepared to lay our foundation – our own African personality." He also declared that, "Our [Ghana's] independence is meaningless unless it is linked up with the total liberation of Africa." I would argue that these words accurately depict Nkrumah's administrative efforts; in other words, Nkrumah's leadership, politically and culturally were strategically molded to propel the new nation of Ghana as a catalyst for decolonization.

Speech to National Assembly on Current Affairs: April 18th 1961

Surely, Nkrumah's vision to unite Ghana as one met a lot of challenges. During an address to the National Assembly on Current Affairs, Nkrumah made mention of the ongoing tensions in regards to a federal government in the new Ghana:

"In all African communities, there is a natural and reasonable tendency for ethnic groups to come together and seek to organize themselves both politically and economically so as to restore their cultural and their traditional way of life which was suppressed under colonialism. It is necessary that we understand and appreciate the force of this motive, which is entirely praise-worthy, and yet at the same time we should prevent it being exploited by those who wish to restore colonialism in a new guise. Fundamentally, the reason why African ethnic groups failed to maintain their independence and succumbed to colonialism was that they were too small and not economically viable.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Kwame Nkrumah, "The Road Ahead: Osagyefo speaks to the National Assembly on Current Affairs." Kwame Nkrumah Information and Resource Site. April 18, 1961. <https://www.nkrumah.net/gov-pubs/gp-a212-61-62a/gen.php?index=0> (accessed January 28th, 2020).

The excerpt above directly illuminates some of the ongoing struggles in Ghana in 1961, the major one being ethnic grouping which is seen as a hindrance to Nkrumah's efforts for a nationwide unity front. These efforts had intensified in 1960, when Ghana became a republic, which transitioned Nkrumah's role from a prime minister to the country's first elected president. As a new republic, it seemed important to eradicate any systems that may be seen as divisive. Indeed, ethnic grouping was seen as a stumbling block in the efforts to unite the people of this new republic.

Nkrumah essentially argued that the domination of European imperialism in the region was a product of the failures of ethnic grouping as organized political and economic forces. It seems the rivalry between Nkrumah and chieftaincy was not about the cultural traditions, rather it was the tension in power dynamics. Indirect rule gave increasing political power to the position of the chief in a manner that confronted the educated elite who were keen on fighting European colonialism. So, to nationalists such as Nkrumah, returning to the said political power of chieftaincy was not an effective approach to building a strong Ghanaian nation capable of releasing the rest of Africa from the bondage of colonialism. The new nation would not succumb to the socio-political divisions on ethnic groupings, but would create a federal government which directed the political power of the nation. Indeed, Nkrumah's stance of chiefstancy was clear, as noted in his speech above. He did not believe that the power of ethnic grouping was sufficient for establishing the kind of power needed to withstand neo-colonialism. Alternatively, Nkrumah initiated a cultural movement known as the National Theatre movement.

The National Theatre Movement

The National Theatre Movement can be understood as the physical exactment of the African Personality, which he mentioned in his 1957 independence speech. Again, he made mention of this concept during his December 1958 “All African Peoples” Conference speech. The term “African Personality” was coined by Edward Blyden, who said that “Africa is struggling for a separate personality.” Great African leaders later used the term, such as Obafemi Awolowo, who was a Nigerian nationalist who took part in the fight for Nigerian independence, Nnamdi Azikiwe, a Nigerian journalist who was also the first president of Nigeria, and Jomo Kenyatta, a Kenyan anti-colonial activist who was also the first president of Kenya. And so, it is no surprise that Nkrumah would also use the term. In his 1973 autobiography, Nkrumah defined the concept:

African personality is merely a term expressing cultural and social bonds which unite Africans and peoples of African descent. It is a concept of the African nation, and is not associated with a particular state, language, religion, political system or color of the skin. For those who project it, it expresses identification not only with African historical past, but with the struggle of the African people in the African Revolution to liberate and unify the continent and to build a just society.⁴¹

In other words, African personality was a uniting force between people of African descent. The linkage was not based on state, language, religion, political system or skin color. This absence of an immediate division meant that Africa could unite itself and even with the diaspora. As the enactment of this concept, the National Theatre Movement would embody these characteristics.

One may question why theatre was used as the medium for this cultural revolution. However, theatre has been recognized as a performative instrument found in all African societies. And so, it seemed appropriate to use this instrument on the national level to unite the

⁴¹ Kwame Nkrumah, *The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah* (London, 1973); 205

new nation. The National Theatre Movement was a product of the collaboration of the Institution of African Studies and the School of Music and Dance at the University of Ghana. Nkrumah's vision to merge Ghana's art and culture scene with the academic realm was carried by many other pioneers. One key actor being Efua Sutherland, a Ghanaian playwright, director, dramatist, children's author, poet, educator, researcher, child advocate, and cultural activist. Like Nkrumah, Sutherland received an extensive college education abroad; she studied at Homerton College, Cambridge University and at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) at the University of London. She returned to Ghana in 1951 as a teacher and a children's writer. She founded and built in Accra, the Ghana Experimental Theatre in 1958, which was originally her own private theatre studio. However, the theatre was later launched by President Kwame Nkrumah in 1963. Prior to its launch, Sutherland in 1962, joined the staff of the new School of Music and Drama, headed by J. H. Kwabena Nketia.

