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'Ghana@50': celebrating the nation – debating the nation

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Abstract

The Ghana@50 commemorative events organised by government and government-related institutions aimed at advertising Ghana as 'champion' of 'African excellence' vis-à-vis an international audience as well as fostering national unity by providing moments of communal reflection and future commitment. However, while many Ghanaians apparently appreciated the magnificent party, the Jubilee also provoked bitter debates that touched on three main issues. First, political inclusiveness, i.e. the question who precisely should organise, finance and lead the celebrations, without aggravating party-political tensions. The second issue regarded social inclusiveness, the extent to which the symbols and festivities addressed the 'grass-roots' or were restricted to the (international) (political) elite. The third point of contention concerned ethnic and regional inclusiveness, i.e. how evenly Jubilee events and funds were geographically distributed and to which degree all regions and ethnic groups could identify with the festivities' symbols and slogans. The paper explores these controversies as well as the festive formats around Ghana@50, based on the author's observations in Accra during the celebrations and an analysis of newspaper articles and internet forums.

The author

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Carola Lentz

Introduction

On 6 March 1957, Ghana became the first country in Sub-Saharan Africa to achieve independence from its colonial masters. Ever since, Independence Day has been celebrated, albeit with varying degrees of intensity and sometimes overshadowed by national holidays commemorating incumbent military or civil regimes.¹ Since independence was declared in the midst of bitter political struggle between the supporters of the triumphant nationalist party, the Convention People’s Party (CPP), and adherents of alternative political and constitutional projects, supported mainly by the Ashanti-dominated National Liberation Movement (NLM) and the Northern People’s Party (NPP) (later amalgamated in the United Party, UP), the meaning of 6 March 1957 was contested from the start. For many, Independence Day commemorated the achievements of Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana’s first Prime Minister and Life Chairman of the CPP. For Nkrumah’s adversaries and victims, who after the 1966 *coup d’état* acted as advisers to the military government and subsequently formed the new civilian government, the holiday primarily symbolised the end of colonial rule and the contested birth of a new nation, a history in which they sought to inscribe the importance of their own contribution towards independence. Up to date, these ‘two utterly irreconcilable master narratives’ about ‘Ghana’s troubled transition to independence’ (Rathbone 2008: 706) continue to coexist in a good deal of tension. The majority of Ghanaians, of course, were born after 1957. Their knowledge about the anti-colonial movements of the post-war period and the early years of independence is drawn mainly from school text-books – that usually support some version of the ‘Nkrumah’ master narrative, but also acknowledge the historical contribution of the ‘pre-Nkrumah’ United Gold Coast Convention – and from occasional recollections of their older relatives or villagers. For them, the Ghana@50 celebrations commemorated ‘the culmination of some very distant events which had taken place way back ... in a distant era of black and white photography’ (Rathbone 2008: 706). However, some of these ‘age-old’, but by no means forgotten political controversies resurfaced in the run-up to the fiftieth anniversary of independence. And while many Ghanaians apparently appreciated the occasion for a magnificent party, the Jubilee also provoked heated debates about national history and current politics.

That Ghana@50 should, even had to be celebrated, was beyond question. A half a century of independence is too significant a milestone that a government could simply ignore it. And no commemoration of 6 March 1957 can entirely avoid in some way acknowledging Nkrumah’s role, even if the organisers actually stand in the political tradition of the one-time Nkrumah opposition, as the 2001 to 2009 governing president John Agyekum Kufuor and his New Patriotic Party (NPP) do. Many of the official events of Ghana@50 may be understood in this context as exercises in a more general practice of ‘forgetting’ that is central to national commemorations generally, and may be interpreted as attempts to depoliticise the festivities as much as possible, without the reigning government entirely forgoing a bit of self-

congratulation. After all, independence day celebrations not only address a local public, but also showcase the country in an international political arena. And in the case of Ghana, the Jubilee organisers also hoped that the event would give a boost to tourism, particularly the ‘home-coming’ pilgrimages of African Americans.

‘Championing African excellence’, the celebration’s official motto, was ubiquitous, printed on numerous flags, festival cloth, t-shirts, coffee cups and the like, and reflected Ghana’s self-confidence vis-à-vis other African nations. Ghanaians were to be proud that their country was once a leading advocate of African independence and pan-Africanism, that it currently figures prominently as one of Africa’s few stable multi-party democracies and that it is playing a pioneering role in the African peer review mechanism of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development initiative. And when Ghana’s president Kufuor was elected Chairman of the African Union in January 2007, this was interpreted as yet another tribute to Ghana’s pre-eminent standing on the continent. Probably even more important for the festive mood, however, was Ghana’s admirable performance during the 2006 World Cup, during which each of the Ghanaian team’s games gave occasion to spontaneous displays of the national emblems and slogans.

In any case, the Ghana@50 celebrations were an important arena in which the state attempted to make the nation manifest in the hearts and minds of its citizens. They were intended to, and indeed did provide opportunities for taking stock, reflecting on past achievements and setting out national aims, although this sometimes took on forms rather more critical than the government would have liked. The entire Jubilee year was marked by manifold commemorative events sponsored by government, civic associations, and private businesses. Each month was assigned a particular theme, ranging from ‘Reflections’ and ‘Towards Emancipation’ to ‘Heroes of Ghana’, ‘African Unity’, ‘Diaspora’ and ‘Service to the Nation’. Activities included the theatrical re-enactment of relevant historical events, inaugurations of new monuments, the renovation of the birth places of the Ghanaian ‘fathers’ of independence, performances of classical and modern Ghanaian plays, film presentations, art exhibitions, book launches, festivals of ‘traditional culture’, parades, a ‘Rally around the Flag’ campaign, political speeches and academic conferences, a ‘Miss Ghana@50’ beauty contest, and much more.²

However, much as some of these events sparked popular enthusiasm and were applauded by the media, the controversies over Nkrumah’s heritage and the historical role of the CPP opposition resurfaced on many occasions. More generally, there was much debate among government employees, politicians and the broader public over how inclusive and truly ‘national’ the official celebrations were and how the nation’s fiftieth anniversary should be appropriately commemorated. But the political controversies not only arose over how to remember Nkrumah, but also over the question as to who precisely should organise, finance and lead the celebrations—a government body (as was the case), a committee comprised of representatives from all political parties, or a less politicised organisation including, among others, chiefs and representatives from various professional and civic associations. Political history and current politics, however, were not the only field of disagreement. A second point of contention regarded the celebration’s social inclusiveness, i.e. the extent to which the symbols, performances and festivities addressed the ‘grass-roots’, or mostly the (political) elite of male, rather well-to-do Ghanaians. A third controversy, finally, concerned ethnic and regional inclusiveness, i.e. how evenly Jubilee events and funds were geographically distributed and to which degree all regions and ethnic groups could identify with the festivities’ symbols and slogans.

This paper offers an initial exploration of the controversies around Ghana@50 and how they played out in some of the festive events as well as in public discussions. My analysis is based on first-hand observations during various official events in Accra in early 2007 as well as on a close reading of newspaper articles and contributions in internet forums. Obviously, this approach focuses on official ceremonies and public discourse, but I would argue that this particular perspective yields important insights into the symbolic, ritual and discursive constructions of nationhood that independence celebrations strive at. At the same time, my work here has also drawn on numerous informal conversations about controversies ‘behind’ the scenes and on the assessments of the impact of the festivities shared by Ghanaian friends and acquaintances from among the educated ‘elite’, but also from wider social circles.³ Since my research has for many years been engaged with Ghana’s Upper West Region most of my interview partners did happen to be Northerners. This might lead some to object that this biases the research by privileging a Northern perspective. Yet at the same time, one cannot help note that research on Ghana has often privileged Southern viewpoints without this ever having been cause for comment. More importantly, however, commentaries provided by ‘Northerners’ actually bring a certain methodical advantage: Because of their marginalisation, even discrimination, they are particularly sensitive with regards to the ‘neutrality’ of national symbolic repertoires and therefore also discuss quite critically issues pertaining to political or social inclusivity or exclusivity.

Nevertheless, the conclusions that can be drawn from my material are limited. For instance, the question whether the controversies ultimately functioned not to divide but rather to strengthen national consciousness and deepen a sense of commonality, must remain open. The paper is thus also intended as a call for further research, not only on Ghana@50, but also on the many upcoming African independence jubilees that will probably at least partly be inspired by the Ghanaian celebrations⁴ and that will provide an excellent opportunity to explore, in a comparative perspective, the politics and poetics of national commemoration.

National commemoration in comparative perspective

While nation-building undoubtedly depends on the creation of a corps of ‘national’ bureaucrats and institutions, the construction of a material infrastructure that supports nation-wide communication, and the establishment of schools and spread of education, it also involves a symbolic dimension, namely, the creation of cultural emblems and symbols such as flags, national anthems, stamps, as well as the (re)writing of ‘national’ history. In these processes of creating ‘national imaginaries’ (Askew 2002: 273), the establishment of national holidays that commemorate formative events of a nation’s history or national heroes plays an important role. Such holidays fix commemoration in the annual calendar; they preserve past events in the collective memory by associating them with annually recurring ‘holy days’. It is in this way that such holidays achieve some measure of ‘mnemonic synchronization’, as Zerubavel (2003: 317) has put it, which binds together the commemorative community. Zerubavel’s survey of national holidays in 191 countries identifies ‘roots’, usually connected with the nation’s spiritual-religious heritage, and ‘historic watersheds’, marking key moments in a nation’s political history, as the two main categories of holidays that are typically commemorated. Among the second [i.e. the watersheds], independence days are by far the most widespread national holidays: 139 countries out of the 191 whose festive calendars Zerubavel ex-

amined celebrate the historic moment at which they became independent as a national ‘birthday’ and founding moment.

