

Carola Lentz and  
Afra Schmitz (eds)

**“Mobilising for Ghana’s Future”**

The 2017 Independence Day  
Celebrations in the Upper West  
Region

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## **Lentz, Carola and Afra Schmitz (eds): "Mobilising for Ghana's Future": The 2017 Independence Day Celebrations in the Upper West Region**

### **Abstract**

In 2017, Ghana celebrated sixty years of independence. As the political debates evolving around the Diamond Jubilee preparations show, national days mark moments in time when the past, present, and future of the nation-state are critically assessed. National-day celebrations commemorate key moments of the national history. At the same time, they offer an arena to stage the national territory, by organising simultaneous observances throughout the nation in the regional and district capitals. This replication of Independence Day, modelled on the festivities in the capital, aims at strengthening the citizens' identification with the nation-state and helps turn the relatively abstract concept of national belonging into a tangible experience.

This working paper presents results of student field research, shifting the perspective from the national organisers' intentions and political debates in the capital Accra to the independence jubilee celebrations in the Upper West Region. The contributions show how the nation was staged and performed at the regional and district level. They explore how budgetary considerations set the scene, and how spatial and protocol arrangements produced various hierarchically-ordered categories of participants, visitors and spectators. They discuss how the element of competition in the school children's parade generated a moment of identification with both the individual school and the nation at large. And they demonstrate how the cultural displays staged sub-national forms of belonging such as ethnicity and regionalism while integrating them into the Ghanaian nation-state and even evoking membership in a pan-African community.

### **Zusammenfassung**

Im Jahr 2017 feierte Ghana sein sechzigjähriges Bestehen als unabhängige Nation. Nationalfeiern bieten Anlass, die Lage der Nation kritisch zu diskutieren. Sie erinnern aber nicht nur an die nationale Geschichte, sondern bieten auch eine Bühne, um das nationale Territorium zu inszenieren – durch zeitgleiche Feiern nach dem Vorbild der Hauptstadt Accra in allen Regionen und Distrikten des Landes. Die Replikation des zeremoniellen Ablaufs soll die Identifikation der Bürger mit ihrer Nation auch fernab der Hauptstadt stärken; sie sorgt dafür, dass das relativ abstrakte Konzept nationaler Zugehörigkeit ein greifbares Erlebnis wird.

Das Arbeitspapier präsentiert Resultate einer studentischen Lehrforschung zum Unabhängigkeitsjubiläum in der Upper West Region und zeigt, wie die Nation in der Region und den Distrikten inszeniert und aufgeführt wird. Die Beiträge diskutieren, wie Budgetentscheidungen die Planung und Durchführung der Feier beeinflusst und wie die Gestaltung von Raum und Protokoll die Teilnehmer und Zuschauer in hierarchisch geordnete Kategorien eingeordnet haben. Sie untersuchen, wie der Wettbewerbsaspekt die Teilnehmer der Schülerparade motiviert und Identifikation sowohl mit der eigenen Schule als auch mit der Nation befördert hat. In den Kulturaufführungen wurden sub-nationale Zugehörigkeiten wie Ethnizität und Regionalismus inszeniert und zugleich in einen Zusammenhang von nationaler und pan-afrikanischer Einheit eingebettet.

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## Introduction

Carola Lentz and Afra Schmitz

On 6th March 2017, Ghana celebrated sixty years of independence from British colonial rule. Since the early years of the new nation-state, Ghana's Independence Day ceremonies have been staged simultaneously throughout the entire country, with more or less pomp and pageantry, in the capital Accra as well as in all regional and district headquarters. Thus on every 6th March, in what has eventually become over two hundred districts and ten regional capitals, thousands of schoolchildren and security forces participate in colourful national day parades. Numerous spectators join these participants in singing the national anthem and reciting the national pledge, watching cultural displays and listening to the president's Independence Day address, replicated by the local political authorities. In this working paper, we present results of fieldwork that a group of six bachelor and master students of social anthropology at the University of Mainz conducted on the 2017 Independence Day celebrations in Ghana's Upper West Region, in the regional capital and several districts.<sup>1</sup>

The student fieldwork projects, directed by Afra Schmitz, complemented the activities of another research team, composed of Carola Lentz, Marie-Christin Gabriel and Konstanze N'Guessan, who explored the Ghana@60 activities in the capital Accra. Combining these research perspectives, from the political centre and from one of the regions and its various districts, has allowed us to gain unique insights into the multifaceted nature of national-day celebrations. Investigating the celebrations in the capital makes it possible to explore the planners' intentions with regard to the festivities as well as the political debates surrounding their organisation, and to witness the staging of an exceptionally elaborate ceremony which is under particular scrutiny by the media and the general public. The ceremony in Accra also serves, in many ways, as a template for the festivities organised throughout the rest of the country. Field research in a region and at the district level, on the other hand, gives insights into the specific challenges of arranging Independence Day celebrations with a usually very limited budget and numerous organisational constraints. It allows for the exploration of how state policies and directives from the national capital are implemented, but also commented upon, sometimes criticised, and often modified in the regions and districts. At the same time, it is at this local and regional level that the larger aim of producing a periodic renewal of attachment to the nation has to be realised – and indeed, despite the many obstacles and locally-felt shortcomings which the students from Mainz observed, they also noted that, by and large, the 2017 Independence Day celebrations in the region did fulfil their mission and mobilised patriotic sentiment.

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<sup>1</sup> We would like to thank our Ghanaian colleagues Dr George Bob-Milliar (Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi) and Dr George Gyader (University of Development Studies, Wa) for facilitating bureaucratic requirements and offering a fruitful collaboration throughout the research process. Thanks also go to Ken Amankwah, Chairman of the Ghana@60 Planning Committee in Accra. We are particularly grateful to the host families in the Upper West Region for their hospitality as well as to all other persons who supported the students' endeavours. For a critical discussion and helpful remarks on this working paper, we owe thanks to Marie-Christin Gabriel. The students' research was financially supported by the PROMOS scholarship awarded by the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, as well as by funds from the research project "Performing the nation and subnational differences in African national-day celebrations", financed by the German Research Foundation.

In the remainder of this introduction, we will briefly present the larger debates that surrounded the celebration of Ghana's Diamond Jubilee of independence. We will then discuss various strategies of staging the national territory during the celebrations and offer a short portrayal of the Upper West Region where the student's fieldwork took place. Finally, we will explain how the research was conducted and give an overview of the contributions that follow.

### **The Diamond Jubilee of independence under debate**

The Diamond Jubilee was designed under the slogan "GH 60 years on: mobilising for Ghana's future" and raised questions about the state of the nation, its achievements and current economic and political situation, and, even more importantly, its direction in future. After sixty years of existence as an independent nation-state, Ghana had, metaphorically speaking, reached the citizens' usual retirement age. Whether this meant progress on the way to future prosperity, to be promoted by building on "the foundations laid by the founding fathers"<sup>2</sup> or, on the contrary, the danger of retiring "into oblivion"<sup>3</sup> was subject to much discussion. Some commentators insisted that the Diamond Jubilee was actually a "time to mourn" and not to celebrate, because "we haven't moved one inch in 60 years" and "have failed as a nation".<sup>4</sup> Or they compared Ghana not to a retiree but to a grandparent, suggesting that a "successful grandparent would have provided for the needs of his or her children, including educating them and setting them up" and condemning that in reality, many parts of the country were still suffering from all sorts of shortages and deficiencies.<sup>5</sup> Others used the occasion to exhort their fellow citizens to love their nation and "espouse the ideals in our national anthem", "fearless honesty... and the determination to building together", "knowing very well that whether we make it or not depends on us as we must all give our best to our beautiful Ghana".<sup>6</sup> In a similar vein, the chairman of the planning committee of the national celebration evoked the biblical meaning of jubilees as "a renewal, a new beginning", inviting all celebrants to leave the past and past mistakes behind. Celebrating Ghana's Diamond Jubilee, he insisted, meant that "from here onwards we commit ourselves, we pledge ourselves that we are going to rededicate ourselves, and we are setting the nation back to the values that gave us that hope from independence".<sup>7</sup>

As these debates that evolved around the motto and the Diamond Jubilee celebrations demonstrate, national days are condensed moments in time when the past, present, and future of the nation-state is discussed and critically assessed. National days, and particularly symbolically charged round-date anniversaries, invite citizens to remember, re-enact and re-define the national past, and they aim to enhance their emotional and moral attachment to the nation (Lentz 2013a). At the same time, Independence Day and other national days are staged by state institutions. They perform not only the nation, or rather: "national imaginaries" (Askew 2002), but also the state itself, making it palpable to the citizenry and potentially to a wider international audience. Such periodic confluences of nation and state in

<sup>2</sup> "Build on legacy of founding fathers", *Ghanaian Times*, 2.3.2017.

<sup>3</sup> Salifu Abdul-Rahaman, "Ghana cannot 'retire'@60", *Ghanaian Times*, 3.3.2017.

<sup>4</sup> Enimil Ashon, "Ghana@60: time to mourn", *Daily Graphic*, 3.3.2017.

<sup>5</sup> Gloria Mintah, "Ghana@60: what are we celebrating?", *Daily Graphic*, 3.3.2017.

<sup>6</sup> Ewurabena Andah, "We love you Ghana", *Daily Graphic*, 3.3.2017.

<sup>7</sup> Interview by C. Lentz with Ken Amankwah, Chairman of the Ghana@60 Planning Committee, Accra, 24.2.2017.

national-day performances work toward legitimating the state as such (Roy 2007). At the same time, they are also regularly instrumentalised to bolster the ruling government.

In the case of Ghana's Diamond Jubilee, this inextricable link of national celebrations to current political dynamics became particularly evident, as the jubilee followed shortly after the general elections of December 2016, which had led to a change of government. After eight years in opposition, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) had regained power and, as chance would have it, after hosting the Golden Jubilee celebration in 2007, it was once again a NPP government that was in charge of organising an important national jubilee. This task was complicated not only by the short time-span of barely two months between assuming office and organising the upcoming anniversary, but also by the legacy of massive discontent with the past jubilee celebration. Broad segments of the population and particularly the political opposition had vehemently criticised the former NPP government's organisation of the 2007 festivities. They had, among other reproaches, condemned the exorbitant expenses of the celebration, financial irregularities and lack of accountability, and accused the organisers of misusing the Ghana@50 event as a platform for party politics (Lentz 2013b). Unsurprisingly, when the new NPP government announced the establishment of the Ghana@60 Planning Committee and the Diamond Jubilee's motto of "mobilising for the future", a member of parliament of the oppositional National Democratic Congress (NDC), which had governed between 2008 and 2016, reminded Ghanaians of these past mistakes. Expressing the concerns of many members of the opposition, he exhorted the NPP government that the 2017 celebration should not be "used as an opportunity to dissipate public funds, reward political party loyalists or be a subtle means to celebrate an election victory at the polls".<sup>8</sup>

Compared to the Golden Jubilee which had been celebrated under the motto "Championing African Excellence", the Diamond Jubilee was indeed to be financially restrained and, as the planning committee put it, "very elegant but modest".<sup>9</sup> Confronted with resurfacing allegations of wastefully spent state money, the NPP government saw the need to reassure Ghanaians that they would preserve the "national treasure"; yet, as President Nana Akufo-Addo insisted, the Ghanaian story needed to be told.<sup>10</sup> Calling on the citizens to become an active part of the celebration, the president mobilised for public-private partnerships to raise the stipulated twenty million Ghana Cedis (approx. four million Euros) for the festivities. The low-profile agenda of the jubilee, and the particular emphasis on self-discipline and civil-society commitment, was in line with his political vision for "a new Ghana" which he presented only a few days before the celebration when delivering the annual State of the Nation Address before parliament. As Akufo-Addo reminded his fellow Ghanaians, the nation-state needed to build on, and finally realise, "the big dreams of our forefathers to build a self-reliant and self-sustaining nation that would take pride of place amongst the comity of nations".<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> "Suhuyini's take on the Ghana@60 celebrations, a while ago on the floor of parliament", *The Ghanaian Lens*, 20.2.2017.