In light of this, Efua's independent work as a creative and educator quickly found a space in the larger national effort to reorganize the cultural scene. Indeed, her drama studio at the Ghana Experimental Theatre was renamed the University of Ghana Drama Studio, when she joined the University of Ghana, Institute of African studies as a research associate. This studio was used as an off-campus training space. As the earliest Ghanaian playwright-director she was an influential figure in the development of modern Ghanaian theatre, and helped to introduce the study of African performance traditions at the university level. Thus, I include Sutherland in my analysis to highlight the fact that there were nongovernmental investments put into this vision of the National Theatre Movement.

For example, one component of the National Theatre Movement was the Ghana Dance Ensemble, which was created in 1961. The vision of this ensemble was based on the belief that music and dance are art forms that could transcend political and social classes, making it the appropriate tool for cutting across ethnic boundaries. Nketia and Opoku began a recruitment process whereby specialists from several regions were brought to teach dance and music at the University. This effort was meant to unify members of the various major ethnic groups: Akans, Ewes, Dagbambas, Gas, and members of other ethnic groups. This was indeed a socio-cultural and nationalist effort of establishing the social and national identity of being “Ghanaian” through dance performance. Indeed, this project was very intentional, as it was meant to go beyond ethnicity. In some way, I can relate this staging as a form of exhibition. In other words, the dancers of the GDE were strategically taught the various dances forms of various ethnic groups so they can display this art form to the consumers of their art. They were essentially the medium through which Nkrumah would introduce people to the cultures of other ethnic groups, thereby breaking the boundaries that exist between them.

Unfortunately, the trajectory of Ghana’s cultural renovation through the national theatre movement came to an abrupt halt in 1966 with the overthrow of Nkrumah. On February 24th of 1966, a military coup d’état overthrew Nkrumah as the president and replaced him with Joseph Arthur Ankrah. As a consequence of the overthrow, national instability intensified. Still, despite the political instability in Ghana, 1966 was a milestone year in Africa’s cultural history.

FESMAN'66

As mentioned earlier, arts and culture were seen as instruments to furthering the decolonization efforts on the continent. And so, in 1966, only six years after gaining its independence, Senegal hosted the World Festival of Negro Arts (FESMAN) in Dakar, Senegal from April 1st to 24th. This three week long “festival” was hosted by former President Leopold Sedar Senghor in collaboration with the United Nations.

A scholarly description of FESMAN writes that:

Organized against the backdrop of African decolonization and the push for civil rights in the USA, the Dakar festival was indelibly marked by the euphoria and idealism of the times. It emphasized Senghor’s conception of the significance of culture and the arts in defining a global role for Africa in the aftermath of empire, and, in a complex mix of pragmatic achievements and utopian objectives, it sought to forge greater links between Africans and people of African descent. Above all, the festival was underpinned by Senghor’s emphasis on culture as central to the development of Africa.⁴²

This excerpt highlights the emphasis that was placed on African culture as the vehicle for establishing a sense of Africanness in the world, post colonization. Senghor’s enthusiasm for FESMAN as a cultural exhibition was evident in the estimation that about, “25% of the national budget was devoted to the arts in the early years after independence.”⁴³ To draw more attention to this great effort, one-fourth of the national budget of a recently colonized African nation was dedicated to the arts. Indeed, “more than 2,500 artists, musicians, performers, and writers,..., as well as Langston Hughes, Duke Ellington, Josephine Baker and Wole Soyinka gathered in

⁴²David Murphy, ed., "Introduction: The Performance of Pan-Africanism: Staging the African Renaissance at the First World Festival of Negro Arts," In *The First World Festival of Negro Arts, Dakar 1966*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016) 2.

⁴³Murphy, *Introduction: The Performance of Pan-Africanism: Staging the African Renaissance at the First World Festival of Negro Arts*, 2.

Dakar.”⁴⁴ Any scholar of the Black arts would recognize these names as prominent figures in the twentieth century. Indeed, this list of participants favor an older generation of artists who represented an era of the New Negro, the Harlem Renaissance, Jazz and Negritude.

My interest in this chapter is to assess Ghana’s approach to a cultural revolution against the larger picture. And so, I immediately took interest in Ghana’s participation at FESMAN, however I found that the literature trace that records the participation of other African nations in FESMAN was quite limited. This limited trace of evidence can be partially explained by the coup d’état in Ghana just a few months prior. Although there is video footage of Ghanaian dancers performing at FESMAN, I was not successful in finding any written trace of Ghana’s participation.⁴⁵ Anthony J. Ratcliff, an Assistant Professor of the Department of Pan African Studies at California State University, presents another theory for this absence. In his exploration, he makes mention of the August 1965 issue of *Negro Digest*, where he cited the objectives of the prospectus of the Association for the World Festival of Negro Arts. The four objectives were:

To advance international and interracial understanding; To permit Negro artists throughout the world to return periodically to the sources of their art; To make known the contributions of what President Senghor has termed “Négritude”; a Negro’s pride in his race and a recognition of the Negro’s unique creative ability based on his African heritage; To make it possible for Negro artists to meet and demonstrate their talents to publishers, impresarios, film producers and other members of the international art world, who can provide them with the necessary outlets.⁴⁶

⁴⁴Murphy, *Introduction: The Performance of Pan-Africanism: Staging the African Renaissance at the First World Festival of Negro Arts*, 3.