That annual official independence celebrations are important to the construction of the new African states was noted quite early in a perceptive essay by the French political scientist Yves-A. Fauré (1978). Since the state’s hold on society was still fragile and conflict-ridden, Fauré argued, the festivals were ‘a civil cult orchestrated by the state’ that celebrated, and thereby strengthened, its very existence and aimed at boosting popular support for the incumbent government (1978: 384; my translation). For Fauré, who had somewhat essentialist notions of what a ‘true’ nation should look like, the celebrations were not an expression of ‘genuine’ national cohesion, but organised from ‘above’, resisting ‘the will for cultural liberation and policies of authenticity’ (1978: 383; my translation). He conceded, however, that the holidays could, in the long run, contribute to nation-building, ‘welding new loyalties in a social universe whose unity is still to be created’ (1978: 404, my translation). Moreover, his perceptive remarks on the celebrations’ requisite elements – the sequence of presidential addresses, displays of national paraphernalia, parades (staging society as a unified and uniformed loyal population), official receptions and popular festivities, as well as the holidays’ symbolic re-enactments of a return to mythical ‘beginnings’ – still provide useful impulses for future studies.

However, Fauré’s suggestions for further research into African national holidays have remained largely unmet, with a few notable exceptions. Leslie Witz (2003), for instance, has explored the construction of Afrikaner nationalism through the 1952 commemoration of Jan van Riebeeck’s arrival in South Africa and the controversies that surrounded these festivities. South Africa, in general, has become a fertile field for studies into the politics of memory and heritage (Rassool 2000, Shepherd 2008). Andrew Apter’s (2005) work on the 1977 Nigerian Pan-African Festival of Arts and Culture has shown how these celebrations reshaped diverse regional ‘traditions’ into an ‘idealized vision of ethnic equality and harmony’ (2005: 9), and how this image of the Nigerian nation as a federation of diverse, but equal regions propelled fierce political competition. With respect to Ghana, some studies have examined official policies of building a ‘national culture’ through the establishment of institutions such as the Arts Council (later renamed Commission on National Culture) (N’Guessan 2009), the National Dance Ensemble (Schramm 2000) and the National Museum (Crimson 2001) as well as through cultural festivals (Lentz 2001, N’Guessan 2008), architecture and artistic displays (Hess 2000, 2001), and, importantly, through cultural education in schools (Coe 2005). However, independence celebrations as arenas of creating, redefining or contesting the ‘memory-nation’ (Olick 2003: 4) have not yet, as far as I can see, been explored systematically, neither in Ghana nor in other African countries.⁵

Outside Africa, national holidays and commemorative celebrations have become a rich area of research, from which Africanist research can draw some inspiration. Most importantly, scholars of the politics of memory have insisted that ‘collective memory’ and ‘memory-nation’ should not be taken for granted and be reified, but that research should rather focus on ‘mnemonic practices’ and also study cases in which ‘memory-makers’ fail to make their visions of the past collectively binding (Olick 2003: 6–7). Important here, so Charles Turner (2006), is the study of the institutional anchoring and the social organisation of commemorative practices and to contextualise this in a wider ethnography of ‘nationhood’. National holidays and commemorations of independence should be understood, therefore, as objects of state policies and as sites of societal contestation over images and practices of nationhood.

They are ‘recommitment holidays’, to use Etzioni’s term, that can serve as ‘socialization agents’, ‘seedbeds of virtue’ and mechanism of societal integration (2004: 10–11), but the boundaries of the group to be integrated may well be contested, and national holidays can spark heated debates about what should be remembered or forgotten, how the commemorations should be organised, and who should be involved. It is these debates that can reveal important fault lines running through the nation under construction.

An important theme that can be identified from historical studies tracing the development of a country’s festival calendar over a longer period concerns precisely the political conflicts that almost inevitably surround the introduction as well the always uncertain continuous celebration of national holidays. What Waldstreicher (1997: 2) observed for American independence celebrations, holds for the history of many national days: they are the outcome of a process marked by both ‘divisive politics and unifying nationalism at the same time’. Rather than a coherent ideology or set of ideas, nationalism, Waldstreicher (1997: 6) contends, is ‘a political strategy, developed differently at different times by specific groups responding to the strategies of other groups’. As Spillman (2003) argues, nations tend to commemorate continuously particularly those historical moments and periods that are relatively vague, abstract and ‘multivalent’ and that therefore are able to accommodate differing interpretations, even critical counter-interpretations. Although ‘beginnings’ such as independence declarations or other founding moments generally have a certain ‘charisma’, that make them practically predestined for integration into the collective memory, they can only be transformed into a memorable ‘national metanarrative’ if critics of the dominant version refer to the same historical period in seeking to legitimate their inclusionary claims. Drawing on the case of the centennial and bicentennial celebrations of the American revolution Spillman shows that the celebrations had broad appeal, because ‘the revolutionary period provided rich grounds for the arguments of commemoration critics’ while commemoration planners could ‘appeal to the “shared” founding moment in order to transcend salient differences’ (2003: 185). In contrast, the bicentennial of the arrival of the British in Australia did not have ‘enough symbolic power to resist critical claims’ (ibid.), particularly with regard to the aborigines, to whom this historical event offered no positive associations.⁶ I would argue that African independence celebrations, and certainly the Ghanaian Jubilee, generally fall into the first category of robust festivals that commemorate historical periods with sufficient latitude for divergent, and even competing, interpretations.

A second, closely related theme regards the relationship between state initiative and control of national commemorations, on the one hand, and civic or popular contributions to and participation in these festivals, on the other. Some national ceremonies developed out of originally regional or local festivals that were only eventually homogenised into one centralised holiday; other festivals have been from the outset planned ‘from above’, i.e. the political centre.⁷ In the case of African independence celebrations, the very historical moment that later came to be commemorated was staged by the departing colonial powers, together with their African heirs to power. Cannadine’s (2008) analysis of the pomp, pageantry and partying during independence declarations in the British Commonwealth shows how India’s independence in 1947, carefully crafted to display consensus while concealing tensions and paradoxes, served as a prototype and model for the African celebrations and subsequent reenactments. Although Republican France ‘had no place for monarchist pageantry and ornamentation’, it also borrowed some of the British ‘midnight hour’ rhetoric and iconography (Shipway 2008: 747). But even if orchestrated by political power-holders, celebrations could be contested or

subversively re-appropriated, or they could be more or less ‘boycotted’ by the broader population, while family- or community-oriented festivities associated with the official holiday sometimes came to overshadow the public political ritual (Behrenbeck and Nützenadel 2000).⁸ Whether this tendency can also be observed at African independence celebrations, remains an open question, but the co-existence of numerous events such as official state ceremonies, the independent initiatives of specific institutions (in Ghana the university, the Bar Association, the Cocoa Marketing Board and many others organised their own Ghana‘@50’ celebrations) and apolitical popular celebration seems quite typical.

Finally, a third theme emerging from historical research is the relationship between regional and ethnic or other group loyalties and national identifications. For America, this has been most prominently explored with respect to the legacy of the Civil War, and commemorative fêtes of African Americans that eventually developed into nation-wide festivals (Blight 2003, Kachun 2003). Ethnic parades and other immigrant festivals, increasingly popular since the latter nineteenth century, could be both ‘divisive’ and ‘integrative’ with regard to national unity, serving as ‘forums where claims were made, grievances voiced, social justice and inequalities or mistreatment exposed, [and] new ideas and strategies tested’ (Fabre et al 2001: 13), and helping to secure immigrant loyalty to the nation-state. However, as the historical studies make very clear, national holidays *per se* do not necessarily reinforce national unity and integration; they can just as well heighten tensions, particularly in the aftermath of political transformations, and they can intensify debates about what vision of the nation and which future course should prevail.

The following sections can only offer an initial exploration of how these three themes - political controversies about what, whom and how to commemorate, the tension between official and popular celebrations, and the grappling with regional and ethnic heterogeneity – played out in the Ghana@50 celebrations. As mentioned above, further research is needed, both on Ghana and the jubilees coming up in other African countries. They present a unique opportunity to engage in comparative research and tap their potential for providing insight into ongoing processes of nation-building.⁹ Particularly the question once raised by Fauré regarding the tensions between independence celebrations as events honouring the state and as moments of national self-reassurance is one that could be explored further.