<sup>9</sup> Statement during the Ghana@60 Planning Committee's press conference on the occasion of outdoor the jubilee cloth, Accra, Independence Arch conference room, 2.3.2017 (tape-recorded by C. Lentz).

<sup>10</sup> Charles Takyi-Boadu, "GHc 20m for Ghana@60", *Daily Guide*, 11.2.2017.

<sup>11</sup> President Akufo-Addo, Address on the State of the Nation, 21.2.2017, reprinted in *Daily Graphic*, 23.2.2017.

## Staging the nation in the regions: the Diamond Jubilee and the Upper West Region

Incorporating all the regions in the Diamond Jubilee and making Ghanaians throughout the country feel part of the jubilee celebrations, was an important aim of the organisers in the capital. As the chairman of the Ghana@60 Planning Committee explained, the president demanded that activities should be planned in a form that demonstrated that the entire ceremony was “owned by the people” and that the “spirit of happiness and unity” would spread throughout the country.<sup>12</sup> As already during the Ghana@50 festivities, there were various strategies of “performing the national territory” and bringing “the nation into being” by making the state’s internal administrative divisions and ethnic differences at once explicit but also “subordinated to the nation” (N’Guessan et al 2017: 686).<sup>13</sup>

On the one hand, there was the established practice of replication, which also characterises Ghana’s annual national-day celebrations. It brings the nation to the regions, so to speak, by reproducing the national ceremony in a well-orchestrated manner simultaneously across the national territory, in all regional and district capitals. This is what the students explored in their fieldwork. Their contributions in this working paper will discuss how these replications contribute to make the relatively abstract notion of national belonging a palpable, tangible experience and to create an experience not only of a national moment, but also of national space.

On the other hand, there were strategies of representing the nation-state’s regions and localities at the national centre or even, quite literally, on the national stage, into which Accra’s Black Star Square was turned for the peak of the Diamond Jubilee celebrations. Most importantly, the elaborate cultural display during the Ghana@60 parade in Accra presented traditional dances and music forms from all of the country’s ten regions; the intricate choreography of these regional cultural representations was organised around a female dancer embodying “Mother Ghana”, thus making the different traditions “produce one identity”, namely that of a unified, culturally rich nation.<sup>14</sup> There were also festive occasions that honoured deserving citizens and pupils from all parts of the country like the presidential presentation of national students’ awards to the finalists from all ten regions or the sixtieth anniversary inter-school debate competition, which featured school teams from various regions; such events staged the country’s administrative divisions as an integral part of the nation-state. In the same vein, the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation offered a series of TV and radio features on each of the ten regions, portraying their special natural and cultural treasures and inviting historical witnesses to reflect on local memories of the independence process.

A third strategy of staging the nation-state’s territory, finally, was various tours of national events or symbols through the different regions. Most prominently, the president lit a Ghana@60 torch during the 6th March ceremony on Black Star Square, which was to travel eventually through the entire country. The torch was ignited at the Eternal Flame of African Liberation, once established by Ghana’s first president Kwame Nkrumah, and handed over

<sup>12</sup> Interview by C. Lentz with Ken Amankwah, 24.2.2017.

<sup>13</sup> On these “spatial” strategies during the Ghana@50 celebrations, see Lentz 2013b: 536-41; more generally on other African independence jubilee celebrations, see Lentz 2013c: 231-3.

<sup>14</sup> Interview by Carola Lentz and Marie-Christin Gabriel with the choreographer Kofi Anthonio, School of Performing Arts, University of Ghana, Legon, 7.3.2017. A video of the cultural performance of 6th March 2017 on Black Star Square can be found on YouTube; URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cHZY-NHpYm8>.

to Ghana's legendary boxer Azumah Nelson who then, accompanied by loud cheers from numerous spectators, carried it to the Accra Sports Stadium to deliver it to the Greater Accra Regional Minister. From there, the jubilee torch would eventually travel to all regional capitals, "encouraging citizens to participate where they lived and worked", as the president explained, "supporting domestic tourism, and [offering] an opportunity to daily reflect, celebrate and challenge ourselves to define the spirit 'I am a Ghanaian'".<sup>15</sup> On 6th March 2018, at the closure of the jubilee year, the torch was supposed to arrive back in Accra and to be received during the annual ceremony of lighting the nation's perpetual flame at Black Star Square on Independence Day.<sup>16</sup> A far less solemn, but also highly visible tour through the regions was undertaken by the Miss Ghana@60 competition, an entertaining activity of nation-building, which was initiated during the independence festivities in 1957. In 2017, as in other years, the beauty pageant toured through the regional capitals and under the motto of "beauty with a purpose", selected regional finalists to compete for the national title. Befitting our interest in the region and for the very first time in the history of this competition, the candidate from the Upper West Region was eventually chosen as Miss Ghana@60.<sup>17</sup>

For the Upper Westerners, this success must have been welcome, given that they often perceive themselves as being marginalised in national affairs. The sense of being peripheral, not sufficiently endowed with neither own resources nor funds from the national coffers, pervaded many of the discussions around the Ghana@60 celebrations, which the students from Mainz witnessed during their fieldwork. Not least because of such perceptions, it is of interest to analyse how the regional and district replications of the national-day celebrations have been organised, performed and evaluated in a region that is geographically distant to the nation's capital and faces particular administrative challenges. The latter were compounded by the fact that at the time of the jubilee celebrations in 2017, the substantive political heads at the district level, namely the District Chief Executives, had not yet been appointed, due to the recent change of government.

Directly adjacent to Burkina Faso, the Upper West Region is the country's least populated region, inhabited by only three per cent of the national population of an estimated 28,3 million. The 2016 projection for the region runs at 790,000 inhabitants and, like the national figure, is based on the latest Population and Housing Census conducted in 2010.<sup>18</sup> The research focused on the regional capital Wa and four of the eleven districts, Nadowli-Kaleo, Jirapa, Lawra and Nandom. Wa Municipal has 107,000 inhabitants, while Wa as the region's

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<sup>15</sup> "Nana Addo unveils Ghana@60 logo, celebration to cost GHc20m", *citifmonline*, 9.2.2017;

URL: <http://citifmonline.com/2017/02/09/nana-addo-unveils-ghana60-logo-celebration-to-cost-ghc20m/>.

<sup>16</sup> The media coverage of the sixty-first Independence Day celebration on 6th March 2018 did not reveal the whereabouts of the Ghana@60 torch; its journey through the country in the course of the jubilee year could equally not be traced back by the authors.

<sup>17</sup> "Margaret Dery is Miss Ghana 2017", *Ghanaweb*, 8.10.2017;

URL: <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/entertainment/Margaret-Dery-is-Miss-Ghana-2017-588769>.

Interestingly, on the homepage of the Miss Ghana contest, all regional finalists presented themselves in traditional dress that is considered typical of their ethnic groups; see URL <http://www.missghana.com.gh/c17.php>.

<sup>18</sup> Since Ghana's Statistical Service conducts the Population and Housing Census only once every ten years, the projection for 2016 is based on the 2010 total numbers projected with the yearly population growth rate of 1.9 per cent recorded for the region.

URL: <http://www.statsghana.gov.gh/docfiles/2010phc/Projected%20population%20by%20sex%202010%20-%202016.pdf>.

largest city serves as its administrative and political centre. The city is inhabited predominantly by Wala, the majority of whom are Muslim. Other major ethnic groups in the region are the Dagara and Sisala, who belong mainly to one of several Christian denominations, with the Catholics constituting the majority, or they follow traditional religious beliefs. The other districts are considerably smaller in size, ranging from Jirapa with 88,400 inhabitants and Nadowli-Kaleo with a population of approximately 63,000<sup>19</sup> to Lawra and Nandom with 54,900 and 46,000 inhabitants respectively.<sup>20</sup> Throughout the region, the economic activities evolve predominantly around agriculture.

To better understand the dynamics that shaped discussions and practices around the organisation and realisation of the Diamond Jubilee festivities in the region, it is useful to take a brief look at the area's political history. As Ghana's youngest region, the Upper West Region was established in 1983 during the military rule of Flt. Lt. Jerry John Rawlings. Rawlings ended decades of intense negotiations about the area's administrative status under changing military and civilian regimes that had largely continued the economic and political marginalisation of the region which dated back to the colonial period (Bob-Milliar 2011; Ladouceur 1979; Lentz 2006). During the country's return to multi-party democracy in 1992, Rawlings' Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) was transformed into the National Democratic Congress (NDC), without major personnel changes. In January 1993, Rawlings was installed as the new president, this time elected by the people, and the PNDC effectively handed over power to its successor party. Rawlings had capitalised, and continued to do so in the coming years, on existing loyalties. In the course of events, the Upper West Region became a stronghold for the NDC and ever since, voters' support for the NPP as the main competitor party was rather poor (Bob-Milliar 2011).

In the following elections, the NPP only slowly gained ground in the region. While the national trend enabled the party's national victory in the 2000 and 2004 elections (until in 2008 the NDC took over again), it was not reflected in the Upper West election results. The Upper West electorate voted consistently for the NDC presidential candidates. The elections of the members of parliament, however, were more often shaped by considerations concerning the candidate's ability to provide development for the constituency as well as by personal interests, family loyalties or patron-client relations rather than by party political affiliations (Schmitz 2013). Thus, the seats won by NPP candidates in the 2008 elections increased to three out of ten. The 2016 election continued the pro-NDC trend at the level of the presidential elections, with only 36 per cent of the votes in favour of the NPP candidate Akufo-Addo and 58 per cent for the then incumbent NDC president. With regard to the parliamentary elections, however, there was a dramatic shift compared with 2012 when the NPP lost all constituencies; in 2016, the party won five out of eleven Upper Western seats. This dynamic in a former NDC stronghold results to a considerable extent from inner-party quarrels and changing loyalties at the constituency level that weakened the campaign's force in addition to what one could term elements of personal revenge. Of the four districts and

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<sup>19</sup> The Nadowli-Kaleo District was carved out of the Nadowli District in 2012; the figures here are based on the District Assembly's Medium Term Development Plan for 2014 to 2017 and differ considerably from the 2010 Population and Housing Census.

<sup>20</sup> The figures for the districts are based on the respective District Analytical Reports published by the Ghana Statistical Service in 2014.

URL: [http://www.statsghana.gov.gh/docfiles/2010\\_District\\_Report/Upper%20West/LAWRA.pdf](http://www.statsghana.gov.gh/docfiles/2010_District_Report/Upper%20West/LAWRA.pdf).

constituencies in which the students from Mainz carried out fieldwork, two – Lawra and Nandom – had been obtained by the NPP candidates; the other two – Jirapa and Nadowli-Kaleo – continued to be represented by NDC parliamentarians.