⁴⁵William Greaves (dir.), *First World Festival of Negro Arts* (New York, distributed by William Greaves Productions, [1966] 2005).

⁴⁶Anthony J. Ratcliff, "When Negritude was in Vogue: Critical Reflections of the First World Festival of Negro Arts and Culture in 1966," *Journal of Pan African Studies* 6, no. 7 (2014): 172.

Ratcliff makes note of the absence of the topic of African liberation, he writes that, “While each of these objectives was important, nowhere did the prospectus discuss politics or African liberation as they related to cultural development.”⁴⁷ This observation is crucial to understanding the function of FESMAN in this larger effort to unite Africa through the arts. From this excerpt, it seems FESMAN did not actually confront the ongoing challenges that the liberation movement faced. I take interest in the depoliticisation of FESMAN because part of my objective is to assess how these festivals were products of their time.

FESTAC’77

At the end of FESMAN, Nigeria was assigned as the next host of the festival in 1970. However, the festival was pushed back due to the civil war that broke out. From January 15th to February 12th 1977, the Second World Festival of Black Arts, also known as FESTAC '77 was held in Lagos, Nigeria. Under the leadership of President Olusegun Obasanjo, over 17,000 participants gathered to have another go at the international effort to celebrate the arts.

Moreover, Andrew Apter’s book, *The Pan-African Nation : Oil and the Spectacle of Culture in Nigeria* serves as a good narrative for situating FESTAC’77 in the discourse of Pan-African celebration. Apter argues in his opening pages that, “drawing on the discourse of anticolonial struggle, in the neocolonial context of the 1970s, a “return to origins” was the only way toward final emancipation and self-determination.”⁴⁸ In other words, after the era of decolonization, it became critical for African nations to promote a rhetoric that sought for

⁴⁷ Ratcliff, "When Negritude was in Vogue," 172.

⁴⁸ Andrew Apter, *The Pan-African Nation : Oil and the Spectacle of Culture in Nigeria*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005) 5.

authentic African culture, not one diffused by European influence. Not only that, but this return to the origins also promoted a welcoming rhetoric to the diaspora, suggesting a reconnection between the continent and the diaspora.

And so, to champion this vision of “returning to the origin,” organizers of FESTAC’77, which was the Nigerian state, developed exhibitions that displayed various crafts and costumes at national treasures. Scholars, including Apter, have criticized this effort as a commodification of culture. He suggests that by removing cultural symbols such as crafts from their local habitats and presenting them as national treasures, exhibitions detached from the originality of such artifacts. The crafts were then transported to Lagos to signify as objects with national value. This removal of crafts commodified them as economic productions, rather than as symbols of culture. This repositioning of cultural and local artifacts hindered the interactions between native Nigerians and the participants of FESTAC.

By the same token, I encountered very similar challenges when I attempted to locate Ghana’s participation in FESTAC. Although FESTAC’77 was more keen on including African liberation into the festival, the same limitations in terms of tracing Ghana’s participation presented itself. It seems several participants, through music and speeches were Ghanaian, however I was not successful in tracing their identities. According to the archives of the festival, I also found that a head of state from Ghana was not present at FESTAC although Ghana was listed as a participating country.⁴⁹

⁴⁹Heads of State in Attendance, Center for Black and African Arts Civilisation. , <https://cbaacfestac77.org/festac-77/heads-of-state-in-attendance/> (accessed April 3, 2020).

My historical analysis for this chapter commences in 1977 with the completion of FESTAC'77. Indeed, within their respective nations, both FESMAN'66 and FESTAC'77 aimed to fulfill certain goals within the larger effort to propel Africa's cultural scene. I am interested in how these two festivals confronted the political and cultural climate of Africa and the diaspora during the 1960s and the 1970s. Besides, Ghana had endured several coup d'etats and Nigeria had just endured a civil war. However, I found that these festivals were exhibits of crafts rather than movements that utilized the arts to confront the climate of the 1960s and 1970s.

Besides tracing Ghana's participation in FESMAN'66 and FESTAC'77, my analysis of these two festivals serve as a foil for understanding Ghana's approach to remodeling its cultural scene. After Ghana attained independence from Great Britain, the immediate target was to unite the people from being people of five different groups to people of one nation. Essentially, to carry on with the traditional festival was not a viable option because these festivals celebrated the distinctions between these people. Instead, Nkrumah spearheaded a national theatre movement, which did not remove the crafts and costumes of the various groups and present them as national treasures. Instead, this movement learned from and collected from the various groups and included that as representation in the national archive. Through theatre, the movement was used as a vehicle to confront the challenges of the nation and the diaspora. Unfortunately, the trajectory of this movement was affected by the political instability in the nation. Still, although Nkrumah was no longer the leader of Ghana starting in 1966, pioneers such as Sutherland ensured the sustenance of the movement.