Debating political inclusiveness: party competition and the struggle over Kwame Nkrumah’s legacy

The irony of Ghana’s Jubilee celebrations was that the Kufuor government that organised them traces its origins back to precisely what was once the Nkrumah opposition. At the same time, independence cannot be commemorated without reference to Nkrumah. Party political competition, including bitter struggles and incidences of violence, has characterised much of Ghana’s political history, and the Ghanaian electorate generally regards all parties as in some way heirs to one of the two political traditions formed in the run-up to independence – the more liberally oriented United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) of J. B. Danquah and others, and Nkrumah’s more radical nationalist CPP that broke away from the UGCC. The very question which course towards independence the country should steer was a central point of contention. Even after the CPP won the 1954 and 1956 elections, and the British opted to support Prime Minister Nkrumah’s efforts towards an early declaration of independence, the opposition remained intransigent and threatened that the Ashanti and Northern region would secede

if their demands for a more federalist constitution and later date of independence were not met (Allman 1993: 162–92). It was virtually at the last minute that the CPP made concessions to some of the opposition's constitutional demands so that in the historical final session of the colonial Legislative Assembly, the Deputy Minority Leader S. D. Dombo supported the majority motion to adjourn and reconvene the next morning as the new independent parliament. However, as Rathbone (2008: 713) aptly put it, 'away from the photographers' lenses government and opposition remained utterly unreconciled, an impasse which was soon to be addressed by the CPP government in draconian ways – imprisonment, exile, deportation – in the first years after independence'. When the opposition's old leader Professor Kofi Busia became Prime Minister after Nkrumah's overthrow, he and his government (1969–72) discredited the CPP and expunged Nkrumah's image from the public sphere wherever possible. It was only beginning in the early 1980s, under the long rule of J. J. Rawlings, that Nkrumah's memory was eventually rehabilitated, a development that climaxed in the reburial of Nkrumah's remains in a large monument on Accra's downtown waterfront, Kwame Nkrumah Memorial Park, in 1992. However, the writing and commemoration of 'national' history has remained a highly sensitive matter, and unsurprisingly this came to the fore again during the Golden Jubilee.

The enigmatic figure of Kwame Nkrumah continues to be an important locus of public debate concerning what and whom the Jubilee should commemorate. Nkrumah's vision of independent Ghana was originally not a narrowly nationalist one, and it differed considerably from the 'normal' nation-state that Ghana has become over the past years. How then to 'neutralise' this alternative vision, how to fit Nkrumah into the mould of creator of the present-day nation, is a somewhat difficult task, even for the most fervent Ghanaian 'Nkrumahists', particularly as Nkrumah is also claimed by many non-Ghanaians as an African, or rather Pan-African, and even African-American hero. In Ghana the debate tended to manifest itself as a debate over what precisely constituted the political heritage for which Nkrumah 'really' stood. What sort of development and what sort of democracy corresponded to his vision? While many Ghanaians celebrate Nkrumah as 'courageous, inspirational and visionary leader of unparalleled selflessness, commitment and dedication to the cause of the oppressed, the repressed and the exploited in Ghana, Africa and elsewhere on Mother Earth'¹⁰ and as 'illustrious Founder of our nation'¹¹, others see him as a 'dictator'. Or, as a Member of Parliament recently put it, 'people are still hurt and embittered by the human rights abuse suffered under Nkrumah's Presidency'.¹² The Kufuor government's strategy for dealing with Nkrumah's heritage was less one of open confrontation than one of 'neutralisation' by selective forgetting and co-optation on the one hand, and by, on the other hand, an expansion of the family of Ghanaian 'founders' to include leaders of the UGCC and later UP tradition.

That Kufuor's Jubilee Secretariat placed the official launching of the Ghana@50 celebrations on 21 September 2006, Nkrumah's birthday, was most certainly an attempt to avoid criticisms that Nkrumah's legacy was not being duly honoured. Furthermore, across the country, there were large billboards and newspaper advertisements with a photographic collage, showing Kwame Nkrumah and President Kufuor, standing left and right of the Ghana@50 logo and the 'Championing African Excellence' slogan, both clad in *kente* cloth and their right hands extended towards each other, as if in greeting across time and space. But the iconographic intimation that Nkrumah somehow endorsed the incumbent President's service to Ghana was criticised by quite a few. The Independence Day front page of *The Democrat*, a private newspaper close to the opposition, for instance, carried a prominently highlighted

headline, or rather insert, reading ‘Let us remember how Kufuor and his political tradition... fought against independence’, and complained that ‘now the NPP is going to celebrate Ghana’s 50 years without shame. ... The NPP did not see anything good in Kwame Nkrumah, but now they are robbing the CPP of this magnificent glory of the 50th year anniversary’.¹³ In a similar vein, *The Chronicle* published a series of articles, under scandalising front page headlines, about the neglect of Nkrumah’s birth place as a symbol of the government’s disdain for Ghana’s first president, headlines such as ‘Nkrumah turns in his grave ... Ghana@50 Secretariat totally neglects birthplace of Nation’s founder’,¹⁴ and ‘After 180 bn for Ghana@50 “No room in the inn” – no single toilet in Nkrumah’s hometown’.¹⁵ An indicative incident that I witnessed coincidentally when visiting the Kwame Nkrumah Memorial Park in the afternoon of March 5 was the almost secluded, private way in which Nkrumah’s son, Dr Francis Nkrumah, accompanied by his family and only a very small group of journalists, placed a wreath at the statue of his father. That this very personal act of commemoration was of little outside interest and that it took place in absence of government officials seemed to confirm the critique that the NPP government was only half-heartedly paying tribute to Kwame Nkrumah. An editorial in the government-friendly *Daily Graphic*, however, insisted that the Kufuor government was ‘not playing down Nkrumah’s contribution’, and that ‘any truth-loving Ghanaian will testify that Osagyefo Dr Kwame Nkrumah is really at the centre of the year long celebrations, except those hypocritical ostriches who see nothing except party colours’. The writer then went on to blame the opposition and ‘Rawlings and the P(NDC) [as] the ones who demonstrated with impunity the level of disregard they had for Nkrumah, the Big Six¹⁶ and our independence when Mr Rawlings cancelled Ghana’s 25th independence anniversary in 1982’.¹⁷

The NPP and the NDC were, of course, not the only ones to lay ideological claims to Nkrumah’s heritage. The smaller Nkrumahist parties (CPP, PNC and other splinter groups) presented themselves as the only faithful guardians of the Nkrumah legacy. The CPP, for instance, insisted in commemorating not only independence, but also the anniversary of the coup in 1966, and CPP chairman Dr Delle insinuated that ‘the forces of reaction that collaborated with the imperialist agents to overthrow Nkrumah were alive and active at various levels’. Only a CPP government truly inspired by Nkrumah’s ideals could put an end to ‘the hardship, suffering, deprivation and poverty that Ghanaians experienced daily’.¹⁸ What precisely Nkrumah’s legacy meant in political terms—a socialist call for fighting against neo-colonialism, social-democratic politics of redistribution and investment in health and education, or massive state interventionism—remained as controversial as the question who else was to be remembered and honoured for their efforts towards Ghana’s independence.¹⁹

These controversies constituted the subtext to many publications, lectures, conferences and commemorative speeches,²⁰ and it was also quite manifest in the almost private nature of Nkrumah’s son’s wreath-laying. In one of the Jubilee Lectures at the International Conference Centre, organised by the Ghana@50 Secretariat, the political controversy over the ‘fathers’ of independence became particularly evident. When Peter Ala Adjetey, former Speaker of Parliament, renowned lawyer and NPP politician, introduced the speaker of the occasion, Yaw Saffu, he highlighted the importance of J. B. Danquah and Paa Grant that is the founders of the UGCC, for paving the road towards independence. Saffu himself, however, a political scientist working in the US, rather concentrated on Nkrumah’s crucial role in creating the necessary grassroots pressure on the British to accept the necessity of independence. It is perhaps indicative that the efforts of the Ghana Historical Society, which regards itself as ‘the

institutional memory of the nation' and therefore offered to compile 'a comprehensive and authoritative history of the country' and organise a series of panels on the nation's past and future, were sidelined by the Ghana@50 Secretariat, as one of the Society's leading members complained (Donkoh 2008). The ongoing political competition makes the construction of such a comprehensive official national history a challenging undertaking, and one that may remain unfinished for perhaps still a very long time to come.

More debates over political inclusiveness: politicisation of the official Jubilee festivities

The wrangling between opposition and government over the Independence Day celebrations were not, however, limited to national history or to the nature of the nation's political heritage, but also involved the organisation of the festivities themselves. There were repeated appeals to 'use [the] Golden Jubilee to facilitate reconciliation',²¹ but the media and the general public also began to ask whether the Jubilee celebrations were organised in an even-handed and politically inclusive fashion, or whether they were 'hijacked' as party-political platforms, with general elections only one and a half years away. A few examples of this pervasive suspicion, which was voiced both 'on-stage' and 'off-stage', in newspaper comments, television talk shows, radio features and internet blogs as well as many informal conversations, must suffice here.

Discussions about the Jubilee's political inclusiveness centred, among other issues, on the question of the NDC's participation, or boycott, of the official celebration on March 5 and 6. The opposition had boycotted the parliamentary sessions for nearly two weeks in February, including the day of the President's 'State of the Nation' address, as a gesture of solidarity with Daniel Abodakpi, an NDC Member of Parliament and formerly Minister of Trade, who had been accused of corruption and was convicted to ten years in prison. The NDC castigated the trial as 'a travesty of justice',²² and it was only after a number of reconciliatory meetings which some elder statesmen, including former Secretary General of the United Nations Kofi Annan, held with government and opposition representatives, that the NDC finally agreed to participate in the Golden Jubilee Parade.²³ Only Rawlings himself remained adamant that he personally would not participate. He felt compelled to ask 'What is being celebrated?' and, as he put it, did not want to risk, after all that had happened, any further humiliation.²⁴

Although the NDC presidential candidate Professor Atta Mills and his associates as well as the minority parliamentarians had decided to attend the Independence parade on March 6, suspicions that they would be sidelined by the official programme were never allayed. This was forcefully brought home to me when I accompanied Leader of the Opposition Alban Bagbin from Parliament House to Independence Square, where the Jubilee parade of March 6 was to take place. Bagbin assumed he was to sit near the presidential dais on Independence Arch, together with other guests of honour, since the highest government authorities, including the Speaker of Parliament and the Majority Leader would no doubt also be sitting there. However, at the bottom of the stairwell security guards and ushers granted permission to go upstairs only to those able to present an invitation. But Bagbin did not carry one. His response – 'I don't need an invitation, I am the Leader of the Opposition' – did not impress the security officials. And he was by no means the only one turned away at the entrance to the VIP section: the Chief Imam of Accra, several other members of parliament and other prominent political actors tried to negotiate entry or protested loudly about the (lack of) seating arrangements and further shortcomings of the organisation. Bagbin remained calm:

the security guards were only doing their job and were not responsible for the organisation. To me he stated that in his eyes this was part of the government's strategy to humiliate the opposition party. As for himself, he would not tolerate such pettiness, but return to Parliament House and get some work done. In the eyes of the NDC critics with whom I spoke subsequently this decision amounted to a practical boycott: according to them Bagbin was only waiting for an excuse to accuse the NPP, for had he only waited a few more moments and informed the director of protocol, the situation would have been redressed. Be that as it may, Bagbin returned to his office, and in the afternoon attended a conference organised by the Committee for Joint Action, an independent (but, as many said, NDC-dominated) oppositional forum that had been highly critical of much of the official celebrations.