Interestingly, however, no matter whether the national government was controlled by the NDC or the NPP, and whether electoral majorities in the region had supported the ruling party or the opposition, many Upper Westerners believed, and continue to do so, that their region was politically and financially marginalised. This perception also shaped debates around the Diamond Jubilee. Although the celebration was presented as a national affair that was to be non-partisan and inclusive, when discussing the lack of funding by the state, the members of the planning committees in the region and districts were frustrated. They often referred to their marginalised role within the nation-state in terms of development, infrastructure, and political relevance. The stereotype of the “remote North”, which is shared nationwide, supports an imagined “Northernness” and leads to a narrative of marginalisation (Schmitz 2018) used by the organisers to explain challenges and supposedly unfair allocations of (financial) support. And when criticising the NPP government’s reluctance to release funds for the region to organise the national-day celebration, the planning committees in the Upper West combined the stereotype of marginalisation and of being “punished” for the political leaning of the region. At the same time, however, the regional and district jubilee organisers took great care to stage the parades, cultural displays, speeches and ceremonial trimmings of the national day in a manner that would enhance local pride and present the Upper West as a confident, respectable and deserving member of the nation-state.

### **The larger research project and the 2017 student fieldwork**

Inspired by the “African year” in 2010, when seventeen African nation-states were to celebrate fifty years of independence from their colonial masters, one of the editors of this working paper, Carola Lentz, organised a group of doctoral students at the Department of Anthropology and African Studies, University of Mainz, to explore the poetics and politics of national commemoration in Africa. Between 2009 and 2013, and in cooperation with supervised fieldwork in 2010 by a group of master students, comparative research has been conducted on the golden jubilees of independence in Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Gabon, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Madagascar, Mali and Nigeria, as well as on the twentieth anniversary of independence in Namibia.<sup>21</sup>

This research was continued by in-depth country studies in Ghana, Burkina Faso and Côte d’Ivoire, in two consecutive research projects, which focused not so much on independence jubilees, but on regular annual national days. The first project, under the title “Marking ethnic and national differences in African national days” (2013-16), examined how the production of ethnic and national differences plays out in African national-day celebrations. It explored discourses and performances of national unity and shared national identity, and examined how national and ethnic differences are downplayed or emphasised in symbolic

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<sup>21</sup> For more information on this research group, see <http://www.ifeas.uni-mainz.de/eng/268.php>; a list of publications resulting from this project can be found here: [http://www.ifeas.uni-mainz.de/Dateien/Veroeffentlichungen\\_Bildarchiv\\_.pdf](http://www.ifeas.uni-mainz.de/Dateien/Veroeffentlichungen_Bildarchiv_.pdf). A comprehensive analysis of the research findings is presented in Lentz 2013a and 2013c.

representations and performances of the nation during national-day festivities. The follow-up project, “Performing the nation and subnational differences in African national-day celebrations” (2016-19), investigates the staging and performance of the nation in relation not only to ethnicity, but more generally to subnational differences. The nation is generally presented as a community superordinate to all other senses of social belonging, such as regional, ethnic and religious ties, and to differences like age and sex/gender. Since nationality is an abstract allegiance marked mainly by only a few conventional symbols, such as the national flag, the national colours, and the national anthem, making national belonging more visible requires representing how it relates to other social affiliations and differences. The project studies how such subnational differences and their relationship to the nation are performed during national days.<sup>22</sup>

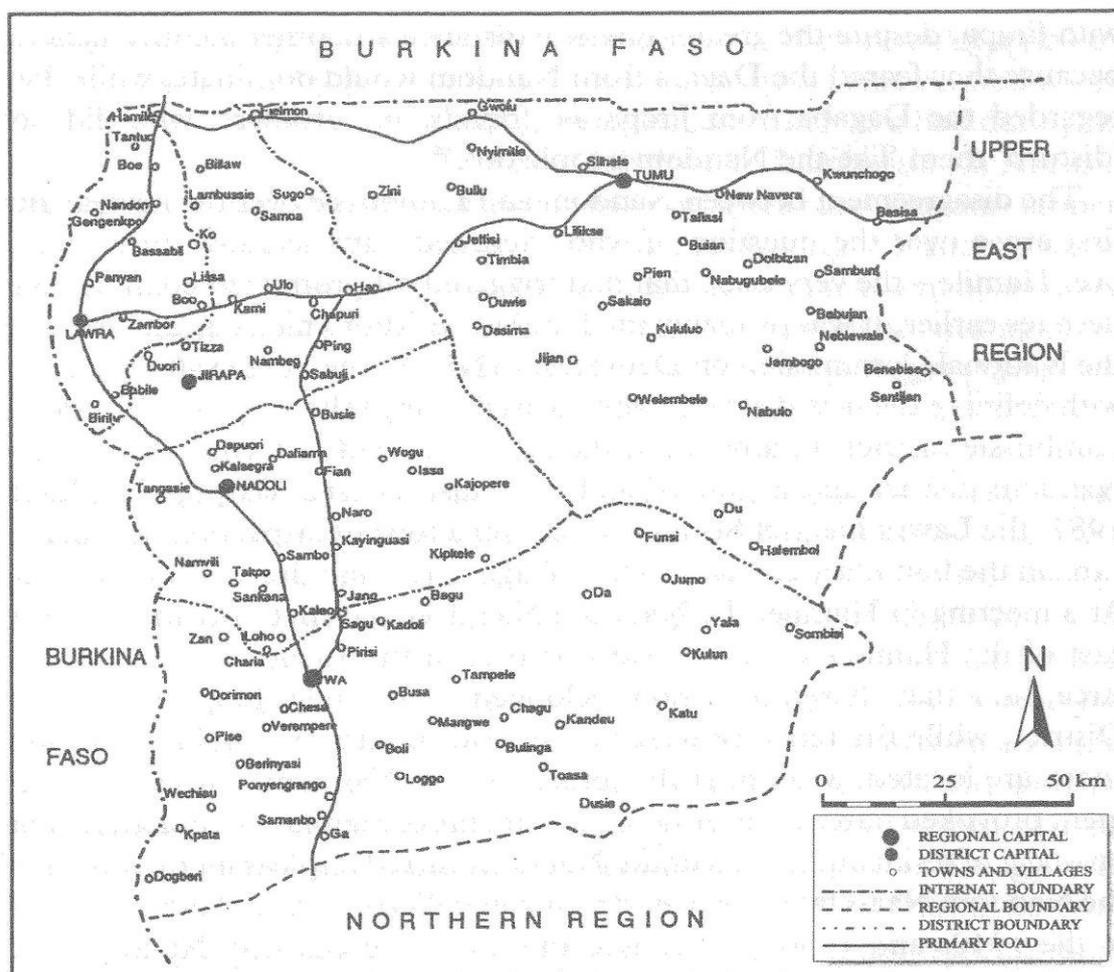
The 2017 student fieldwork took place in the context of this ongoing research project. Our previous research experience had brought home to us that the study of national days has to deal with particular challenges. In terms of location, the celebrations are staged simultaneously in several places and the organisers of the event often restrict the researcher’s mobility. In terms of timing, the rhythm of research has to adapt to the event-driven temporalities. To address these challenges, the project team, consisting of Carola Lentz, Marie-Christin Gabriel and Konstanze N’Guessan engaged in joint fieldwork, for instance during the Ghana@60 events, but also during Independence Day in Burkina Faso in December 2017. While these research activities focused mainly on the celebrations at the national level, the team enlisted the support of a total of nine bachelor and master students to carry out fieldwork at the district and regional level in both Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire.

In Ghana, the students worked, as mentioned above, in various districts and the regional capital of the Upper West Region. Between February and April 2017, Teresa Weber and Patrick Windschügl worked in Wa, Sarah Stenner undertook research in Nadowli-Kaleo, while Michael Swiacki did fieldwork in Lawra, Janna Reichart in Jirapa and Sabrina Gabel in Nandom. Guided by a comparative research programme and supervised by Afra Schmitz, the students participated in their respective research localities, in the organisation and preparations of the festivities, covered debates before, during and after Independence Day, and attended the ceremony itself. They joined the planning committees’ preparatory sessions and observed rehearsal upon rehearsal of brass bands, schoolchildren, the military and civil servants preparing for the national day parade. In addition, the students conducted numerous interviews with organisers, journalists, schoolchildren, teachers, enthusiastic celebrants and those who preferred to watch the live coverage of the national celebration in Accra on TV. To meet the challenges of an event research, the group worked as a team and used regular meetings and social media platforms such as WhatsApp to stay in contact with each other and exchange information in real time. Former and current students in the Department of Social, Political and Historical Studies at the University of Development Studies in Wa, supervised by Dr George Gyader, supported their coverage of the Independence Day celebration itself. Individual research themes included the conflicts surrounding the tight budget for the festivities, the influence of party politics, the spatial organisation of the celebrations and the role of schoolchildren in the parades as well as the

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<sup>22</sup> For information on these two research projects, see <http://www.ifeas.uni-mainz.de/eng/1131.php>, and <http://www.ifeas.uni-mainz.de/eng/2374.php>; a list of publications from these projects can be found here: [http://www.ifeas.uni-mainz.de/Dateien/Veroeffentlichungen\\_3\\_1\\_2018.pdf](http://www.ifeas.uni-mainz.de/Dateien/Veroeffentlichungen_3_1_2018.pdf).

speeches and cultural performances on Independence Day. This working paper presents a first analysis of the results of all these research activities.



Map 1: Ghana's Upper West Region (Source: Lentz 2006: 243)

### The contributions

In the course of analysing the field data from the four districts and the regional capital, it became evident that there were indeed – and perhaps unsurprisingly since each celebration was intended to reproduce a standard model – many similarities between the various research locations. These resemblances concerned not only aspects like setting the stage and organising the protocol of the festivities, but also the challenges, conflicts and discussions that accompanied the preparations as well as local evaluations of the achievements of the jubilee celebrations. We have therefore decided that instead of discussing each research locality individually, we would organise the discussion along cross-cutting themes that were relevant, in one way or another, in all of the students' research sites.

The first contribution, by Sarah Stenner and Patrick Windschügl, discusses the bureaucratic order to which the members of the planning committees were subjected, but which they also actively shaped and manipulated. The tight budget became an arena of numerous conflicts, some manifest, others less open, and the discussions about planning how the extraordinary

national event should be staged in the districts and the regional capital revealed contested politico-administrative hierarchies. Underlying many of the discussions were long-standing tensions between the region and the national capital. Particularly in their debates about the allocation of financial resources, administrators and organisers often invoked the well-established stereotype of the marginalised, peripheral North, which is neglected, if not consciously sidelined by the economic and political centre of the country. The contribution by Sarah Stenner and Patrick Windschügl explores these discussions and provides a first analysis of how the change of government may have influenced the preparations for the Diamond Jubilee. It also shows that the regional capital and the districts differed in their possibilities and strategies of dealing with the challenges imposed by an insufficient budget.

The second contribution, by Sabrina Gabel and Michael Swiacki, analyses the spatial organisation of the celebrations in the various localities, focusing on the preparation of the stage and the stands for invited guests, decorations, the accessibility of the festival grounds for the general public, and the seating (and standing) arrangements. The organisation of space highlighted that the jubilee is a nation-state affair; at the same time, through distinguishing features such as elevated dais or specially decorated chairs, it staged hierarchies of political office and administrative rank as well as specific categories of local dignitaries and visitors. This was supplemented by protocol arrangements and the temporal organisation of the programme that guided the course of events. The contribution thus shows how, at the district and regional level which both replicated and adjusted many arrangements of the national celebration in Accra, the nation was staged and performed in space and time. At the same time, it explores how various actors attempted to influence, manipulate or even boycott the arrangements, seeking to position themselves differently from what the organisers intended or “silently” expressing their discontent with the financial or symbolic recognition they received during past celebrations or in the ongoing festivities.