Chapter 3:

The Return: The New Ghanaian Identity and its Corresponding Festival Scene

1992-2019

Introduction

This final chapter is going to follow and complete the chronology that maps out the history of Ghana's cultural scene starting from 1992 up until 2019. Ending the previous chapter with Efua Sutherland's collaborative efforts to advance the National Theatre Movement, it was obvious that due to the nation's political and economic instability, the movement endured some challenges. The greatest push to this movement occurred in 1992, when the National Theatre was opened. Some may inquire about the omission of what occurred between 1977 to 1992, which would be an insightful query. Truly, after the overthrow of Nkrumah in 1966, a series of successful and failed coup d'etats followed in 1967, 1972, 1978, 1979 and 1981, all of which left Ghana unstable and quite incapable of any consistent development. Then, a presidential election was not held until 1992, so all this while, the new nation was not under the guidance of a constitution, making it even more difficult to progress.

The chapter proceeds by exploring the opening of the National Theatre and how it contributed to the overall movement. Just as Sutherland contributed to the theatre movement, she also founded the Pan African Historical Theatre Project, also known as PANAFEST in 1992; it seemed a new festival scene was emerging out of this movement, which is what I have labelled as the contemporary festival. So, to explore the continuities between Ghana's festival scene, I analyze PANAFEST and Afrochella as products of their time, confronting the socio-political climate of Ghana as well as the diaspora. I argue that the contemporary festivals that emerge in Ghana are sites for identity formation in ways that are quite similar to the traditional festivals studied in the first chapter. In other words, at the core of this chapter's analysis is the fact that what the Ghanaian identity consisted of had changed immensely because of decolonization, but

also because of the new movements between the continent and the diaspora at the turn of the twentieth century. For this sake, I explore the post-independence movement of Ghanaians, primarily to the United States, as a tool for unpacking such identities.

Truly, it is important for me to include the immigration patterns of the late twentieth century into the twenty-first century because it has greatly contributed to the formation of the new and growing Ghanaian festival scene. The political and economic instability of Ghana from 1966 to 1992 forced many Ghanaians to travel to settle abroad. In the first chapter of this project, the Ghanaian identity were along the lines of ethnic groups, and so their festivals were avenues for identifying themselves within their respective groups. Then, during the decolonization and independence era, the state interfered in this dynamic with the goal of uniting Ghana together as the people of a nation. The traditional festival did not accommodate this mantra, so instead Nkrumah started the National Theatre Movement. This movement would identify and celebrate the nationhood of Ghana. The twenty-first century saw the resurgence of festival making in Ghana, however these festivals were not necessarily along the lines of ethnic groupings nor based on the nationhood of Ghana. Instead, these new festivals are rather accommodating of the diversity that now exists in the makeup of the Ghanaian identity. Not only that, but these festivals are accommodating of Africa as a whole as well as the diaspora.

A major objective of this final chapter is to disrupt the historical thinking that there is minimal continuity between traditional Ghanaian festivals and the contemporary ones that began at the turn of the twentieth century. In order to further explore the new and forming Ghanaian festival culture, I employ two contemporary festivals that offer insight into the sort of socio-political objectives that they fulfil. These two festivals are PANAFEST and most

especially Afrochella. These festivals cover a timeframe from 1992, when PANAFEST started to the present.

The Resurgence of the National Theatre Movement

If this chapter was a linear timeline, it would begin in the year 1992, with the completion and opening of the National Theatre as an attempt to revive Nkrumah's national theatre movement that aimed to redirect the new nation's cultural identity. The Theatre provided a multi-functional venue for concerts, dance, drama and musical performances, screen plays, exhibitions and other artistic events. The national theatre houses the three resident companies of the National Dance Company, the National Symphony Orchestra, and the National Theatre Players.

The National Dance Company is also known as "The Ghana Dance Ensemble." The company was first established at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana as the first of its kind. The company was directed by Emeritus Prof. J.H. Nketia and was endorsed by Kwame Nkrumah in 1962. When the company moved to the National Theatre in 1992, the vision to chapter Ghana's new identity remained. The company's artistic director at the time, Nii-Yartey pronounced that "it was important that the work of the Ghana Dance Ensemble reflected the changes and transformations Ghanaian society went through and that it represented this dynamic society not just to a national audience but to outsiders alike."⁵⁰ This quote speaks to the overall vision of the movement as a vehicle for uniting Ghana and also the diaspora.

⁵⁰ Katharina Schramm, "The Politics of Dance: Changing Representations of the Nation in Ghana," *Africa Spectrum* 35, No. 3 (2000): 349.