As mentioned above, Atta Mills did attend the official celebration on Independence Square, observed how the Ghanaian Armed Forces, the police and the fire brigades, the cadet schools and many others who every year march in the Independence Day parades filed in, and, under the watchful eyes of a team of journalists, clapped, if rather reservedly, following the presidential speech. As he explained to a BBC reporter, the NDC politicians and parliamentarians were present,

to pay respect to the people who have contributed to make the celebration possible. We are here to pay respect to the children who have spent months rehearsing. We are here also to acknowledge the fact that for nineteen years, out of the fifty years, some of my colleagues and I were in charge of the state called Ghana, and some lost their lives ... and it is to pay respect to all those who have contributed to what Ghana is now. And I am here also as a Ghanaian. Whilst we celebrate, it is also an opportunity to look at the past and the future of the nation. ... We are here to remind Ghanaians: we are only fifty years, there is a long road ahead. And it is not as rosy as people want us to believe. But I think we should remind ourselves where we have come from, where we are now and what we need to move forward as a nation. ... We have won independence, but that is not all. ... This country is disunited, it is polarised, and we do not want to admit the truth, we have corruption, we have all kinds of problems, but we are celebrating independence, because it is a fact. ... We should acknowledge our joint obligation.²⁵

This statement aptly summarises, and in interesting ways reformulates the conviction of many Ghanaians, politicians and 'grass-roots' alike, that the nation is a community united by a common destiny despite and beyond all party-political rifts, and that the nation should acknowledge, and invite, everybody's contribution towards a better future. In any case, everyone I spoke to was relieved that during the festivities on March 5 and 6 hardly any one donned party logos or t-shirts and that national symbols predominated. But whether a majority of Ghanaians actually believed that the festivities united the nation across party lines and strengthened national unity, is difficult to assess.

A corollary of the discussions on how to overcome, or at least suspend, party-political competition during the celebrations was the question of the political inclusiveness of the official Jubilee organisation. Was it appropriate that a government body, appointed by the executive, should officiate over the celebrations, as was the case with the Ghana@50 Secretariat,²⁶ or should such an organising committee have included representatives from all political parties, or, instead, be constituted as a deliberately 'a-political' organisation that also integrated, among others, chiefs and representatives from various professional and civic associations? These controversies also concerned the role that the executive, parliament and extra-governmental institutions – the management for many events was outsourced to private companies – should play in organising the celebrations. An example of these discussions was that

of the Jubilee finances. The Ghanaian parliament had approved a sum of 20 million US Dollars for the festivities, but the Ghana@50 Secretariat's chief officer, Charles Wereko-Brobby, repeatedly refused to appear before parliament to account for the expenditures, insisting that he was not answerable to parliament, but to the executive. This met with strong criticism not only from among the opposition, but also from among the majority party parliamentarians, and from the general public.²⁷

A similar tug-of-war between opposition and government, and between the executive and parliament, concerned the organisation of the Commemorative Sitting of Parliament scheduled for the evening of 5 March that was to re-enact the historical final session of the colonial legislative assembly in 1957. The historical session had been graced by the presence of the Duchess of Kent, representing Queen Elizabeth II. Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah, supported by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition S. D. Dombo, spoke about the bright future of an independent Ghana and thanked Britain and other countries for their support of the new nation. The Speaker of Parliament then read the Governor's message to terminate the legislative assembly by royal prerogative and announced that the body would reconvene as the newly independent parliament the next morning. This was followed by the Declaration of Independence at mid-night by Kwame Nkrumah and his close supporters on the Old Polo Grounds across Parliament House, the lowering of the Union Jack and the raising of the new Ghanaian flag. On the morning of March 6, in the presence of many foreign dignitaries, the Duchess of Kent opened the first session of the Parliament of Ghana, conveyed the Queen's greetings to the Governor, the Speaker, the members of parliament and to the people of Ghana and presented the Prime Minister the Ghana Independence Act and Ghana's constitution. The Prime Minister then moved, this time seconded by Leader of the Opposition K. A. Busia, to send an address to the Queen on behalf of the House, and parliament was adjourned indefinitely. Following this sitting, a grand parade and other festivities were held throughout Accra and all over the country.²⁸

Historically, then, parliament played a central role in the independence celebrations, not least because Nkrumah as Prime Minister was himself member of the legislative assembly. Under his regime, however, the constitution was changed in favour of a presidential system, a system that by and large also characterises Ghana's current government and that presents new challenges for the balance of power between the legislative and executive branches. One of the controversies during the Jubilee was how to re-enact the historical session in the absence of a prime minister, and, even more importantly, how much decision-making power parliament would retain over the staging of the Commemorative Session when this session was, in reality, largely planned by members of the executive (among them, the Jubilee Secretariat).

During the event itself, the parliamentary dais was dominated by the presence of the executive and its guests. After the Speaker of Parliament opened the session, short addresses were given by the President of the Pan-African Parliament, the President of Nigeria 'on behalf of colleague Heads of State', by the Duke of Kent and finally by President Kufuor, congratulating the nation on fifty years of independence and a relatively long and stable democratic tradition. When Majority Leader Felix Owusu-Adjapong at last unceremoniously moved to adjourn, Leader of the Opposition Bagbin stepped forward to second the motion and used his control of the floor to deliver a long-winded statement to which the majority party responded with much commotion, although it was hard to determine whether this was in protest or in support. Bagbin not only welcomed Busumuru Kofi Annan, whose presence none of the pre-

vious speakers had mentioned, but also pointed out that the motion to prorogue parliament fifty years previously was seconded, not by K. A. Busia, whom President Kufuor had acknowledged in his commemorative speech, but by S. D. Dombo, a chief and politician from Upper West Region. Moreover, Bagbin, in a populist move that indirectly accused the NPP Jubilee organisers of elitism, thanked ‘all Ghanaians for their patience, tolerance and mandate for us to be here to represent their interest’.²⁹ The rest of his statement was drowned out by the NDC faction’s tumultuous applause, and a number of NPP members waved their flags in both agreement and revelry. It is also possible that they were grateful to Bagbin that his statement indirectly protested the executive’s co-optation of parliament. But these tensions between the executive and parliament, too, were ultimately overshadowed by antagonisms between government and opposition.

The extent to which, beyond such party-political tensions, Jubilee celebrations may or may not have strengthened a sense of national community is a question that would require further research. The answer would no doubt vary depending on the section of the population asked—the political elite, the urban middle class, the rural population in various regions across Ghana. Among the political elite, at least, a debate over Nkrumah’s legacy—and the lessons to be learned from the history of the march towards independence—flared up once again on the occasion of Nkrumah’s 100th birthday in 2009, following the December 2008 victory of the NDC in what was an extremely close election. The newly elected NDC government re-established 21 September, Nkrumah’s birthday, as a national holiday, calling it ‘Founder’s Day’. The opposition, on the other hand, demanded the establishment of Founders’ Day, but on 4 August, in memory of the foundering of the liberal UGCC in 1947, of which Nkrumah’s CPP was a subsequent offshoot.³⁰ Since the ‘irreconcilable master narratives’ (Rathbone 2008: 706) are time and again being reproduced by the respective political camps, it is not to be expected that the politics of memory will become any less controversial, after the after the remaining eye-witnesses and contemporaries of the independence period have passed away.

Staging ‘the people’: social inclusiveness and elite celebrations

The official parade and nationalist rituals such as the lighting of the ‘perpetual flame’ at Independence Monument, the recital of the national pledge and anthem, the salute to the flag, or the ‘trooping’ and ‘marching off of the colours’ – in short, the standard ingredients of national festivals around the world that were also staged prominently during Ghana’s Jubilee celebrations – highlight a significant difference, namely that between ‘the people’ and ‘the government’. This difference is visibly expressed by the architecture of the places and buildings where the public ceremonies take place and, more generally, the spatial arrangements of the festival. The president and his guests are driven in cars or carriages, while ‘the people’ walk; the elevated stands and dais on which the president and his entourage sit (or stand, as the occasion demands) are opposed to the streets, benches or the floor on which the ‘masses’ stand, squat or march. To be precise, ‘the people’ appear in the festival arena in two capacities: first, as more or less enthusiastic masses who line up along the roads, or push into the places where the president, members of government and international guests pass by in their carriages or cars amidst cheers and the waving of flags; and secondly, in the parade, as uniformed groups representing the armed forces, civil servants, students and cadet schools, teachers, nurses, fire brigades, trade unionists, police men and women, traditional healers associations, and many

other professional groups and civic organisations. The parade, in particular, stages the national society as a heterogeneous, but in principle harmonious ensemble of professional bodies and civic associations. Differences of class, and to a certain degree also gender, are muted. The nation is represented, and presents itself, as citizens who, while distinguished by their different professional roles, all pay allegiance to the same nation-state (and government). It is indicative that in the parade, as well as in the subsequent patriotic gymnastic presentations by school children, displays of ethnic and regional differences had no place, and even indirect expressions of cultural difference in clothing were notably absent.