The third contribution, by Janna Reichart and Teresa Weber, focuses on the parade as the core element of the Independence Day festivities and zooms in on the schoolchildren. By understanding the students’ parade as a competition and by analysing the children’s motivation and their strategies of differentiating themselves from their peers, multiple forms of belonging become apparent. Various elements of their costumes, banners, marching styles and forms of salute were used to demonstrate the students’ belonging to specific schools, but also their age, gender, and religious affiliation as well as their being young and proud Ghanaian citizens. Analysing their performances during the march past and the enthusiastic reactions of the audience allows insights into how the future of the nation is made visible.

The elaborate cultural performance in Wa was a central part of the regional capital’s Independence Day parade. The last contribution, by Teresa Weber, analyses the various elements of this cultural display, including dance, acrobatics, and the recital of poems. It shows how “unity in diversity”, Ghana’s official motto for integrating cultural and ethnic difference into what is regarded as “national culture”, was performed on stage. With their cultural display, the choreographer, the poet and their student troupe inextricably linked the notion of national unity and pan-African identity with their interpretation of a distinct regional culture.

Taken together, the four contributions offer a wide range of insights into important aspects that shaped the Independence Jubilee celebrations in Ghana's Upper West Region. The contributions show how budgetary considerations set the scene, and how spatial and protocol arrangements produce various hierarchically-ordered categories of participants, visitors and spectators. They discuss how the element of competition in the schoolchildren's parade secures enthusiastic participation and identification with both the individual school and the nation at large. And they demonstrate how the cultural displays stage sub-national forms of belonging such as ethnicity and regionalism, but also integrate them into the larger Ghanaian nation-state and even evoke membership in a pan-African community.

## **Celebrating under Financial Restraints: The Diamond Jubilee in the Upper West Region**

Sarah Stenner and Patrick Windschügl

When Ghana's President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo inaugurated the National Planning Committee six weeks before celebrations to mark the sixtieth independence anniversary, he broached a sensitive issue: "We have to recognize it; we don't have the money that we ought to have. Therefore, our celebration of this milestone should be modest. We should take into account our financial circumstances".<sup>23</sup> Organisers should be not only thrifty; private institutions and companies should take over the budget for national independence more or less entirely, according to Akufo-Addo. This year's concept of a public-private partnership was the overriding principle of funding the celebrations, the president stressed.<sup>24</sup> A glance at Ghana's recent political development shows clearly which factors, apart from economic problems, led to the cut in funds for the national holiday. No costs or efforts were spared when Ghanaians celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of national independence in 2007. More than triple the planned budget was spent on the prestigious ceremony in the capital, Accra, complete with luxury vehicles purchased especially for the celebrations and various banquets for honorary guests, and incensed the population (Lentz 2013b: 535). Criticism of the expenditure caused not too small a problem for the government, among others a lawsuit filed by the opposition against the organisers on suspicion of alleged misappropriation of monies. Now, ten years later, Ghanaians re-elected the government in office at that time, in presidential elections in December 2016 – prompting the new president to restructure funds for the celebrations and to call for more thrift and transparency.

The available funds determine the scope of celebrations and the budget is central to the work of every planning committee. Plans for Ghana@60 were now being made and executed under new financial framework conditions. The inclusion of private sponsors may have been promising on a national level, but the planning committee soon reached its limits on regional and district levels. Although funding for regional celebrations had been secured, the government's austerity measures led to limited festive opportunities in the economically weaker districts and angered the population.

In the following, we will outline funding of the Ghana@60 celebrations based on the examples of Wa, capital of the Upper West Region, and the district capital, Nadowli, and look at the related challenges and discussions.

### **Celebrating with the help of sponsors: Independence Day in Wa**

Regional and district-level preparations for the national holiday were adjusted to the national approach. A committee, divided into themed sub-committees, was responsible for planning and executing festivities, and calculated the financial requirements. This came to a considerable total budget of Ghana Cedis (GHS) 54,000 (approx. EUR 10,800) in Wa, which

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<sup>23</sup> Excerpt from the president's speech in defence of the National Planning Committee, 26.1.2017. URL: <http://www.ghana.gov.gh/index.php/news/3384-president-inaugurates-ghana-60-planning-committee>

<sup>24</sup> Takyi-Boadu, Charles: "GHC 20 million for Ghana@60", *Daily Guide*, 11.2.2017.

amounted to an increase of GHS 20,000 (EUR 4,000) over the previous year and underlines the special nature of the round anniversary. The Regional Coordinating Council, the main administrative council in the region, and Wa's Municipal Assembly shared the total budget equally. Asked how past celebrations had been funded, the regional co-ordinating director said that this year funds which the government normally assigned centrally had failed to materialise.

In view of this situation, the Planning Committee focused more on obtaining private sponsors. Although that had been an issue in recent years, this became even more important during preparations for Ghana@60. A total of twenty-four sponsors were found and included companies, schools, non-governmental organisations and private persons. Their support varied with some offering money while others gave donations in kind or, for instance, broadcasting time on radio stations. The donors seized the opportunities created by the national celebration to present themselves and their businesses. The official sponsors were allowed to unfurl advertising banners in the festival area and big companies had their own sales and advertising booths at the celebrations. The master of ceremonies who commented over a loudspeaker the unfolding of events in the festival area also announced the sponsors' names repeatedly as well as the amounts they had donated.



Fig. 1: Big mobile phone companies' advertising stands in Wa, 6.3.2017 (Photos: P. Windschügl)

Although the regional capital's economic clout helped find a number of sponsors, the lack of funds was palpable and evident in many details. On the occasion of the Golden Jubilee in 2007, the government had, for instance, provided the festival cloth and had it sent to the regions allowing many invited guests and officials to dress up for the festivities. However, in 2017 they had to organise and purchase the cloth themselves. That meant purchasing and transporting the goods from Accra to Wa and selling the cloth in party bureaus in the city. Although this may seem a marginal issue at first glance, the lack of cloth was symbolic: The members of the planning committee only got hold of the Ghana@60 anniversary cloth a few days to the celebration, if at all, contrary to their expectations. This caused anger and became apparent in the discussions about paying the committee members for their work. At first, they worked free of charge, but later tough negotiations resulted in a daily rate of GHS 25 (EUR 5). The following glimpse of one planning committee session shows that this conflict centred not only on wages, but generally on the government's low appreciation of their work:

After the Regional Minister thanked the members of the planning committee for their work and left the meeting room, the sub-committee's budget breakdown was presented. Some budgets had been cut or redistributed because of a lack of funds. This caused anger and several participants recalled the regional minister's comments before a closer discussion of the individual budgets began. The participants demanded that praise for their work should be followed by deeds. Merely reimbursing their petrol costs was not enough. They were working for the welfare of Ghana. A fixed remuneration was essential to avoid financial drawbacks. (edited fieldnotes, 2.3.2017, P. Windschügl)

Challenges, discussions and new features thus marked the funding of the Ghana@60 celebrations in Wa. The location as the region's economic centre mitigated the lack of state funds considerably and secured some funding for the Independence Day celebrations. Sponsors were obtained and private monies used so that none of the events had to be cancelled or changed. Yet, what happened on the district level? Conditions differed vastly in districts, far from regional capitals with economic and financial clout, and the concept of public private partnerships soon reached its limits.

### **Celebrating unaided: the national day in Nadowli-Kaleo District**

The budget for national celebrations on a district level consisted mainly of money generated by the District Assembly, the lowest administrative level. Additionally, the District Common Fund, consisting of five per cent of the national common fund distributed yearly to all the districts, contributed ten per cent. However, the central government rarely pays the District Common Fund in full, according to some members of the District Assembly, and that caused problems. As a result, district funds were often exhausted and were not a reliable source of funding.

In Nadowli-Kaleo, the budget for national celebrations came to GHS 34,419 (approx. EUR 7,000) and consisted of GHS 14,540 for catering (approx. EUR 2,500) and GHS 19,879 for the festival area and the requirements (approx. EUR 4,000 Euro). By comparison, the total budget for the 2017 anniversary celebrations in Nandom came to GHS 14,626 (approx. EUR 2,500) barely half that of Nadowli's budget and the committee in Jirapa budgeted a mere GHS 16,000 (approx. EUR 3,000). The differences show the diverse allocation of funds and how they were used and managed. Although the estimate in Nadowli came to twice the amount, the lack of funds forced optimistic planners to live with many cutbacks and a reduced programme. In other districts, less money had been budgeted for celebrations from the start and severe cuts were avoided.

The lack of funds triggered conflicts and debates during the planning phase and after the celebrations. The recent change of government meant the District Chief Executive (DCE) had not yet taken office. The District Coordinating Director (DCD), who is head of the local administration, took over his position as Chair of the Planning Committee for National Celebrations. The DCE and two members of the committee, the District Finance Officer and the District Budget Officer, were responsible for the budget. However, the DCD alone had the final decision on the allocation of funds. The other committee members had hardly any say, and much to their anger, their opinions expressed in discussions about the budget were fre-

quently passed over. During conversations with them, it became clear that although they accepted the DCD's decision as chair, they accused him of insufficient knowledge of the DCE's tasks and as a result disapproved of his decisions. Tensions in the planning committees, however, were also due to the difficulty of finding sponsors on a district level which was far more difficult than in Wa. The lack of possible public-private partnerships meant that members of the committee had sole responsibility for finding the monies. The organisers rose to the challenge and borrowed props for the festivities where possible on credit or saved on quality out of necessity.

On the day of the celebrations, the cutbacks became noticeable in the quality of the pavilion, the loudspeaker or in the reduced programme. For instance, fun games such as football and volleyball matches by schoolchildren were cancelled in the afternoons; such matches had been a fixed part of entertainment in previous years' festivities. Only schools were invited to march in Nadowli's parade, and other groups such as the security services and civil-society associations were not allowed take part. The First Commander of the Fire Service, who said that he had marched with a contingent of firefighters during parades in previous years, noted the bad financial situation: "The budget is very low so they can't pay for so many people to march".<sup>25</sup> The planning committee justified the exclusion of police, firefighters and civil-society actors with the lack of funds as catering had to be provided for official participants and the available funds were insufficient. Therefore, the planning committee decided not to issue invitations and focused instead only on the schoolchildren. Unlike previous years, on the occasion of the Independence Jubilee, some of the schoolchildren had to cycle to the festival area as the buses had been deployed to collect schoolchildren from remote places. The selection of the participants in the parade also revealed the hierarchical structures in the district: the planning committee alone decided who took part. Civil-society groups were not represented on the committee and had no say in planning the celebrations; and were excluded from them not least because they were not involved in laying plans.

However, Jirapa's programme foresaw more events and greater participation in the parade despite a far lower budget and thanks to people's involvement. But this was possible mainly thanks to the initiative of participants. Fifteen police and the same number of firefighters joined forces to form a thirty-strong marching contingent, as they had been unable to come up with the required thirty participants each. The police commander in Jirapa justified the merger with the importance of the jubilee. The police and firefighters absolutely wanted to take part in the parade and included special features in the celebrations: "At sixty years, we need to improve our work and make it a grand festivity".<sup>26</sup>

Talks after the festivities soon revealed speculation and accusations about the budget. Some people in Nadowli were accused of sabotaging the celebrations and of corruption as well as embezzling money. The manager of the Centre for National Culture accused the driver, assigned to collect dancers performing in the cultural display of national celebrations from their homes and to drive them to Nadowli, of intentionally arriving late in a bid to ruin the festivities. She suspected that the driver wanted to put pressure on the District Assembly as he had yet to receive payment for his services a year earlier. Representatives of the Ghana Education Service (GES), who took part in the celebrations, were also accused of sabotage.

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<sup>25</sup> Interview by S. Stenner with Eduah Issaac, Nadowli, 22.2.2017.

<sup>26</sup> Interview by J. Reichart with Daniel Nartey, Jirapa, 27.2.2017.