The Drama Company is one of the three resident performing groups of the National Theatre of Ghana. It was established in August 1983 to facilitate the teaching and experimentation of drama at the University of Ghana, Legon. Then, it became the resident theatre company for the National Theatre upon its completion in 1992. The drama company has been responsible for the concert party, a well-loved theatre show which peaked in the early twentieth-century. The concert party, although has its origins in Britain, was remodelled by Ghanaian artists and became a popular form of theatre in the 1950s and 1960s. The concert party has been cherished for its theatre performances which are often held at the national theatre. In fact, the medium was used for 'theatre-for-development, which was especially championed by Efua Sutherland.⁵¹

PANAFEST

As this effort to promote the arts on a national level continued in 1992, Sutherland spearheaded the The Pan African Historical Theatre Project, which became known as PANAFEST. Sutherland initially proposed the idea for PANAFEST through the Drama Unit of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana in 1980.⁵² Sutherland's vision for the festival was within the context of the National Theatre Movement. In other words, her vision for this festival would solidify the connection between African theatre and festival making; it was a deliberate attempt to connect this national theatre front with the diaspora. PANAFEST was

⁵¹Catherine M. Cole, *Ghana's Concert Party Theatre* (Indiana University Press, 2001), 9.

⁵²Victor K. Yankah, "The Pan-African Historical Theatre Festival (PANAFEST) in Ghana, 1992–2010: The Vision and the Reality," In James Gibbs and Martin Banham, *African Theatre 11: Festivals* (Woodbridge, Suffolk; Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2012): 46.

founded on the premise that the arts, particularly theatre, are powerful tools of communication. As implied by its name, the festival aimed to attract artists not only in Ghana, but within Africa and the diaspora. Truly, PANAFEST, if executed fully based on Sutherland's proposal, would have introduced a new era of festival gathering in the new nation of Ghana. This sort of international gathering of people of African descent for arts sake had not occurred in Ghana prior to this occasion. In many ways, PANAFEST fulfilled the objectives of Nkrumah's efforts to build a link between Ghana and the diaspora, especially through the arts.

Nonetheless, the organizers of PANAFEST did not heed completely to Sutherland's proposal. During the inaugural opening in 1992, the PANAFEST theme was 'The Re-emergence of African Civilization,' implying that the festival would carry a message shared throughout Africa, whether that be on the continent or within the diaspora. In terms of execution, the festival had an intellectual component in the form of a two-day colloquium held at the University of Cape Coast that actually ran parallel to its creative dimension. In other words, although the festival was meant to focus on the arts, much of it strayed from, meaning this festival strayed away from Sutherland's vision by failing to address the theatrical dimension. Instead, this theatrical dimension was dubbed as 'arts and culture.' Furthermore, Yankeh cited from a 1997 PANAFEST Souvenir Brochure that the event aimed at:

...establishing the truth about the history of Africa and the experiences of its peoples using the vehicle of African arts and culture; providing a forum to promote unity between Africans on the continent and in the diaspora; and affirming the common heritage of African peoples the world over and defining Africa's contribution to world civilization.⁵³

⁵³Yankah, "The Pan-African Historical Theatre Festival (PANAFEST) in Ghana, 1992–2010: The Vision and the Reality," 12.

This excerpt shows a common thread between the goals of the 1992 PANAFEST that of the 1997 edition. The common thread is a desire to unite Africans on the continent and in the diaspora, however the medium through which the idea was proposed was not properly infused.

Although I am in complete agreement with Yankah's criticism about the absence of theatre as the medium through which the objectives are fulfilled, I find that his argument lacks historical contextualization. This is because, the state of the nation in 1980 when the proposal was made was quite different from 1992, when the plan was executed. After the political instability began submerging during the latter end of the twentieth century, Ghana saw a growing return of Diasporans. As mentioned in the previous chapter, coup d'etats had overtaken Ghana's political arena since 1966 when Nkrumah was overthrown, which led to the fleeing of many Diasporans in Ghana. However, the latter end of the century saw the regrowth of heritage tourism.

Heritage tourism, especially in the context of the African diaspora holds a deep history that has been thoroughly studied.⁵⁴ In particular, Ghana has been a site for heritage tourism for many decades and scholars have written a lot about this phenomenon. According to Katharina Schram, in her book *African Homecoming*, this phenomenon can be attributed to a number of reasons. Some of these reasons stem from the fact that Ghana is an English speaking country, to its historic role in the efforts towards Pan-Africanism, and the many tangible relics of transatlantic slave trade.⁵⁵ In fact, in 1979, Ghana had three castles: the Cape Coast Castle, the

⁵⁴ Discourse on slavery heritage tourism in Ghana: Bruner:1996, Kemp:2000, Kreamer:2004, Reed:2004, Timothy and Teye:2004, Hosley:2004, Schramm:2004, Macgonagle:2006, Schramm:2008, Mowatt and Chancellor:2011.

⁵⁵Katharina Schramm, *African Homecoming: Pan-African Ideology and Contested Heritage*. (London & New York: Routledge, 2016), 30-31.

Elmina Castle and the Christiansborg, 15 intact forts, four forts partially in ruins, four ruins with visible structures, all of which are physical sites of history for Africans and Diasporans.⁵⁶ It is worth noting that Diasporans were part of Ghana's effort in the early years of its independence, involving themselves in politics, education, health and many other fields. However, the 1966 overthrow of Nkrumah completely disrupted the presence of Diasporans in Ghana.