This basic configuration of ‘masses’ and ‘government’, or the ‘nation’ and its ‘leaders’, staged during the official celebration seems to be so commonplace that no commentator found it noteworthy. Similarly, the micro-politics of who participates in the parade, and in which order the different groups march in the procession was of concern largely to the organisers of the parade and the participants themselves, and did not find its way into public debates. There was, however, an interesting rumour concerning the enormous masses of people pushing onto the parade grounds. Police and security forces clearly had difficulty in securing the seating reserved for VIPs and other official guests. At the same time, it was just as undesirable to have broadcast around the world images of police and security forces beating citizens with clubs, which meant that many of the official guests (civil servants, heads of departments, etc.) were only able to find seating with great difficulty, the exception being ‘VVIPs’, who were able to present an invitation to sit in one of the levels of Presidential Arch at Independence Square. Quite a few members of the NDC with whom I talked during the parade were convinced that the supposedly enthusiastic masses had not assembled of their own accord. Instead, during the night, the Jubilee Secretariat had ostensibly carted them on busses into the city from the surrounding provinces in order to avoid the potential fiasco of half-empty stands that would expose the government’s unpopularity in front of its official guests and the press.³¹ Unsurprisingly, supporters of the ruling party viewed things differently, and later descriptions of the enthusiastic masses filled the media.

While nobody publicly doubted the massive euphoria during the peak of the celebrations, journalists and other commentators were concerned as to whether the ‘grass roots’ benefitted from the Jubilee celebrations as a whole, and to which degree they were involved in the entertainment programmes that preceded and followed the official ceremonies. It is here that questions of class and economic as well as educational standing were widely debated, and many complained that most of the Jubilee activities were more or less restricted to the political elite – almost exclusively male and rather well-to-do Ghanaians.

Criticism regarded, for instance, the regulation of access to a number of ‘top’ events that were reserved for the political elite (‘by invitation only’), as well as the prohibitive entrance fees for some of the allegedly more ‘popular’ events. The ‘Miss Ghana@50’ competition, for instance, and some festive dinners were so expensive that only well-to-do upper middle class persons could attend. For the ‘Miss Ghana@50’ gala, tickets ultimately had to be given out nearly for free on the evening of the event, because the organisers risked having to host the event in an empty hall. One could also argue that the official symbol of Ghana@50, the at sign, @, nowadays most commonly used in e-mail addresses, is somewhat ‘elitist’, because not everybody in Ghana is familiar with e-mail or has access to the digital world.

Another example of the tensions regarding the ‘grass-roots’ and elite’s benefits from the Jubilee was brought home to me when walking around Kwame Nkrumah Memorial Park on the eve of Independence Day, where numerous helpers were busy setting up the benches,

chairs, podia and audio equipment for the gala and rock concert that evening. A Dutch water engineer explained that he and his crew would probably not be able to fill the pools and fountains at the mausoleum in time, even though the water supply in several parts of the city had been cut several days previously, causing a lot of inconvenience to the local population, to ensure sufficient water to fill the ditches on the festival grounds. In a similar vein, the ‘massive Jubilee clean-up exercise’ that the Accra Metropolitan Assembly decreed included clearing the streets of itinerant vendors as well as ‘lunatics’ and ‘destitutes’, provoking criticism from among local branches of Amnesty International and the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative.³²

More generally, a number of newspaper articles and radio features (and many internet bloggers) debated whether there was indeed anything to celebrate at all and, more importantly, whether the money for the Jubilee should not rather be invested in social infrastructure and poverty reduction than in the public festivities with their conspicuous consumption.³³ Of the 20 million US Dollars that parliament budgeted for the celebrations, 5.9 million indeed were spent on importing new vehicles (allegedly for transporting foreign dignitaries during the festivities, etc.); 4.9 were invested in the renovation of the Independence Square, Independence Arch and other squares and buildings in and around Accra; and 7.8 million went to the ten regions where they were to be spent on infrastructural developments, particularly the rehabilitation of parade grounds, monuments and other Jubilee-related locations. ‘It was in the discussions about the budget for the anniversary’, as Anyidoho and Asante’s (2008: 9) instructive analysis of newspaper articles and editorials on the celebrations demonstrates, ‘that comments on inclusion and exclusion became salient’. Many commentators strongly felt that Ghana had more pressing needs than spending big sums on a lavish celebration:

Ghana has to cut its coat according to its size and think of the citizens first. ... How many computers, hospital beds, or boreholes can half of this money provide to the people? The president’s son is schooling in the USA where computers are common. How many do we have in all our universities? At least half of the \$ 20 million can buy a lot or provide chairs and tables for students who wouldn’t have to stand outside during lectures.³⁴

Others put it even more dramatically, castigating the expenditure of ‘as much as \$ 6 million on luxury cars whilst our mothers and babies bled to death in our hospitals’.³⁵ One of the Jubilee Secretariat’s promises of public benefits of the celebrations, namely the erection of facilities, including toilets, became a symbol in the debates over the social inclusivity or exclusivity of the festivities. Thus, when the toilets that were to be installed in all districts were still not delivered on 6 March 2007, ‘there were loud and angry commentaries on the radio’ (Anyidoho and Asante 2008: 10). Two years after the Jubilee celebrations government auditing officials calculated that the Ghana@50 Secretariat had spent not 20, but rather 60 million US dollars and that still to date ‘only one out of 25 toilets for which an amount of GH ₵ 19 million [approx. US \$ 1.9 million] was allocated had so far been provided’.³⁶

The sense of exclusion of the political opposition, but also of the broader population and their grievances regarding the official programme motivated the government-critical Committee for Joint Action (CJA) to plan a ‘grass-roots’ march from Nkrumah Circle to the Nkrumah Mausoleum in Accra on March 6. ‘Why is it that the highlighted entertainment and social events carry price tags that make them inaccessible to all but the rich?’, a CJA spokesperson asked, complaining further that there were no ‘events through which ordinary people can express themselves creatively and freely’.³⁷ The CJA ‘People’s Jubilee Procession’ initia-

tive was, as the NPP government criticised, mainly sponsored by the NDC, but not exclusively. And as the CJA leaders explained, the march was to ‘provide a popular platform for the masses as an alternative to the essentially elitist Ghana@50 programme’³⁸, and thus a more authentic tribute to Nkrumah’s heritage than the ruling party’s emphasis on national and international elite publics. The plan for the alternative march was eventually taken before the courts, and finally placed under an injunction. That one of the groups which vociferously criticised the CJA’s agenda as being divisive and prone to cause ‘chaos and anarchy’ called itself Committee for the Advance of Patriotism is revealing.³⁹ Indeed, what was at stake in the conflicts surrounding the oppositional march were competing views of justice and democracy, and different visions of the nation that the celebrations should enhance. Alternative visions of national history and the future course Ghana should steer, however, were formulated not only by the CJA. They were also expressed in less publicly noted ways, namely during the manifold Jubilee activities that various civic and professional associations, trade unions, women’s organisations and many other institutions hosted, often celebrating their own anniversaries – a fertile field for further research.

Debating ethnic and regional inclusiveness: the role of ‘tradition’ and Asante symbolism

One of the basic ambiguities inherent in the Ghanaian project of nationhood is the unresolved tension between two fundamentally different conceptions of citizenship and national belonging. On the one hand, Ghana is legally constituted, and many Ghanaians share this view, as a modern nation-state with equal rights for all of its citizens, regardless of their ethnic, religious, or regional background. In this conception, the state, and its various institutions, confront a ‘civic nation’ comprised of individuals equal, at least in principle. Whatever ‘traditional’ or otherwise legitimised communities they may feel attached to, is bracketed from the official political sphere. On the other hand, Ghana inherited, and in part has also actively promoted, a colonial model of the nation as a federation of ‘native states’, of original, quasi-‘natural’, pre-political communities that are based on descent and are centred on the authority of traditional chiefs (Lentz and Nugent 2000, Nugent 2007). In this model of (multi-)ethnic nationalism, concepts of autochthony and respect for culturally distinct group identities play an important role, and the state is expected to function as arbiter by ensuring that national resources are even-handedly shared between these ‘natural’ communities and by providing a level playing-field for their political representation. Supporters of this model may disagree whether ‘autochthony’ and ethnic belonging should play any role whatsoever in the political process, or rather only be acknowledged in the form of more or less depoliticised displays of cultural identity and linguistic difference. Furthermore, while a majority of Ghanaians from the Southern regions would emphasise the historical dominance of the Asante over much of current Ghana and assert that modern Ghana is ‘built upon a traditional Akan ethnic core, around which non-Akan peripheries are clustered’ (Brown 2000: 29), people from those ‘peripheries’ are highly critical of such Akan-centredness and insist on a more balanced version of diversity. In any case, it is not the individual, but the community to which he belongs that is viewed here as the ‘counterpart’ of the state, and in this model one cannot simply be a Ghanaian, but can only be so by at the same time being a Fanti, Asante, Dagomba, Dagara, Ewe, and so on.