They had been tasked with bringing the national flag on the morning of Independence Day and hoisting it punctually for the events, but failed to do so. The flag was missing during the oath of allegiance and when the national anthem was played. It had to be hoisted later, as visible in Fig. 2, during the DCD's speech.



Fig. 2: The District Works Engineer hoisting the flag during the DCD's speech, 6.3.2017 (Photo: S. Stenner)

The members of GES were accused of intentionally not bringing the flag and this was understood as indirect protest of what they saw as bad payment. Apart from that, they were also dissatisfied with the planning of the celebrations and cuts to the programme and especially the fun games which they deemed an essential part of national celebrations. Allegations of corruption were also expressed. It was suggested that funds provided by a member of parliament for the district had not been received or used as planned. And the chief of Gili voiced his anger at the misuse of public funds:

But what happens is, in Ghana there are a lot of people who like money too much, so money that is even devoted for some of these things doesn't go in this direction. So at the end of the day you see that a lot of money is given for this occasion, but it is given to the wrong hands. People just use them for themselves, instead of using them to grace the occasion. (Interview by S. Stenner with Gili Naa, Nadowli District, 30.3.2017)

## Conclusion

Funding of Ghana's sixtieth Independence Anniversary celebrations was subject to complex discourses and practices. The influence of the recent change of government and the guidelines issued by the new executive for modest Independence Day celebrations meant that regional and district capitals had to come up with alternative financing. The districts, in particular, were soon stretched to their limits.

The precarious financial situation frequently caused conflicts and debates in the organising committee about more equitable allocation of funds; certain events in a programme were either changed or cancelled entirely. The lack of transparency about how the available funds were handled was criticised. These conflicts sometimes turned into alleged acts of sabotage and sparked debates about the general sense of the expenditure. Plans for the celebrations had to be improvised. Events for inclusion or exclusion were negotiated and reveal which items on the agenda the organisers deemed essential for national festivities, such as the spatial setting and seating arrangements, the parades and a sufficient catering for the participants.

The budget is central to planning the celebrations. Our research has also shown, however, that the financial means do not play an existential role in the national day. Regardless of whether government funds were released or of internal conflicts, the celebrations still went ahead. The deputy chair of the organising committee in Wa expressed that clearly in an interview:

The actual money that comes is always less. [...] This year, what came is even... I don't know how to say it. They didn't release some. But the thing is, because it's a national celebration, we have to make it with what we have to celebrate it; to do the best out of it because we cannot afford to miss it. You can't do that. We are responsible for it. (Interview by P. Windschügl with Fati Koray, Deputy Director RCC, Wa, 24.3.2017)

Some people criticised the amount and purpose of the expenditure: "We don't have money for projects, but we spend 30,000 GHS for the celebration".<sup>27</sup> However, the importance and execution of the celebrations was never fundamentally questioned. Events in the regions and districts mirror the national celebrations in Accra and convey the importance of belonging to the Ghanaian nation. The government is held responsible for the provision of funds as it designates national, annual celebrations in all regions and districts. At the same time, however, patriotism in the population became palpable. Although the celebrations put a strain on local budgets and prompted controversial debates, ignoring the celebrations for financial reasons was never an option, neither for the organisers nor the residents.

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<sup>27</sup> Observational note on meeting of Planning Committee in Nadowli by S. Stenner, 23.2.2017.

## **Setting the Stage and Arranging the Protocol: Independence Day Celebrations in the Region**

Sabrina Gabel and Michael Swiacki

At around 7.30 am, three pavilions had been set up, rows of seats placed underneath and a red carpet had been rolled out on a small podium. I know this square mainly as a dusty place where people meet during the day to relax and chat under the shade of big trees. Young men meet here in the afternoons to play football. Celebrations marking Ghana's independence are being held here today. Preparations began at 6 am: Firefighters have been watering the square and a GES employee marked the parade's route with little hats. Members of the Planning Committee have set up a dais and hoisted Ghana's national flag. More and more children in school uniforms are gathering in the square, unpacking socks, cleaning their shoes and dusting down their clothes. A band consisting of ten young men has been playing marching songs for a while. Members of the Planning Committee are walking around and are still busy. (edited fieldnotes, 6.3.2017, M. Swiacki)

The organisers of the annual Independence Day celebrations have to manage the financing and invite guests and participants to the parade; they must also decide on matters of protocol, that is: when and what occurs, where the celebrations are to be staged and how the venues actually look on the day itself. The introductory excerpt from the fieldnotes gives insight into the wealth of preparations made for celebrating the nation every year. In their research projects into diverse aspects of the spatial production of the nation in African national celebrations, Konstanze N'Guessan, Carola Lentz and Marie-Christin Gabriel show how the choice of venues and the nationwide, simultaneous replication of the festivities on national, regional and district levels should convey a picture of a cohesive, state-dominated national territory (N'Guessan et al 2017). The design of venues in various parts of the country in turn has significant implications. The organisers, for instance, systematically highlight access to venues, the positioning of the stages, spectators' stands and seating for certain groups of people while others have to make do with limited spectators' stands (Gabriel et al. 2016).

Our analysis of celebrations in the regional capital Wa and in four district capitals in the Upper West Region underlines some of these observations. However, the focus on regional and local levels also offers a different perspective on the spatial production of the nation and its timing. We understand space not simply as existing; rather it is constructed through communication and by practices of people (Tilley 1994: 11). Furthermore, many instances in the jubilee festivities revealed that celebrations are not shaped by the plans alone, but by diverse actors, including the audience, who influence the events and turn the production into a performance (Fischer-Lichte 2004: 16). In the following, we show that such influences could be observed at the regional and district celebrations. First, we explain where the celebrations were held, why these places were selected and how they were prepared for the big day. We then discuss how the arrangements at the venues distinguish different categories of people from each other and are also clearly visible to all those present. Finally, we look at the protocol for the festivities with a view to both common features and differences between the various districts and the regional capital.

### **Nationalising space: the venues of celebration in the regions and districts**

Unlike Accra where national Independence Day celebrations are held on the especially built Black Star Square, district capitals do not have similar places. On Ghana's fiftieth Independence Anniversary in 2007, the government had so-called Jubilee Parks built in all ten regional capitals. Although smaller than their model in Accra, they follow a similar pattern: raised seats for invited guests and other grandstands, some of which are painted white and in Ghana's national colours, surround a square and tarmacked parade ground. Apart from the national celebrations, unique functions such as election rallies<sup>28</sup> or police recruitment events<sup>29</sup> are held there also.

The venues in the district capitals consisted in early March of dusty squares that are used in everyday life as well as for special events. Centrally lying venues in all districts, that is: near churches, local administration offices or bus stations, were chosen for the Ghana@60 2017 celebrations. Sports events or rallies are usually held there as well as annual cultural festivals such as Kakube in Nandom or Kobine in Lawra (Lentz and Wiggins 2017). When plans for festivities marking Ghana@60 were being laid, the places selected were not really a topic of discussion. However, talks with those responsible indicate the demands made on the venues. Asked about an alternative venue, a member of the planning committee hinted at the criteria including the proper condition. He replied: "The stadium is not in a good shape. It is dilapidating; the walls are broken and people even farm there. So it is inappropriate".<sup>30</sup> Although the stadium in Lawra had hosted the national celebrations in the past, it does not seem to have met the criteria. Other demands on the venue included the size of the square and whether there were trees so that spectators could sit in the shade. As part of the state-initiated "clean-up exercise" on March 4th, people in the district had to help ensure that the city and the venue were clean and tidy for the special Independence Jubilee day.<sup>31</sup>

### **"When you are coming, you will know where you are going to be seated": producing difference in seating arrangements**

On March 6th, preparations on the squares began before sunrise. Firefighters watered dusty squares. Markings such as ashes, little hats or tiny Ghana flags lined the route of the march past. Red carpets were rolled out, chairs set out in the pavilions and on the grandstand. Ghana's national flag was hoisted in front of seats for invited guests and signalled clearly that the nation was being celebrated. The parade ground, which would see one to two thousand people march past depending on the venue, was the centre of events. As a member of the local administration explained, guests were told about seating arrangements when they arrived.<sup>32</sup> Dignitaries were given the best seats at the so-called high table, a raised VIP stand

<sup>28</sup> Modernghana.com, 8 January 2008, "Upper West goes wild for Akkufo-Addo".

URL: <https://www.modernghana.com/news/152640/upper-west-goes-wild-for-akufo-addo.html>.

<sup>29</sup> Ghana News Agency, 30 January 2018, "Over 2000 applicants undergoing police recruitment screening in Wa".

URL: <http://www.ghananewsagency.org/social/over-2-000-applicants-undergoing-police-recruitment-screening-in-wa-128013>.

<sup>30</sup> M. Swiacki's conversation with a member of the Planning Committee in Lawra, 22.2.2017.

<sup>31</sup> President John Dramani Mahama set up the national clean-up exercise, also called National Sanitation Day, after cholera broke out in 2014. It has been held on the first Saturday of the month ever since.

URL: <http://www.ghananewsagency.org/social/president-announces-national-sanitation-day-81660>.

<sup>32</sup> Conversation with M. Swiacki, 15.3.2017.

that stood out with a speaker's lectern and the national flag beside it. This is where all the salutes were given and the parading schoolchildren greeted the DCD, the director of the GES, and the commanders of the police and the fire brigade. Opposite the high table was the waiting point for the contingents of schoolchildren and, in the case of the celebrations in the regional capital, groups of military, police and other security organisers to perform in the parade.

Figure 3 shows local administration staff, traditional leaders and other important local people sitting to the right and left of the grandstand in the shade of the pavilions (the seating order could be reversed in some districts). The seating of the guests on the VIP stands was the same at all the celebrations. The regional minister or DCD, the director of the GES, flanked by the commanders of the fire brigade and the police on the right and left, sat in the front row. Other invited guests including directors of other educational institutions, religious leaders or former political functionaries were seated in the rows behind. The only exception was in Nandom District where one seat at the high table had been reserved for the paramount chief. The festivities only began when his representative finally arrived.

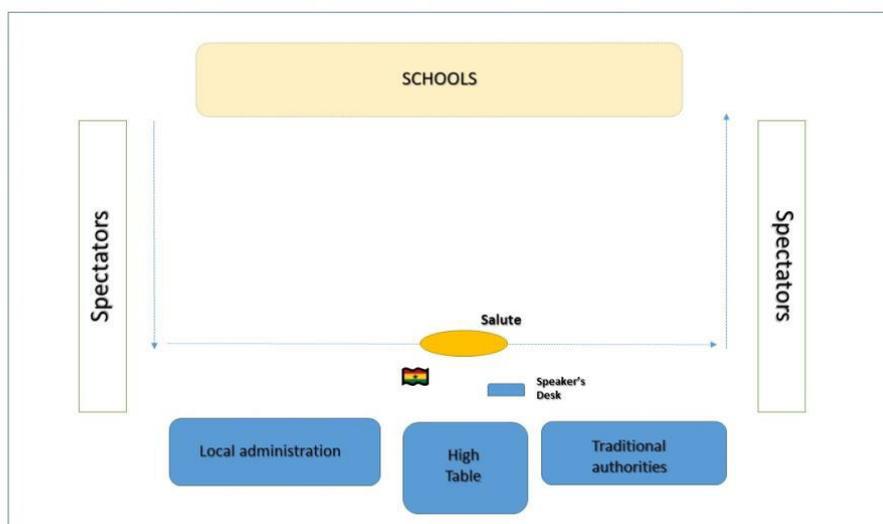


Fig. 3: Example of arrangements at venue in Lawra (Draft: M. Swiacki)

The spatial arrangement of the festivities shows the differences between various categories of people. They were all given different seats, according to their roles. Guests on the VIP stand sat on slightly higher, upholstered seats, not on plastic chairs like other invited guests. A red carpet was often rolled out on the VIP stand for everyone to see and guests frequently had a choice of food, refreshments as well as booklets detailing the programme. Clear distinctions were made between invited guests and other persons. Invited guests sat in the shade and had an unobstructed view of all the festivities; all others had to sit in the shade elsewhere under a tree or stand in the sunshine like the schoolchildren. This was a great strain on all those present, and was one reason for not taking part in the celebrations in the hot season. The juxtaposition of different categories of spectators meant the invited guests were guaranteed not only an unobstructed view of all the events, but the spectators also had a clear view of the VIP stand and the dignitaries seated there who represented the state, bureaucratic order.