Consequently, it was not until the political climate stabilized in the late 1980s that Ghana saw a spike in numbers again in terms of Diasporans visiting Ghana and resettling there.⁵⁷ The rise in heritage tourism in Ghana is evident in the statistics of people visiting the remnants of European imperialism, especially through the trans-atlantic slave trade. "In 1993, there were 17,091 visitors to Elmina Castle, 67 percent were residents of Ghana, 12.5 percent were Europeans, and 12.3 percent were North Americans. An important and growing segment consists of blacks from the diaspora, and includes many African Americans."⁵⁸

Subsequently, in the context of PANAFEST, many of its participants fell into the category of Diasporans as it is generally defined, especially in the twentieth century. The diaspora, or more specifically the "African Diaspora" is often used to categorize the descendants of enslaved people in the new world. Colin A. Palmer, a historian of African American Studies, explored this term in her journal article, "The construction of a diaspora, then, is an organic process involving movement from an ancestral land, settlement in new lands, and sometimes

⁵⁶Aaron Yankholmes, and Bob McKercher, "Understanding Visitors to Slavery Heritage Sites in Ghana." *Tourism Management* 51 (2015): 23.

⁵⁷ Yankholmes, and McKercher. "Understanding Visitors to Slavery Heritage Sites in Ghana," 23.

⁵⁸ Edward M. Bruner, "Tourism in Ghana: The Representation of Slavery and the Return of the Black Diaspora," *American Anthropologist*, New Series, 98, no. 2 (1996): 290.

renewed movement and resettlement else-where.”⁵⁹ Using this definition, it seems quite appropriate that the African diaspora was used to categorize the descendants of Africans enslaved in the New World. And so, part of PANAFEST was about providing an experience for Diasporans to touch base with their roots.



Figure 3. *Wreath laying at an Ancestral Gravesite.* Photograph by Christina McMahon, August 1st 2009. Lauren Adrover, David A. Donkor, and Christina S. McMahon, "The Ethics and Pragmatics of Making Heritage a Commodity: Ghana's PANAFEST 2009," *TDR/The Drama Review* 54, no. 2 (2010): 162.

Hence, the turn of the twentieth century welcomed a new form of the Ghanaian identity that transcended the boundaries of nationhood. Now, it seemed diasporic Africans were now part of this identity. In the year 2000, Ghana became the first African country to officially open its doors to people of African descent from all over the world through the passing of the “Right of

⁵⁹ Colin A. Palmer, "Defining and Studying the Modern African Diaspora," *The Journal of Negro History* 85, no. 1/2 (2000): 28-29.

Abode” law which allows any person of African descent to apply and be granted the right to stay in Ghana indefinitely.

In that respect, it is important to analyze the impact that PANAFEST had on Ghana’s festival making. Other than focusing on the criticism that PANAFEST did not actually focus on theatre as it was originally envisioned by Sutherland, I present the argument that it initiated a direction of festival making that allowed Ghanaians, Africans and Diasporans to commune and establish a new Ghanaian identity, forever changing the building blocks of nation building in Ghana. Truly, what it meant to be Ghanaian was changin; not only did Ghanaian join forces along the lines of ethnic groups prior to and during colonization, they communed together as people of a nation during the independence era.

Suitably, this redirecting was quite befitting of the times, because just as Diasporans returned to Ghana for visitation and resettlement, many Ghanaians left and settled abroad. Besides, Palmer acknowledges another diasporic stream; the fifth diasporic stream, which she argued began in the nineteenth century upon the fall of the transatlantic slave trade. Although I do concur with Palmer that there exists a fifth African diasporic stream, this new stream actually took hold at the turn of the twentieth century. I acknowledge that there were “free” movements of Africans into the Western world, as early as the end of the transatlantic slave trade, however I would argue that the actual formation of a new diaspora occurred about two decades after decolonization took hold in the 1960s. And so, I explore the evolution of this new diaspora.

Immigration Patterns of the 1990s

Being that Great Britain was the colonizer of the then Gold Coast, immigration to Britain came much faster after decolonization in 1957. However, the late 1980s and the 1990s saw a great increase in the emigration of Ghanaians into the United States specifically; “the peak period in the African born immigration population in the USA peaked between 1981-1990 and 1991-2000.”⁶⁰ This timeline aligns with my previous assertion that the new diasporic stream took hold about two decades after independence. For the purpose of this essay, I take interest in the wave of Ghanaians who immigrated to the United States after 1991.

1990 was a crucial year in the development of a Ghanaian-American community. The United States government enacted the Immigration Act of 1990; this act essentially increased the total number of immigration to the United States per year. More importantly, it provided a family-based immigration visa, created employment based visas, as well as a diversity visa program that created a lottery to admit immigrants from "low admittance" countries or countries whose citizenry was underrepresented in the U.S. Ghana being one of the countries categorized as “low admittance” countries, the immigration of Ghanaians increased.⁶¹ This brief synopsis of the evolution of Ghanaian immigration is included not for the sake of immigration as a topic. In fact, this would be an insuffice synopsis. Instead, it is included to illuminate the development of this new identity such as the “Ghanaian-American.”