In Ghana’s political reality, these two ideal-typical models of the nation cannot be neatly attributed to specific groups or individual proponents; rather, they intermingle, and

anyone can draw on arguments from both strands of thought, depending on the occasion and the particular interests in question. Indeed, Ghana's favourite slogan in this respect, namely 'unity in diversity', testifies to this flexibility and ambiguity, since it leaves open whether unity is believed to evolve through peaceful interchange between irreducibly diverse communities or whether Ghanaians should discover, and promote, that basic unity (and sameness) that lies 'beneath' apparently diverse cultural customs. The intermingling of, and inherent tension between the two models can also be detected in the Ghana@50 celebrations' cultural policies. The Jubilee Secretariat clearly attempted to cater to public expectations of a balanced participation of the various regions in the celebrations – and the different ethnic/cultural communities usually are, for administrative convenience, imagined to somehow coincide with regional boundaries.⁴⁰ This regional involvement took two different forms that correspond, *cum grano salis*, with the above-mentioned models. On the one hand, some of the Jubilee activities, which for the most part were concentrated in the capital Accra, were repeated, on a smaller scale, in the regional capitals and even in the seats of the district administration. These events entailed the usual national trappings and thus drew on 'neo'-traditions that deliberately avoid any visible association with an identifiable ethnic group and tradition. On the other hand, both within the regions and in the capital, the Secretariat encouraged festivals of 'traditional culture', usually organised by local chiefs and educated elites, that explicitly celebrate regional specificities and ethnic communities. The first type of involvement stages all Ghanaians as equal citizens; the second pays tribute to their 'primary patriotism' (Geschiere and Gugler 1998) as members of specific local and ethnic communities.

Examples for the first type of activities were gospel festivals that the Secretariat staged in all regional capitals, and the 'Greening Ghana' and 'Rally around the Flag' campaigns in which all regions were encouraged to actively participate. Another conspicuous symbol involving the performative integration of the various regions into the nation was the 'freedom flame', modelled on the Olympic flame, that travelled through the entire country, with public ceremonies and speeches accompanying its arrival in the various regional capitals. The flame was lit in Upper West Region, then carried through the other northern, and afterwards southern, regions of Ghana, reaching Accra on the eve of Independence Day.⁴¹

However, there are not many such 'neutral' inclusivist, trans-ethnic emblems and rituals. In many other cases, colourful representations of Ghanaian culture and African-ness draw on specific regional and ethnic styles, and the Ghana@50 celebrations were no exception.⁴² Here, as on many other occasions, Akan-centred symbols abounded. The 0 in the Ghana@50 sign, for instance, was clearly styled as an Akan *adinkra* symbol, signifying *gye nyame*, 'only God'. The official Jubilee cloth was inspired by a *kente* design, and Northerners, wearing the smock as their 'traditional' dress, felt slighted by the Jubilee Secretariat's attempt to declare the *kente* cloth the article of clothing constituting official 'Ghanaian' traditional dress that everybody was expected to sport on Independence Day. Similarly, during the two festive Parliamentary sittings in the context of the Independence celebrations, namely Kufuor's 'Message on the State of the Nation' and the re-enactment of the last legislative assembly gathering, parliament was decorated festively with Ghanaian flags and banners in the national colours as well as with lavish traditional *kente* cloth. In fact, the special *kente* cloth that during the commemorative sittings adorned the back of the parliamentary dais, left and right of Ghana's coat of arms, was presented to parliament by the Asantehene, King of Asante.⁴³ During the ceremonial entrance of the President, Vice-President, Chief Justice and other dignitaries for both sitting, the big *fontomfrom* drums were beaten, and special horns blown. Like

the *kente*, these instruments are imports from Asante royal history, used traditionally to announce the arrival of important chiefly authorities and played at parliament and other official venues for major state ceremonies. More generally, while these ‘cultural’ quotations from Akan repertoires have from the very beginning shaped official displays of Ghanaian ‘national’ culture, they have become even more numerous under the Kufuor government, representing a celebration of ‘the Asante moment’ in Ghanaian politics with which not all Ghanaians can identify, particularly not many Northerners. As became clear in numerous informal conversations with Northerners, many non-Akan Ghanaians regard with much wariness the use of such ‘ethnic’ symbols, criticising this as what they regard to be lack of balance.

The role of ‘tradition’ and a critique of possible Akan dominance also were the focus of extended discussions on the politics of clothing and the varieties of cloth used to decorate public space during the celebrations. Particularly President Kufuor’s dress was a matter extensively discussed in the press both before and after the Independence Day parade. Some people sided with the President who had argued his suit was a fitting symbol for a modern Ghana and that on similar occasions the heads of state of nations like China or Japan would also choose to wear ‘modern suits’. However, the appropriate dress code was controversial for further reasons. Particularly many people from the North had noted that the often reproduced photograph and the television spot which had been running since the beginning of the year in order to rally Ghanaian spirits for the celebration clearly showed Nkrumah and his close associates declaring independence at the Old Polo Grounds clad in northern smocks (only the next day, during the first session of the independent parliament, did Nkrumah and his cabinet sport *kente* cloth, thus carefully balancing regional identifications). However, as my Northern interlocutors would repeatedly complain, the Nkrumah statue was miraculously re-clothed. When the monument stood in front of the old Parliament House, and when it was later transferred to the National Museum grounds, it showed Nkrumah in a smock. But after the statue had to undergo repair following the breaking off of one of its arms during its relocation to Kwame Nkrumah Memorial Park in 1992, Nkrumah re-appeared dressed in *kente* cloth – in some people’s eyes a clear and rather unsettling sign of Asante ‘imperialism’.⁴⁴

However, at least Nkrumah wore ‘Ghanaian costume’. In contrast, President Kufuor’s choice of the suit for the Jubilee parade attracted much scathing criticism. Although his predecessor Rawlings did choose to wear Ghanaian costume, he was also criticised for his inability to wear the Akan cloth in the traditional manner with the required dignity. But now in retrospect, he was praised for his preference for Ghanaian clothing and his versatility in alternating between the Northern smock, the Muslim *boubou*, the *kente* cloth, etc. Kufuor, often seen in a Western suit, compares poorly in this regard. During the Commemorative Parliamentary Sitting, Kufuor did wear a light-blue *boubou*, but observers criticised this as being inappropriately simple for the occasion. On the other hand, at least it was ‘Ghanaian’, unlike the suits he and some of his cabinet ministers wore on March 6, a choice which many regarded to be a ‘shame’ to the nation. Kufuor himself argued the suit was appropriate to receive state guests and was simply more comfortable than the cumbersome cloth. The presidential Jubilee dress code has occasioned so much debate (also in blogs and feature articles on the internet)⁴⁵ that some critics have asked whether this topic really warrants so much discussion, whether there is anything really uniquely ‘Ghanaian’ about the *kente*, and why the President should be criticised for wearing Western clothes when ordinary Ghanaians have no qualms about driving fancy Western cars or putting permanents in their hair. However, the matter is anything but trivial: the question of appropriate clothing has attracted so much atten-

tion, because it has become an idiom in which the role ‘tradition’ and regional identity in the modern nation is debated. And the discussions around *kente*, in particular, have become a battle ground for the defense of, or attack on, Asante dominance. To give just one example of the strongly worded contributions to this debate: a blogger calling himself ‘devil’s advocate’ believes that the only source of the ‘*kente* war’ were ‘tribal sentiments’ that needed to be overcome:

If it was ever proven without a shadow of doubt that KENTE [sic] was first introduced and woven in Ghana by EWES, Ashantis might cease wearing it. Ashantis have this tendency to think that anything that is remotely related to them is superior to all others and they would promote and prop it up by all means necessary, as cheap, tawdry and backward as it may prove, to the detriment of the entire nation of a varied cultural group, they do it with the Twi language, ... and now this piece of rag called KENTE. ... Ewes can begrudge Ghanaians as much as they want, and Ashantis can yell till their eyes pop out, none of them can alter the acculturation of Ghana. Unless we intelligently find ways to assimilate our multifaceted culture and language into one unique form called Ghanaian, I see no hope. I am beginning to think that an allied force of Fantis, Gas, Kwahus and Hausas should form a coalition and tell these Ashantis and Ewes to shut up once and for all cos [because] Ghana is much bigger, smarter and civil than they could ever be.⁴⁶

One of the occasions where the nation was intentionally staged as a ‘federation of native states’ was during the independence celebrations of the morning of March 6 on Independence Square. Here, right beneath Independence Arch, on the grass in front of the VIP dais, sat a large number of chiefs from all over the country in pomp and pageantry, surrounded by their entourage, representing their respective ‘traditional areas’ and ethnic communities. At some point during the official ceremony they rose and paraded under their umbrellas to greet the President who stood on a small pedestal decorated in the national colours – a performance that could both be read as the chiefs’ claim to equal rank or as their deference to the ‘higher’ authority of the modern state. It is not quite clear how much latitude the Jubilee Secretariat had in arranging these encounters between the chiefs and state representatives, or whether the chiefs more or less imposed their own protocol. The Secretariat certainly did have a hand in organising the Ghana@50 durbar in the Accra zongo, during which Vice President Alhaji Aliu Mahama formally greeted and addressed the chiefs and immigrant communities from northern Ghana, as well as from Burkina Faso and Nigeria. This durbar, and the media coverage that it received, like all the other official Jubilee events, was clearly an attempt to redress the imbalance in the visibility of the various regions’ ‘traditional rulers’ during the official celebrations.⁴⁷ Significantly, here as on other occasions, when state officials elicit the presence of ‘traditional authorities’ and ‘ethnic’ communities, they organise these ‘components’ of the nation along the lines of administrative boundaries, thus making the expression of ‘pre-political’ communities congruent with the structure of the contemporary nation-state.