### Accessing the parade grounds: marking status and occupying space

Not only seating arrangements and place assignments help visualise different groups of actors and categories of people; the different means of access and ability to move about were important as well. The invited guests were driven mostly in large SUVs near their seats and were collected there again. Other means of transport such as scooters were not allowed near the squares. After the festivities, the invited guests were catered to in exclusive places accessible only to a small number of celebrants, officially invited guests and state personnel. The traditional authorities were entertained in special places, mainly in the chief's palace or in a separate seating area.

The described seating was by no means coincidental, but enforced by different strategies. Invitation cards with printed seat reservations or ushers at the square ensured that the seating arrangements were kept. At the same time, the seating order has become customary for many participants, through years of repeated celebrations. Security personnel recruited from police, firebrigades and groups of cadets stopped both children and adult spectators from gathering behind the seating in case they obstructed the invited guests' views of the proceedings or even from stepping on the parade grounds. However, they were not always able to prevent seats being occupied by people who had not been assigned a seat in the respective section. Furthermore, some spectators were not satisfied with their places and constantly tried to take up different locations during the celebrations. They were chased away from the parade grounds, but then sat down on the surrounding walls, on vehicles (Fig. 4) or under the grandstands like many children to get a better view of events.



Fig. 4: Spectators in Wa's Jubilee Park, 6.3.2017 (Photo: P. Windschügl)

The invited guests also influenced the spatial arrangements. As Figure 5 shows, the chiefs submitted to sitting lower down than people on the VIP stands by taking seats in adjacent pavilions. However, they insisted on highlighting their special status by putting up a symbol of traditional power such as a chiefly umbrella (Gabriel et al 2016: 129).



Fig. 5: High table and pavilions in Lawra, 6.3.2017 (Photo: M. Swiacki)

The use, which the chiefs made of their umbrellas, demonstrated that categorical and status differences were staged not only through seating but also via clothes and accessories (Gabriel et al. 2017). The chiefs, for instance, consistently arrived wearing clothes typical of the region, especially smocks while religious authorities wore clothing typical of their faith during opening prayers. Security personnel including police, firefighters, military and customs officers all wore their uniforms. Clerks at the local administration usually wore suits to stress their professional affiliation. More generally, guests wore clothes at the celebrations that depended on their function, whether religious or professional. Despite the recent presidential elections, there were noticeably few political symbols, clothing or similar. In individual cases, party T-shirts or caps with the party logo were worn. However, a certain political preference cannot be deduced from that as such clothes were often worn. Clothes and accessories worn or used by schoolchildren will be dealt with later.

### **Demonstrating unity in time: the celebration's protocol**

Similarities existed between both the venues and the timeframes of the celebrations. A comparison of the programmes at the Independence Day celebrations in the districts and regions shows that the procedure was almost identical and differed only slightly. In Figure 6, we juxtapose examples of the programmes in the regional capital Wa and Nandom District to show that the celebrations on the national level were replicated on the regional and local levels and the main components of protocol were consistent.

60th Independence Anniversary Celebration	
PROGRAMME OUTLINE	
<b>Morning</b>	
6:50 am:	Arrival of Chiefs, Heads of Department and Other Dignitaries
6:55 am:	Parade Formed up by Security Agencies and School Children
7:00 am:	Arrival of the Heads of the Security Agencies
7:10 am:	Arrival of the Hon. Regional Minister
	The National Anthem
	Inspection of Parade by the Regional Minister
	Prayers
	• Tendamba
	• The Catholic Bishop
	• The Chief Imam
	March Pass by Security Services
	• Trooping of Band
	• Security Services March
	• School Children March
	Dance Choreography
	Parade Marches in Review Order
	Appellation
	Anniversary Address by the Hon. Regional Minister
	Presentation of Awards
	Closing Prayer by Head of Ahmadiyya Mission, Wa
	Present arm for National Anthem
	Hon. Regional Minister Departs
	Parade Commander Hands over Parade to the Parade 2 I/C
	Parade Marches off
<b>Afternoon (2:00 pm): Sports at Tendamba JHS Park</b>	
<b>Night: Achievers Jams at Jubilee Park</b>	
6:00AM	➤ Arrival Of School Children And Teachers To The Parade Grounds
6:30AM	➤ Arrival Of Hon Assembly Members Chiefs and Queen Mothers
7:00AM	➤ Arrival Of Hon District Chief Executive And Entourage
	➤ Singing Of National Anthem
	➤ Recitation Of National Pledge
	➤ Opening Prayer
	i. Traditional
	ii. Islam
	iii. Christian
	➤ Parade Commander Reports To DCE About Parade Readiness For Inspection
	➤ Inspection Of Parade
	➤ March Pass By School Children and Civil Society Groups
	➤ Display
	i. Ko Senior High School Cadet
	➤ Speech By Hon District Chief Executive
	➤ Display – St. John's Technical Inst. Cadet
	➤ Presentation of Certificates for participation
	➤ Declaration Of Results – PRO (GES)/Inf. – District Assembly
	➤ Announcement
2:30PM	➤ Football Matchers
	i. St. John's Technical Inst. Vrs Town Team
	ii. Nandom Senior High School Vrs Ko Senior High School
	❖ M.C – Information Service And PRO
	❖ PRO – Paul Kpaatigh
	❖ Information Service – Tadoh Titus

Fig. 6: Procedure of festivities in Wa (left) and in Nandom (right)

Noticeably, only the arrival times of honorary guests were given precisely in all places, not those of the events on the programme. To open the festivities, the national anthem was played everywhere followed by the national pledge of loyalty and fidelity to the mother country Ghana. Then high-ranking political government representatives inspected the parade. This was the task of the regional minister in Wa and, since the DCE was not present, the DCD in the district. Opening prayers by different religious communities were followed in most places by the *tendana* or earth priest's prayer (Lentz 2006: 18-21) who also blessed the ground of the festivities; both a Muslim and Christian prayer were said. This ensured that all religious communities were united under national celebrations and that no denomination was neglected. The prayer usually called on the faithful to observe peace and unity, and god was asked to let the celebrations go smoothly.

Then security services, schools, and – except in Nadowli – diverse civil-society associations marched in the parade. This was usually followed by a cultural performance (see the contribution on cultural displays), before the regional minister or DCD presented the president's speech. Awards and certificates to schoolchildren were presented, and water handed out. The events closed with a prayer by a religious leader. Smaller differences between the individual celebrations occurred, caused either by mishaps or consciously by the actors.

### Negotiating the protocol and the president's speech

Mishaps such as delays with setting up grandstands or deferments in the sequence of events often caused the festivities to start much later and meant that they sometimes lasted far longer than planned. When inspecting the parade, the DCD might set off in the wrong direction and had to be put back on the right track. This glitch was probably due to the fact that a DCE, who would normally inspect the parade, was not yet in office and the DCD did not have the experience. The more important variance was the influence of traditional authorities on the procedure of celebrations. The actors seized the opportunity of a delayed arrival to draw the spectators' attention to themselves. So basically, the later a person arrived, the more important or higher up the hierarchy they were (Gabriel et al. 2016). As Figure 7 shows, the Jirapa Naa, the paramount chief of Jirapa, only arrived when the celebrations were in full swing. He became the centre of attention as some guests had to vacate their seats for him.



Fig. 7: Arrival of Jirapa Naa, third from left (Photo: J. Reichart)

The chiefs did not make an appearance at all in other districts. A paramount chief of one district, for instance, refused to attend the festivities because a DCE had not yet been appointed. He sent a representative instead to take part in his place. Unlike the celebrations in Wa, the *tendanas* in the district did not come to the traditional opening prayers. Asked why he did not attend, a *tendana* justified his non-attendance saying he had not received an invitation.

The protocol left room for variants also with regard to the address on the national day. The president of Ghana produced the speech to be read aloud in all districts, as the DCD in Lawra explained:

Because even the speech that I read that day [6 March], that is the President's speech, that is what the president also delivered. When it comes to the Independence Day celebration, the speech that the president is to read at the national level is what we read at the regional, and at

the [...] district level, too. (Interview by M. Swiacki with Abdul Sallam Kadiri, Lawra, 14.3.2017)

As the president's speech only arrived in the districts at very short notice, some DCDs drafted individual speeches to be read in case the National Planning Committee's did not manage to send the speech on time. The DCD in Jirapa ultimately did give his own speech, which had been adapted to the district's context although he probably had received the president's text. In Nandom, on the other hand, DCD Abudul Karimu clarified that drafting his own speech did not fall within his remit: "We are only civil servants, we are not politicians. It is the politicians who can make political statements".<sup>33</sup> The DCD in Nadowli-Kaleo, in turn, mentioned repeatedly in the opening part of his speech that the following were the words of the president, and not his own, to show that the contents of his own speech would have differed in focus:

I have with me a speech from the President. For uniformity, in fact that the President wants everybody to hear or listen to what he's delivering at the Independence Square today. He wants us to read the speech of the President at all district parades. So, I'm delivering what the president asked me to deliver. So, whatever is said here is from the President and not from myself. So, I deliver from what the President says. (DCD's speech in Nadowli, 6.3.2017)

## Conclusion

Independence celebrations have a time and content-related dimension and have spatial implications also. Both the choice of venue and turning it from a multifunctional place into an arena suitable for a national celebration is a challenge for organisers. Preparations on the day include setting up the pavilions, chairs, and decorations such as the national flag and other symbols to mark the route of the march past. This set up results in distinctions between categories of people, and impacts the seating, accessibility and catering. Everyone sees clearly whom the focus is on. As all the actors must interact to stage the national celebrations successfully, they have different means of influencing the events, either by expressing dissatisfaction with the seating and occupying alternative seats and spaces, by wearing different clothes and accessories or by arriving late or not arriving at all. On the other hand, the scope for action is limited. Our analysis has shown that the celebrations on the district level in particular were almost identical. Furthermore, in both the districts and regions the celebrations did replicate the national ceremony in Accra, both spatially and in terms of time and the protocol.

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<sup>33</sup> Interview by S. Gabel with DCD Abudul Karimu, Nandom, 1.3.2017.

## **“Mobilising for Ghana’s Future”: Producing Identification with the Nation through Competitive School Parades**

Janna Reichart and Teresa Weber

6th March is the day Ghana freed itself from its colonial masters. On this day Ghanaians become [...] happy because it is the day Ghana had its independence on the 6th March 1957. Every year on the 6th March Ghanaians take part in [a] marching competition and the winners are given prizes. On 6th March 2017 this was what we experienced. We experienced both bad and good things. The bad experiences were [that] they made us stand in the sun for hours. Instead of [...] giving us cold water they rather gave us hot water. We were also bored and sad because we did not get any prize. The good experiences were our parents sew new uniforms and bought new shoes for us. We were also happy because the teachers [...] provided us with new socks for those of us who were to take part [in the march] past. We were also given drinks, biscuits and water for participating.