Upon arrival, Ghanaians initially adopted institutions to help them preserve their culture while living abroad. For instance, a 1989 New York Times article speaks of the formation and

⁶⁰John A. Arthur, *The African Diaspora in the United States and Europe: the Ghanaian Experience* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 3.

⁶¹Warren R. Leiden; David L. Neal, "Highlights of the U.S. Immigration Act of 1990," *Fordham International Law Journal* 14, no. 1 (1990-1991): 329-332.

use of a Ghanaian association in New York. Titled, "King of Ashanti in U.S. Stresses Cultural Pride," the article discusses the efforts made by the Asantefuohene to help maintain the growing Ghanaian population in New York.⁶² Of course, the Asantehene is the paramount chief of the ashanti people, and so the Asantifuohene was an adaptation of that traditional system. His job was to work with the migrants to maintain order. In like manner, another New York Times from 1999 describes a real estate venture established in the Bronx to allow Ghanaians in New York to purchase houses in Ghana.⁶³ Again, to illustrate the development of a Ghanaian community in the United States, a 1984 New York Times article describes a visitation by Otumfour Opoku Ware II to city hall. Otumfour Opoku Ware II was the reigning Asantehene of the Ashanti people in 1999, and so his visit was quite meaningful to Ghanaians in New York. The article cited some reactions, "Our King, Our King is here," said Oheneba Aseidu, a 41-year old wielder from the Bronx who left Ghana about a dozen years ago."⁶⁴ It is evident that the generation of Ghanaians who resettled in the United States between 1991 and 2000 were already indulged in the traditional Ghanaian culture. So much so, it seems they created ethnic group associations to help them reestablish some form of normalcy as back home in Ghana.

Nonetheless, the transition into the twenty-first century welcomed a new generation of American-born Ghanaians as well as Ghana-born Ghanaians who had relocated to the United States at a very tender age. This new generation officially introduced the new identity of a Ghanaian-American with minimal exposure to the Ghanaian culture as it exists in Ghana. This

⁶² Howard W. French. 1989. "King of Ashanti in U.S. Stresses Cultural Pride." *New York Times* (1923-Current File), May 29, 25.

⁶³ Seth Kugel, "Ghana Dream Homes Inc." *New York Times* (1923-Current File), Jul 18, 1999.

⁶⁴ Philip Shenon. 1984. "Thousands in City Hail Ghana King." *New York Times* (1923-Current File), Oct 15, 1.

<https://search-proquest-com.ezprox.bard.edu/docview/122563794?accountid=31516>.

narrative is captured in a 2016 New York Times article titled, “I’m Ghanaian-American. Am I Black?”⁶⁵ In this article, the writer, Gyasi speaks of her contradicting experience as “Black” outside the home and “not Black”, but Ghanaian within the home. She makes mention of her parents’ great comfort with this arrangement, as they were more immersed into the Ghanaian culture. However, for her, these two identities were equally present. This new identity as a “Ghanaian-American” is crucial to understanding the creation of a new identity. This new identity is useful for understanding the festival culture that emerged in the twenty-first century.

Afrochella

In December of 2017, Afrochella shook the grounds of Ghana and attracted an estimated 5000 guests for its inaugural opening. In the days following Christmas, Afrochella welcomed the intermixing of natives living in Ghana, natives living abroad returning home to family for the holidays, as well as those of the diaspora returning to rekindle their ancestral ties to the continent. The organizers of the festival were indeed children of Ghanaian immigrants to the United States and some immigrated at very young ages. And so, the idea was prompted by the new generation of Ghanaian-Americans, an identity that was forming as a product of the mass immigration of Ghanaians into the United States at the end of the twentieth century.

Sandwiched between Christmas and New Years, it is almost as if Afrochella was designed to commemorate the end and also a beginning. The end of frowning upon African culture and the beginning of a celebratory sentiment of African culture, specifically Ghanaian

⁶⁵Yaa Gyasi, 2016. “I’m Ghanaian-American. Am I Black?” New York Times (1923-Current File), June 19,1.

<https://search-proquest-com.ezproz.bard.edu/docview/2310033900?accountid=31516>.

culture. Afrochella is a celebration of Africa's diverse culture and the vibrant work of African creatives & entrepreneurs. The festival is designed to not only celebrate Ghanaian culture, but to create room for the teaching of various cultures in Africa and the diaspora. Participants, also known as "Afrochellans" are allowed the opportunity to explore African art, African music, and African cuisine. Indeed Afrochella is a prime setting for the display of Ghanaian cultural exhibition in the 21st century. A kind of exhibition that culminates several socio-political and even economic objectives that can be traced far back to the traditional festivals explored in chapter one.⁶⁶ Using images as primary sources, I found many continuities between Afrochella and the traditional festivals.



Figure 4.1.



Figure 4.2.

⁶⁶ Ivie Ani, "Afrochella Sets Sight On Connecting The African Diaspora, One Festival At A Time". *Vibe*. December 12, 2019.

<https://advance-lexis-com.ezprox.bard.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:5XR5-SVM1-DYRK-V0RS-00000-00&context=1516831>.



Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.1.- 4.3. *Images of Afrochellans at the El Wak Stadium. December 28, 2019*
<https://culturemanagementgroup.pixieset.com/afrochellafestivalpics2019/afrochellafestival/>
 (accessed March 28, 2020).