On the whole, however, it is remarkable that the official celebrations gave relatively little space to performances in the mould of the ‘federation of native states’-model, but rather foregrounded national paraphernalia and rituals that mute ethnic and regional loyalties.⁴⁸ This is also evident in the series of monthly themes around which activities were organised. None of the themes related to the country’s internal ethnic and cultural diversity or to the role of ‘traditional authorities’, while there were months devoted to the ‘Diaspora’ and to ‘Africa unity’, whereas others focused on health, education, and various aspects of development. This may well have been a deliberate attempt to avoid conflicts and estrangement that could arise

from a more prominent staging of ‘ethnic’ nationalism. In any case, the relatively low visibility of the chiefs during the Independence celebrations stands in notable contrast to the often important role that ‘traditional authorities’ usually play at official events—this not least because the chiefs, particularly the Asantehene, make themselves heard quite audibly, claiming for themselves a significant role in the political arena. But on this, too, as well as on how the tension between civic and ethnocultural nationalism played out during the independence celebrations, more research is needed.

Conclusion

The study of national celebrations, such as the Ghanaian Jubilee, allows us to explore contested processes of nation-building and images of nationhood. The ways such national celebrations are negotiated and organised at the local, regional and national levels as well as in the diaspora, reflect the societal and political fault lines with which nation-building has to contend – among others, diverse political traditions and orientations, questions of social class, and regional and ethnic diversity. At the same time, the celebrations are in themselves cathartic moments of nation-building, at least potentially. They aim to enhance the emotional attachment of citizens to the country, and invite to remember, re-enact and re-define national history, as well as to ‘socialise’ younger generations into the national heritage and icons. More importantly, however, they become a forum of debate, both ‘on-stage’ and ‘off-stage’, in the media and in more informal popular discussions, about what should constitute the norms and values that make up ‘Ghanaianess’, and, in the interstices of the official ceremonies, provide space for alternative quests for public recognition.

As I have shown in this paper, however, the celebrations were intensely politicised, and various groups, particularly competing political elites, attempted to appropriate the festivities for their own agendas. We may therefore well ask whether Ghana@50 actually accomplished its goal, uniting the nation and fostering reflection as well as pride, or rather deepened Ghana’s major political, social and ethnic fault lines. The answer to this question, of course, depends very much on whom one talks to and on which level one discusses the issues. However, I would like to suggest here that underlying the public, often seemingly irreconcilable, debates over national history and what constitutes a desirable future for the nation, there are a number of partly explicit, but mostly implicit understandings and ‘conventions’ that are shared by most of those participating in the debates and by many Ghanaians generally. These commonalities rest not so much on substantive symbols or political convictions, but on the rules of the debate. There seems to be a minimalist consensus that the nation’s future should be defined by some degree of social inclusion, defining Ghana in one way or the other as a ‘social justice community’ (Brown 2000: 38), by cultural diversity and by ‘multi-party’ democracy. At the very least Ghanaians agree that disagreements on these issues and on the rules of the debate should be resolved (or tolerated) without recourse to violence. ‘Unity in diversity’ with regard to both politics and ethnic-regional diversity is more than just an official slogan, it is a widely shared conviction, as is the idea that cultural and regional heterogeneity should be generally depoliticised. And rather than being merely divisive, controversies about whether the celebrations were elitist or popular and politically hijacked or balanced, whether Nkrumah and his political visions were being paid their due respect or not, or whether certain quotations from Akan cultural symbols were an expression of legitimate pride

in indigenous cultural traditions or a sign of Asante hegemonic aspirations, may well strengthen national consciousness and indirectly deepen a sense of commonality.⁴⁹

Charles Turner's (2006: 209) observation that 'a national tradition ... may consist in an extended argument that a nation conducts with itself about the good internal to that tradition ... or in extreme cases about whether there is such a tradition at all' could almost be regarded as a motto for the Ghana@50 celebrations. In any case, there is no doubt that Independence Day will continue to be celebrated in the future. As an historical turning point it quite clearly fulfills the criteria that according to Lyn Spillman (2003) are shared by all robust festivals: controversies notwithstanding, all parties refer to the same moment of Ghana's 'birth', because it can serve to anchor competing political projects and legitimate the corresponding visions for the future. The Independence Day celebrations therefore can accommodate the projective identifications of all Ghanaians and might thus indeed serve to foster national unity – a hypothesis that, however, still needs to be corroborated by further research and by comparative studies of independence day celebrations in other African countries.

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- 1 In 1982, however, J. J. Rawlings, who assumed power on 31 December 1981, cancelled the Independence Day silver jubilee celebrations, arguing that ‘the celebration that had been insensitively planned by that regime [the PNP government under Dr Hilla Limann] would perhaps have given joy to the few who had been scandalously plundering this nation’s resources, but for the ordinary man, woman, child of this country, there would could only have been mourning’. Rawlings declared that the silver jubilee should instead be celebrated during the entire year by firmly working towards ‘true national independence’ and putting the ‘process of national rescue... on a firm and irreversible footing’ (quoted in ‘The cancelled Mar. 6, 1982 silver jubilee celebrations’, *The Crusading Guide*, 6 Mar. 2007).
 - 2 For some of these events, see details on the official Ghana@50 website, www.ghana50gov.gh/ghana50/index.php (accessed 28 Aug. 2007). Many foreign institutions, too, participated in one way or another in Ghana’s independence celebrations; for the German contribution to the festivities, see the Jubilee web-page organised by the German Embassy, <http://www.ghana.diplo.de/Vertretung/ghana/en/Startseite.html> (accessed 5 Sep. 2007). For an eye-witness account, including some photographs, of the celebrations in Accra on Mar. 5 and 6, 2007, see Lentz and Budniok 2007a and 2007b. A preliminary version of some of the ideas discussed in this paper was published as Lentz and Budniok 2007b.
 - 3 Among other activities, I attended several of the Jubilee lectures and plays at the Conference Centre, various programmes at the University of Ghana, and a conference organised by the Historical Society of Ghana during the run-up to the peak of the celebrations. I also witnessed two festive parliamentary sittings, one in February 2007, during which President John Kufuor delivered the ‘Message on the State of the Nation’ – an annual affair, but in this Jubilee year a particularly solemn occasion – and one in March, on the eve of Independence Day, which re-enacted the historical final session of the colonial legislative assembly in 1957. I spent most of the morning of March 6 on Independence Square, mixing with journalists around the press stand and on the stands where the parliamentarians were sitting. Later I was invited to participate in various

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- family celebrations, and accompanied friends to the drinking spot where many Northerners in Accra often ‘hang out’. All these and further occasions provided opportunities for many informal conversations on the Jubilee. In addition, I extensively collected newspaper articles, including ‘news’, ‘editorials’ and ‘letters to the editor’ that pertained to the celebrations. On the specific observational strategies and the methodological problems connected with them, see the account in Lentz and Budniok 2007b.
- 4 An example of the Ghanaian Jubilee as potential ‘travelling model’ comes from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Dr Isidore Ndaywel è Nziem, a Congolese historian who was appointed to the scientific advisory council that is to advise President Kabila on the upcoming independence celebrations of 30 June 2010, related that after Kabila returned from his visit to Ghana for the peak of her Jubilee celebrations, he told the council members that he very much admired the Ghanaian celebrations and wanted the Congolese organisers to emulate this example (Dr Ndaywel, personal communication, 29 Jan. 2009).
 - 5 D’Almeida-Topor (1999) offers a brief overview of independence declarations in Francophone West Africa, but does not address the subsequent commemorations of independence. In a similar vein, Mbodj (1999) analyses the festive declaration of independence in Gambia in 1965 as an instance of an ‘invented tradition’, but does not carry his analysis beyond 1965. Koffi (1999), on the other hand, offers an interesting description, but hardly any analysis of colonial and post-colonial celebrations in Lomé. Ansu-Kyeremeh (2004) promises an analysis of the role of broadcasting for Ghana’s independence celebrations, but actually only enumerates the ‘chaotic dates of a nation caught in its own subjugated and dominated past’ (2004: 103) in passing and instead castigates at length the privatisation of mass media for ‘deepening... foreign domination’ and eroding ‘Ghanaian symbolism of nationhood’ (2004: 101); Akyeampong and de-Graft Aikin (2008) offer interesting personal reflections on the exclusivity of the Golden Jubilee celebrations in Ghana, dominated by male elite Ghanaians, but no full-fledged study. Rathbone (2008) discusses the ‘particular embarrassment’ that Kufuor’s government faced, having to commemorate a historical moment that was ‘obscured by messy politics’ (2008: 705–6), but offers no analysis of the Jubilee celebrations as such. Akuupa (2008) seems to be one of the few scholars who currently conducts in-depth research on independence day celebrations, namely in Namibia.
 - 6 For a fuller discussion of the (North) American and Australian centennial and bicentennial celebrations see Spillman 1997. For an interesting example of the degree to which organisers of national holidays are able to mobilise mass participation depends on prevailing political interests and of how the festivities may be boycotted altogether, see Schneider’s (1995) study of political festivals in nineteenth century Rhineland (Germany). Various contributions in Behrenbeck and Nützenadel’s (2000) comparative volume on Italian and German national days demonstrate the enormous difficulties that festival organisers face in creating consensus and suppressing, or accommodating, dissenting visions of the nation.
 - 7 Harzeesingh (2004) and Schneider (1995), for instance, demonstrate how local civic ‘patriotic associations’ in France and Germany sometimes challenged state administrators’ ideas of what constituted proper festive organisation; Beezley’s (2008) study of nation-building in Mexico highlights the contribution of a local community-based popular festive culture to the growing sense of belonging to one nation.
 - 8 In his analysis of the American Vietnam War Memorial, Bodnar (1992) has shown how the commemoration of national historical events has, in recent times, become ‘pluralised’ and, to a certain extent, individualised. More generally on the history of ‘pre-national’, ‘national’ and current ‘post-national’ practices of commemoration, see Gillis (1994).
 - 9 In order to facilitate communication among scholars interested in research on the upcoming jubilees, I have created an e-mail mailing list that has been operating for two years now; for further information and subscription, see <http://www.ifeas.uni-mainz.de/ethno/ethno1/Lentz.html>. Since October 2009, a research group of five doctoral students at the Department of Anthropology and African Studies, University of Mainz, has been exploring the poetics and politics of national commemoration in Africa. In cooperation with a project of supervised fieldwork of masters students, comparative research will be conducted on the Golden Jubilees of independence in Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Gabon, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Madagascar, Mali and Nigeria. See <http://www.ifeas.uni-mainz.de/info/PRODoktoranden.html> for more information.
 - 10 Dr Kwabena Adjei, National Chairman of the NDC, quoted in ‘Ghana@50: Prof. Mills storms Independence Square today’, *The Democrat* 6 Mar., 2007.
 - 11 President Evans Atta Mills, in his ‘State of the Nation’ address to parliament, 19 Feb. 2009, <http://www.africanelections.orf/ghana/features/page.php?news=2728> (accessed 18 Nov. 2009).
 - 12 *The Ghanaian Journal*, 22 Feb. 2009, in <http://www.modernghana.com/news/203528/1/npp-tp-crash-dr-kwame-nkrumah-founders-day-initiat.html> (accessed 17 Nov. 2009).
 - 13 *The Democrat*, 6 Mar. 2007.
 - 14 *The Chronicle* 30 Jan. 2007.