This commentary on Independence Day is taken from one of many essays written, at the request of Janna Reichart, by schoolgirls at St. Anthony’s Model Junior High School in Jirapa after taking part in the parade. Apparently, for the girls the parade is the most important part of the celebrations and contains the main aspects of the day, which we will deal with in this contribution. The schoolchildren’s parade is an attempt at greater inclusion of the youngest in the celebrations and to strengthen their identification with the nation. Diverse factors play an important role. On the one hand, the pupils march in lockstep and wear special clothes and accessories to demonstrate their belonging to the nation. On the other hand, the schoolchildren represent and compete for their schools in the parade. They are rewarded with the encouragement of their schoolmates and spectators and receive prizes if successful, as well. Participating in the competition and standing a chance to win is a great motivation for the schoolchildren to play an active role in the parade. At the same time, the parade encourages unity among the schoolchildren and helps them to identify not only with their school but also the entire nation. Apart from the contingents in the parade, other actors such as the organisers and spectators are important as well. However, in this contribution we concentrate on the schoolchildren and ask which allegiances can be observed and to what extent the performance revealed differences, in addition to the display of unity.

### **Organisation of parade**

As described in the contribution about arena and protocol surrounding Independent Day celebrations, the festivities on 6th March are modelled on the British example and held in the main squares in the regional and district headquarters. The participants march through the square in a fixed sequence. The sequence of the contingents reflects the basic elements of society and the national state and their relation to each other. Ideally, the security forces, which embodied state organisations, open the parade. However, of all the places where we carried out research, this was only the case in Jirapa and Wa. The contingent in Jirapa consisted of the security forces, police and firebrigade while customs officers, prison officers and immigration officers also marched in Wa. Schoolchildren from different types of schools paraded after the security forces. The schoolchildren represented the Ghanaian population or, more precisely, the future of the nation. At the same time, the schoolchildren’s parade

pitted various schools against each other. Similar to the national model, clubs and associations marched after the schools to reflect the population's involvement in national society. A band or marching band accompanied the parade, playing military music, patriotic songs and church hymns. The music dictated the rhythm of the march and created a sense of togetherness as the spectators knew most of the songs and could sing along.

The schoolchildren in the parades accounted for most of the participants although their numbers varied from town to town. Around two thousand participating schoolchildren in Wa and six hundred in Jirapa indicate the different size of the festivities in the regions and districts. This had to do mainly with the extent of the budget available to the local planning committees (see contribution on budget). Nursery schools, primary schools, junior high schools, senior high schools and diverse training colleges took part in the schoolchildren's parade. As every year, special schools such as those for the blind, the deaf and mentally and physically handicapped children took part in the parade in Wa. Various groups of cadets, who take part in voluntary activities at senior high schools particularly in boarding schools, also performed in different functions on the national day. These extracurricular activities are offered with a view to military careers and include military training sessions such as marching or practising with wooden rifles. On the national day, the groups of cadets did various performances, and the orderlies ensured that the spectators did not disrupt the festivities.

The Ghana Education Service (GES) was usually responsible for selecting the schools in the parade. All types of schools had to be represented, but, as mentioned above, the selection procedure depended on the budget provided by the organisers, and sometimes only schools in the area close to the district capital were allowed to take part owing to the high cost of transport. All the participants usually receive refreshments such as water and snacks, and thus the number of schools invited to participate once again depended on the available budget. The planning committees thus stipulated a maximum number of participating schools. Then GES selected the schools and announced a fixed number of schoolchildren who could take part in the parade.

### **The student parade as a competition**

The schoolchildren spent several weeks preparing for the "best performance" beforehand, as it is one of the most important aspects of the parade in the eyes of the pupils. During this preparatory period, discussions ensued about the uniforms to be worn and the accessories to be used to make them stand out from other schools. On Independence Day, the invited schools competed against each other to achieve the best result for their school and/or to defend their title from the previous year. A jury decided on the winning schools according to certain criteria. The winners were honoured with their certificates and prizes after the parade. As the contest was highly motivating for the schoolchildren, it was one of the main means of mobilising them. The schoolchildren were expected not only to represent their school and to demonstrate the self-discipline learnt there, they were also expected to show readiness to identify with the nation. The contest on Independence Day thus aimed to strengthen the schoolchildren's identification with their school and the nation.

The jury in each district consisted of security force representatives. The parade is military-based and members of military organisations have special authority when judging perfor-

mances.<sup>34</sup> As Figure 8 shows, the diverse members of the jury positioned themselves on the square to get a better view and to judge the schoolchildren from close-up.



Fig. 8: Members of jury at parade in Wa, 6.3.2017 (Photo: T. Weber)

The judges filled out score sheets and gave points for various disciplines. The categories rated included their entrance, the formation, staying in formation and keeping formation when turning a corner, the uniforms and accessories, the marching style and obeying commands during the march. Points were awarded in each category and resulted in a valuation pattern similar to school grades. First, second and third prizes were presented to the winners in each category and according to age. During the awards ceremony, honorary guests presented the certificates and material prizes to the schoolchildren. The categories were based on values such as discipline, unity and obedience, which the schoolchildren were expected to demonstrate and internalise as they reflected the qualities of good Ghanaian citizens. Teaching these values and especially discipline is a top priority in Ghana's education system, as Mirco Göpfert and Andrea Noll (2013) have shown in their work about boarding schools in the Upper West Region.

Participants in the parade and members of the jury were the most important actors on Independence Day, but so too were the spectators who attended mainly because of the parading schoolchildren. Both the audience and the marching schoolchildren identified with the diverse schools in the parade. The spectators were, indeed, mainly made up of other pupils from the schools on march and the participants' families who all came to cheer on their marching schoolmates. The loud cheers of schoolchildren among the spectators showed great identification with their school. The parading schoolchildren went to noticeable, great effort during the parade, which was honoured by loud cheers. "Depending on which school was marching, you could tell where their schoolmates stood in the audience as they cheered loudest".<sup>35</sup> The masters of ceremonies repeatedly stressed the schoolchildren's important role in the parade, as reflected by this cheer in Jirapa: "Come together, mobilise for Ghana's future. You are contributing to Ghana's future; you are the ones we mobilise for. Ghana is

<sup>34</sup> T. Weber's conversation with Muazu Adams, Director Education Office, Wa, 22.2.2017.

<sup>35</sup> Edited fieldnotes, 6.3.2017, J. Reichart.

mobilising for you, you are also important. Thank you so much, God bless you“.<sup>36</sup> The master of ceremonies highlighted the importance of the motto on Independence Day and stressed that pupils, as children of Ghana, make an important contribution to their country’s development. He also urged the spectators to go to efforts for the future of their children. Education and being taught the above-mentioned values was to form the nation’s youngest into citizens who would take responsibility for their country. Thus, the country had a responsibility for the children, who in turn had a responsibility to play a role in Ghana’s development.

### Demonstrating multiple affiliations in the schoolchildren’s parade

During the parade, the participants used diverse means of demonstrating their affiliations. The clothes, accessories, banners bearing a school’s coat of arms and choreography were used both to show unity and to highlight differences between the schoolchildren. Multiple affiliations became apparent through the school uniforms worn. Three are shown in figure 9. The colour of a uniform indicated the school attended by a wearer. All schoolchildren at state schools wore brown/yellow (see group of schoolchildren on the right) while schoolchildren at church schools wore white/green uniforms. Especially in Wa, schoolchildren who attended a Muslim school were identifiable by a *takke* worn on their heads. The embroidered patches on the uniforms showed the school’s name and coat of arms. This photo shows two junior high schools with twelve to fifteen year-old pupils. The uniforms were gender specific; the girls wore blouses and skirts while the boys wore shirts and trousers.



Fig. 9: Line-up of schoolchildren in Nadowli, 6.3.2017 (Photo: S. Stenner)

<sup>36</sup> Comment by MC Joseph Kontomah during celebrations in Jirapa, 6.3.2017.

The schoolchildren wore accessories such as gloves, sashes or badges in the Ghanaian national colours to demonstrate their belonging to the nation. Yet, in addition to their uniforms, the schoolchildren could also use these special accessories, which were also used by many other schools, to stand out from others. Lastly, apart from accessories such as socks, sashes and badges the banner held aloft at the front by the schoolchildren displayed the name of the school and its coat of arms. (Figure 10)



Fig. 10: Schoolchildren wearing accessories in Ghanaian national colours, Jirapa, 6.3.2017 (Photo: J. Reichart)

Marching in lockstep basically is a show of unity. However, the schoolchildren also practiced smaller choreographies to distinguish themselves from other schools competing in the parade. This included marching formations and a special gesture at the salute, devised by the schoolchildren beforehand. The following two figures show examples of such formations and gestures.



Fig. 11: Choreography in Nadowli, 6.3.2017 (Photo: S. Stenner)



Fig. 12: Gesture at salute in Jirapa, 6.3.2017 (Photo: J. Reichart)

During the parade, the schoolchildren marched three abreast. Yet, as Figure 11 shows, they did not stay in formation during the salute and instead marched individually past the VIP stand. Basically, they are required to look straight ahead when marching, similar to military groups. During the salute, they must make eye contact with respectable persons. These are the guidelines along which many groups of schoolchildren devised their own choreography/gesture during the salute to make them stand out from other schools. This aspect, too, shows the competitive character of the students' parades.

### Conclusion

Ideally, parades should evoke uniformity and sameness (Gabriel et al 2017). The examples given above show however that the participants in the parade used various means, such as accessories, clothes and choreography, to stand out from each other and to demonstrate multiple affiliations. These distinctions are due to the competitive nature of the event. At the same time, different affiliations are revealed during the parade: The uniforms and banners show affiliations to a specific school; headgear shows affiliation to a religion and accessories in the national colours point to affiliation with the nation. Accordingly, the young Ghanaians identify with their school and the nation by taking part in the parade. The competitive nature of the parade fosters solidarity with their school. The schoolchildren represent their school and are expected to learn to show pride in their school. This ambition is supported by their cheering schoolmates in the audience and boosts a sense of community.

The schoolchildren's parade and competition plays an important role in celebrations on national day and is central to the festivities and the entertaining nature of the day. In addition, all actors on the square including schoolchildren in the parade, the jury and the spectators show their allegiance to the nation with their presence. The awareness that thousands of schoolchildren are marching all over the country at the same time creates a sense of community that can barely be achieved otherwise.

## “Dance to Tell a Story”: The Cultural Display at the Ghana@60 Celebration in Wa

Teresa Weber

The noise level was rising steadily and the MC had difficulties announcing a dance choreographed to a text by the poet Joseph Pobby and the schoolchildren after the parade. However, when the first sounds of “Circle of life” became audible, the atmosphere on the square changed abruptly. The schoolchildren in particular began cheering loudly as many of them had attended the rehearsals beforehand and knew parts of the dance. The media and photographers also showed great interest in the performance. Pobby wore a kind of smock with many ribbons in the national colours attached. The schoolchildren wore red, yellow, green and black jerseys like the ones worn during the last rehearsal. Despite the relatively long performance, the mood in the audience barely changed. Loud cheers were heard from every corner while the schoolchildren and Pobby were on the square. (edited fieldnotes, 6.3.2017, T. Weber)

This glimpse of the Independence Day celebrations in Wa shows clearly the audience’s enthusiasm during the so-called cultural display, which is a fixed element of national celebrations in all the examined districts and, indeed, in all of Ghana. Cultural displays usually consist of short music and dance performances at diverse public events such as political rallies, school celebrations, award ceremonies and national-day celebrations. They provide an arena in which local, ethnic and national identities as well as popular culture genres come together and for negotiating national culture dynamically and creatively (Lentz 2001: 4; N’Guessan 2008: 6). As Carola Lentz and Trevor Wiggins (2017) have shown, cultural displays are a means of defining and presenting a particular cultural heritage on both the local and national level. Even today, Ghanaian cultural policy initiated by Kwame Nkrumah, continues to have an effect on local, cultural traditions insofar as they are performed to demonstrate national unity and balance between Ghana’s diverse cultures (Lentz and Wiggins 2017: 181).