The three images above were taken during Afrochella 2019. I chose these three images because they capture several symbols that were crucial to the success of some traditional festivals. The image on the top left (figure 4.1) captures sculptures of several adinkra symbols mounted on the festival grounds. The adinkra symbols are historic to many Akan groups, and they were used during the traditional festival. So, to see that this symbol was used in 2019 as exhibits of culture has to be recognized as a continuity. In like manner, the picture on the top right left (figure 4.2) captures two individuals sitting on a golden stool. Of course, we encountered the golden stool as an important socio-political symbol in the Ashanti kingdom and a key factor in the celebration of the Akwasidae. I chose to include the image on the bottom (figure 4.3) as well because dress was another important factor in traditional festival making. I was captivated by the variety of dress that existed among the participants of Afrochella; as one person is dressed in traditional ankara cloth, another is wearing an NBA

jersey that is original to the United States. This difference highlights the diversity that exists within the participants of Afrochella.

In addition to what is evident through pictures, I would argue that Afrochella provides a space for a kind of self identification. As a product of movement, the twenty-first century presented a shared “afro” identity that could be shared among Africans on the continent as well as those in the diaspora. In this space, participants gathered to self identify with the “afro” identity. Through such an exhibition, I base my argument that Afrochella displays several continuities that can be traced back over centuries. As mentioned in the first chapter, traditional festivals were spaces for community gathering and unity, a medium of cultural education and intergenerational knowledge transmission, as well as a space for cultural and memory preservation. I would argue that all these objectives were and are undertaken during Afrochella.

Not only that, but like the Homowo festival, Afrochella encouraged a similar sense of homecoming because of the importance that is placed on the physical space. The year 2019 was a milestone in the history of Ghana, Africa, and within the diaspora, because it celebrated the 400th year of commemorating the arrival of the 1st documented enslaved Africans to the shores of North America at JamesTown, Virginia. Acknowledging that the people of the “Afro” identity are dispersed, the sense of homecoming contributed to the remembrance of triumph, just as we see during the Homowo festival.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Zaina Adamu, "How Ghana's Historic Homecoming is Changing Africa," *CNN*. January 13, 2020.
<https://advance-lexis-com.ezprox.bard.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:5Y01-GN31-JBSS-S4Y4-00000-00&context=1516831>.

Conclusion

Again, the main objective of this project was to uncover the continuities between the Ghanaian traditional festival and the contemporary festival. The traditional festival refers to festivals that originated within distinct African kingdoms which became ethnic groups during colonization. These festivals have been thoroughly studied by scholars, who have illuminated the religiousness of these festivals. Moreover, without deducting from the importance of religion in these festivals, my project uncovers the socio-political significance of these festivals. After which, I present the argument that, actually these social and political components can be found in Ghana's emerging festival culture in the twenty-first century. Using the independence era as the link between the two kinds of festivals, I explore how Nkrumah's efforts redirected Ghana's festival scene. The independence era includes the Pan-Africanist agenda of the twentieth-century through international festivals such as FESMAN'66 and FESTAC'77, which I argue put African art on exhibition, rather than use this art to confront the challenges of the socio-political climate.

My argument that there exists continuity between the traditional festival and the contemporary festival is interesting, especially considering the great difference in time, social norms and political climate. Despite this difference, both kinds of festivals have confronted the social and political climate by fostering a sense of community. During the traditional festival, this community is the people of the ethnic group. However, the contemporary festival acknowledges that there is a new community that binds Ghana to Africa and Africa to the world; it is this community that joins together during these newer festivals.

As mentioned in the first chapter, the traditional festival was a space for socio-political projects such as community gathering, heritage and memory preservation, and a medium for

cultural education and intergenerational communication. In addition to that, the traditional festival also urged for the homecoming of the members of the ethnic groups. Similarly, the contemporary festival fulfils these objectives. By encouraging the gathering of people of various backgrounds and ages, not only does community gathering happen, but culture and memory are preserved simultaneously. In like manner, the diversity amongst the participants allows for interpersonal and intergenerational cultural education and knowledge transmission. More importantly, Ghana's contemporary festival scene is conducive to the social and political climate of Ghana, Africa and the diaspora, allowing these identities to be formed and developed in a manner that is appropriate in the twenty-first century.

Looking forward, I am interested in exploring the state's role in the emerging contemporary festival culture of the twenty-first century. The traditional festival scene maintains a clear hierarchy; the paramount chief is the leader and head of the festival. It seems this kind of leadership is absent in Ghana's contemporary festival scene. Evidently, the state has an economic interest in the reemergence of festival making in Ghana; it is implied by the state's decision to coin 2019 as the "Year of Return." Besides this economic interest, I reckon that this reemergence will lead to profound developments to the relations between Ghanaians, Africans and Diasporans.

All the same, there are many questions left unanswered and some thought processes left incomplete in this project. The reality is that I am finishing up this project during a global pandemic that has completely knocked down my routine as a scholar. Nonetheless, I look forward to working on this project further and I am very excited to do so.

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