During various conversations with organisers of cultural displays occasioned by the Ghana@60 celebrations in the regional capital Wa and diverse districts, it became clear, however, that these displays were not only performances and mediations of a particular cultural tradition in connection with national unity, but also important elements of entertainment. Our interlocutors often explained that the rigorous marching was to be punctuated with entertaining, colourful performances. As there were no clear guidelines about this part of the celebrations, different cultural displays were staged in each district and in Wa. Different interpretations of the *bewaa* dance were performed in Nadowli and Lawra while in Nandom two groups of cadets incorporated acrobatic and military elements in their performance. By contrast, schoolchildren in Jirapa recited poems and sang songs. The design of the cultural display on the national day in Wa differed mainly in length and elaborateness from performances in the districts. The display contained several elements. For one thing, it included an acrobatic part performed to international pop music; and on the other hand, the *bewaa* dance, a traditional dance in the Upper West Region, was performed as a symbol of local culture even though the *bewaa* is subject to constant change (Lentz and Wiggins 2017: 198). And lastly, the dancers presented symbols that were intended to allegorise Ghanaian national unity.

In the following, I focus on the organisation and performances of the cultural display in Wa, as this performance united many elements of cultural displays in the other districts and can be considered representative of the Upper West Region to an extent. My interest concerns mainly the performance of national and local culture and the representation of the related concept of unity.

### **Planning and rehearsing the cultural display**

The culture and entertainment sub-committee, which is part of the regional planning committee, was responsible for organising the cultural display in Wa. After discussing the programme of the celebrations initially, the choreographer Kafui Marcus Taiy and other members of the sub-committee quickly realised that the activities on 6th March were originally supposed to consist only of the march. Then Taiy and some supporters decided to hold a cultural display:

... we felt that there was the need for us to make it more lively. So we decided to have choreography and then we also decided that we could use the children even after the national day. We can use them to do some more shows and then to let them learn more about our culture. (Interview by T. Weber and P. Windschügl with Kafui Marcus Taiy, 20.3.2017)

The organisers put together a troupe of one hundred young dancers and ensured that a multiplicity of schools and schoolchildren from different religious and ethnic groups were taking part. The plans were laid in close cooperation with the regional Centre for National Culture (CNC). Hamidu Seidu Bomison, a member of staff at CNC, chaired the above-mentioned sub-committee. The CNC, a state institute, is mandated with promoting and preserving Ghanaian cultural heritage (N'Guessan 2008).

Together with the locally known poet Joseph Pobby, a big dance performance was organised and held. Preparations for 6th March began in early February, and the intense rehearsals were attended daily by individual groups of schoolchildren and once a week by the entire group. The dancers, Pobby and Taiy took part in each official rehearsal of the parade to be held on Independence Day. The content and procedure of the dance to be performed in Wa was held along the lines of "Mobilizing for Ghana's Future", the Accra government's motto for the entire national celebration. The performance was divided into several parts, which differed in terms of music and choreography although some were held simultaneously.

### **The Arc of Life: the birth of the nation in united Africa**

The first part of the dance performance dealt with the birth of the Ghanaian nation in a united Africa and stressed the motto "unity in diversity" which is widespread in Ghana. The birth of the nation was symbolised by an arc of life in which the schoolchildren first crouched down on the ground and stood up slowly in time to the music, as the poet explained later in a conversation:

A dance to tell a story! [...] So, beginning with that dance choreography, what we did was to form an arc of life. Showing that this is the life the eternal creator has given to

mankind. We were given allegiance to the supreme creator who has created us. And from there we began to scramble, so at first, when you remember the choreography, a group of children came, turning their hands, so life was forming. (Interview by T. Weber with Joseph Pobby, 14.3.2017)

To begin, the organisers chose the song “Circle of life” (1994) which likens the emergence of a nation to a birth, at least according to the choreographer’s interpretation. The first verse goes: “From the day we arrive on the planet and blinking, step into the sun. There’s more to be seen than can ever be seen. More to do than can ever be done”.<sup>37</sup> The poet introduced the arc of life in a poem and referred not only to the birth of the Ghanaian nation, but to that of the entire continent of Africa: “Sons and daughters are gathered together, sons and daughters are gathered together in the spirit of oversize and allegiance of red earth mother Africa. Let my children come and then play”.<sup>38</sup>

The poet himself embodied “mother Africa” who called the children of Africa to her in the arena. Then, six schoolchildren wearing black jerseys formed a circle in the arena and crouched down on the ground after a short acrobatic display. Other dancers arrived, wearing costumes in the Ghanaian national colours, i.e. red, yellow and green, and sat around them in the same positions (Fig. 13). In that moment, the first six children wearing black jerseys stood up and ran around the others. On reaching the refrain, all the dancers stood up slowly and started dancing. The repeated crouching down and standing up was intended to symbolise birth and the progress of the arc of life. The pan-African aspect was embodied by “mother Africa” who called her children to her and urged them to unite.



Fig. 13: Dancers on the parade grounds in Wa, 6.3.2013 (Photo: T. Weber)

<sup>37</sup> Elton John (music) and Tim Rice (lyrics), sung by Carmen Twillie.

<sup>38</sup> Poem by Joseph Pobby, Wa, 6.3.2017.

### **The *bewaa* dance as a symbol of regional culture**

The second part of the performance consisted of a presentation of the local *bewaa* dance and marked a change in the music. Taiy chose a song by a local music group for this dance. The contents of the song dealt mainly with preserving Dagara culture, as Taiy explained:

It's traditional and I just loved it. And I said, what is the meaning of the song? And fortunately, it dealt with how much culture values we have [...]. The Dagara should rise up and make use of their rich culture talent. And I said: "Bingo! This is a good song!" (Interview by T. Weber and P. Windschügl with Kafui Marcus Taiy, Wa, 20.3.2017)

The narrative strand depicted here by the choreography drew the arc, from the birth of the nation and its achievements, right up to cultural diversity symbolised by the *bewaa* dance. Already in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Nkrumah had seized the opportunity provided by public displays of cultural diversity to create a national culture. And as Lentz and Wiggins (2017: 187) show, cultural displays with performances of different traditions have been used as a means of nation-building again since the 1980s when Jerry Rawlings was in office.

The *bewaa* dance performance in Wa during the Ghana@60 celebrations was met with great enthusiasm and had maximum impact not least because a hundred children performed the same dance simultaneously. A schoolgirl was chosen to dance in front of the VIP stand and to encourage the honorary guests to dance a few steps, which they declined. However, children in the audience began dancing at their places, which shows the popularity of this dance in the region. Moreover, the *bewaa* dance, a traditional dance throughout the Upper West Region, was performed as part of the cultural display during the Ghana@60 celebrations in Accra.

### **"The whole of Ghana was my audience": the cultural display as a performance of national unity**

The poet, Joseph Pobby, invoked national unity through the contents of his poems and his verbal contributions in different languages. In terms of content, Pobby focused on unity: on the one hand, Ghana as a nation, and the unity of Africa on the other hand, as mentioned above. National unity was evoked by different stylistic means, among others, by using different languages. The poet recited his poems alternately in English and in five different Ghanaian languages: apart from Wala spoken in Wa; in Dagbani, another language spoken in Northern Ghana; and in the Ga, Ewe and Twi, languages which are most widely spoken in Southern Ghana. As Pobby explained: "We did it with a national perspective. Though I was here personally, the whole of Ghana was my audience. So, I didn't want to speak to only Upper Westerners but I spoke to the whole of Ghana".<sup>39</sup> The use of five Ghanaian languages was intended to include not only the local audience, but also people from other parts of the country, who lived as migrants in Wa or those outside the city listening to radio transmissions of the celebrations or watching them on television. Language thus served here as a means of appealing for unity among the different ethnic groups.

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<sup>39</sup> Interview by T. Weber with Joseph Pobby, Wa, 14.3.2017.

The clothes worn by the dancing children and poet were another element intended to show national unity. Even during rehearsals, the dancers wore clothes in the national colours red, yellow, green and black, but which differed from the outfits worn on the day of the performance. During the last two rehearsals, the schoolchildren wore merchandise shirts with badges from the fiftieth Independence Anniversary in the national colours. On 6th March, they wore jerseys and shorts in the national colours to perform the choreography.



Fig. 14: Formation of an *adinkra* symbol during the cultural display in Wa, 6.3.2017  
(Photo: T. Weber)

As Figure 14 shows, the dancers swung cloths in the same colours as their jerseys during the performance. This served to visually enhance the formations of *adinkra* symbols, which were another element of the performance. The *adinkra* symbols originate from the Ashanti region of Southern Ghana, but can now be found in many parts of life throughout the country. The symbols can be found on fabrics, furniture and other everyday objects. The dancers sat down and formed an *adinkra* symbol and swung the red, yellow, green and black cloths to visually enhance the message of national unity. Yet, the *adinkra* symbols should also be understood as expressions of national unity and community.

*Gye nyame*, acceptance of God, was the first *adinkra* symbol formed. The second formation showed *abode saintaan* and highlighted the eye of God or God's omnipresence. The third and fourth symbols referred to Ghana as a nation, whereby the *kokromoti* symbolised the cooperation with neighbouring states and Ghana's relations to them. The last formation depicted the *adinkra* symbol *obohemaa*, which represented Ghana's wealth of resources.

So, after the arc of life, the second thing we formed was *abode saintaan*. That also means the eye of God. *Abode* means the creator, so the creator's eye. That is used to mean that the blue sky is the single eye of God, that God is omnipresent. Wherever you are, God sees you. That shows the omnipresent creature of God. [...] And *kokromoti* means co-

operations [...] with other people, with our neighbours: Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali, Senegal. Co-operation was [...] what made us able to get to what we are now. That we move forward, that we form the last act, which is also called *obohemaa*. Yes, that means precious treasure. So, with that treasure that we have in Ghana, for example the cocoa, the gold mines, the diamonds, all the resources together. (Interview by T. Weber with Joseph Pobby, 14.3.2017).

Pobby always related the formations in the *adinkra* part of the choreography to Ghana's unity and to the "mobilizing for Ghana's future" theme of 2017 national celebrations.

## Conclusion

The cultural display, performed in Wa on the national day, shows an attribution of affiliations on three levels, which a local poet accompanied with his poems. The arc of life, which depicts Africa, and a mother calling her children to her to unite them, drew the pan-African aspect. This idea reoccurred at the end of the performance, represented by *adinkra* symbols, as the choreographer explained:

In every part of Africa, we share these symbols. We might have different names, but they share the same meaning. The philosophy behind *adinkra* symbols is the same. The purpose in which they are used is the same. (Interview by T. Weber and P. Windschügl with Kafui Marcus Taiy, 20.3.2017)

This pan-African element of the choreography linked the performers' costumes and the music with the Ghanaian concept of unity and emphasised belonging to the nation. The Upper West Region, which constituted the third level of the performance, was embodied by a performance of the *bewaa*, which is nationally understood as the signature dance of the region's cultural heritage. Belonging to the African continent was, in terms of the performance, above national unity in which the recollection of local traditions was embedded. The close links between these three elements made the objectives of this cultural display visible, namely to create awareness that unity and diversity are not contrasts in the context of national celebrations, but enrich and complete each other.

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