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- 15 *The Chronicle*, 1 Feb. 2007.
- 16 The 'Big Six' are the UGCC politicians detained by the British as allegedly responsible for the riots after the ex-servicemen's protest on 28 February 1948: Kwame Nkrumah, Edward Akuffo Addo, Obetsebi Lamptey, William Ofori-Atta, Ako Adjei, and J. B. Danquah.
- 17 'Govt not playing down Nkrumah's contribution', *Daily Graphic*, 3 Mar. 2007. For earlier articles in the same vein, see 'Accord Nkrumah honour and recognition', *Daily Graphic*, 27 Feb. 2007; editorial 'Nkroful on board', *Daily Graphic*, 27 Feb. 2007; and 'Foundation to rescue Nkrumah's heritage launched', *Daily Graphic*, 1 Mar. 2007. On heritage politics more generally, see 'Ghana: an African country's odyssey through 50 years', *Daily Graphic*, 22 Feb. 2007; 'We must preserve heritage sites', *Daily Graphic*, 22 Feb. 2007; and 'Let's build monuments for past leaders', *Daily Graphic*, 2 Mar. 2007.
- 18 'Nkrumah's overthrow dashed our hopes – Delle', *Daily Graphic*, 26 Feb. 2007.
- 19 The male elite bias in commemoration has been discussed by Akeyampong and de-Graft Aikin 2008. See also, 'Africa, not Ghana's independence@50: what Africa's heroines did not fight for', *Daily Graphic*, 6 Mar. 2007. See also reports on the demand for monuments that honour women's contributions to independence, 8 Mar. 2007, on <http://www.ghanaweb.com> (accessed 23 Oct. 2009); *Daily Graphic* and other newspapers also published articles on the biographies of various 'makers of history', like the designer of the national flag, the composer of the national anthem, etc. See, for instance, 'Makers of history', *Daily Graphic* 5 Mar. 2007.
- 20 For a more broadly disseminated attempt at representing historical developments, see the *Daily Graphic's* publications immediately prior to and after Independence: 'In the beginning was Paa Grant and the UGCC' (14 Feb. 2007), 'Evolution of parliamentary democracy in Ghana: and a new day dawned' (21 Feb. 2007), 'Fifty years of hopes and fears' (26 Feb. 2007), 'Nkrumah to Kufuor: how far has Ghana gone?' (7 Mar. 2007), 'Nkrumah put premium on dev of women' (14 Mar. 2007), 'From King George V to President Kufuor' (4 Apr. 2007), '50 years of nationhood: achievements, challenges and the future' (25 Apr. 2007), '50 years of nationhood (2): deep rooted injurious cultural practices must go' (16 May 2007), all in *Daily Graphic – Jubilee Graphic*; also almost the entire *Daily Graphic* issue of 5 Mar. 2007 was devoted to the history of Independence and the Independence celebrations of 1957.
- 21 *Daily Graphic*, 26 Feb. 2007, in an article on interviews with members of the National Reconciliation Commission that was set up to investigate past violations of human rights by the Rawlings' regime and others, and to make recommendations towards reconciliation.
- 22 'Reconsider decision to boycott sittings', *Daily Graphic*, 9 Feb. 2007. See also, 'Minority boycott test of democracy', *Daily Graphic*, 9 Feb. 2007.
- 23 For the development of the reconciliation talks and public discussions, see 'NDC not happy with celebration programme', *Daily Graphic*, 19 Jan. 2007; 'Use Golden Jubilee to facilitate reconciliation', *Daily Graphic*, 26 Feb. 2007; 'Cause of disunity in the country: blame it on politics, Prof. Ayee declares', *Daily Graphic*, 2 Mar. 2007; 'President extends hand to all', *Daily Graphic*, 3 Mar. 2007.
- 24 Press release by Jerry John Rawlings on 5 Mar. 2007, published on the internet at: <http://www.modernghana.com/GhanaHome/NewsArchive> (accessed 15 Sep. 2007). See also 'NDC to participate', *Daily Graphic*, 5 Mar. 2007; 'Rawlings' absence at anniversary parade is regrettable – Prof. Ayee', *Daily Graphic*, 6 Mar. 2007; 'Ghana@50 & the Rawlings paradox', and further articles in *The Guide*, 6–12 Mar. 2007.
- 25 During much of parade, I sat in one of the 'VIP' stands among NDC parliamentarians and party leaders, and was able to tape-record parts of Atta-Mill's interview.
- 26 Dr Charles Wereko-Brobby was made the Chief Executive Officer of the Ghana@50 Jubilee Committee, working under the authority of Kwadwo Mpiani, the Minister of Presidential Affairs and Chief of Staff. Wereko-Brobby, however, is generally not regarded as politically neutral, to say the least, and is certainly a controversial figure in Ghana.
- 27 See, for instance, 'The country's Golden Jubilee celebrations C'ttee will be transparent', *Daily Graphic*, 21 Feb. 2007; 'Parliament puts Charles Brobby on the carpet', *Daily Graphic*, 26 Feb. 2007; 'From the show boy files' by George Sydney Abugri, *Daily Graphic*, 2 Mar. 2007.
- 28 For more details on the 1957 organisation of events, see e.g. Ayensu and Darkwa (1999), and Rathbone (2008: 713–6).
- 29 For a verbatim account of the various interventions during the Commemorative Golden Jubilee Sitting of 5 Mar. 2007, see *Parliamentary Debates*, Official Report, Fourth Series, Vol. 55, No. 20.
- 30 For more on this intense, revealing debate, which for reasons of space cannot be discussed further here, see the various articles at <http://modernghan.com/news> (22, 26 and 27 Feb. 2009; 17 and 19 Sep. 2009; and 20 Oct. 2009), and at <http://www.graphicghana.com/> (4 and 21 Sep. 2009).

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- 31 This however did not correspond to the official press statements later made by the NDC, in which the NDC Chairman, for example, criticised the inadequate organisation of events, but then went on to expressly praise the ‘impressive nature of the large crowd which attended the parade’; ‘Reactions to Jubilee celebration’, *Daily Graphic*, 12 Mar. 2007.
- 32 On the ‘clean-up’ exercise, see ‘Accra should be dressed up for celebrations’, *Daily Graphic*, 11 Nov. 2006; ‘The massive Jubilee clean-up exercise’, *The Chronicle*, 18. Jan. 2007; and ‘Ministry to clear streets of lunatic, destitute’, *Daily Graphic*, 26 Feb. 2007. On the human rights’ organisations’ critique, see ‘Government asked to have respect for human rights during nation’s 50th Independence Anniversary’, *The Chronicle*, 12 Mar. 2007.
- 33 See, for instance, ‘Ghanaians don’t feel Ghana@50 celebrations’, *Daily Graphic*, 21 Feb. 2007; ‘Let’s all contribute towards Golden Jubilee’, *Daily Graphic*, 22 Feb. 2007; ‘Involve grassroots in Jubilee celebrations’, *Daily Graphic*, 28 Feb. 2007; ‘Ghana at 50; what exactly are we celebrating?’ *The Chronicle*, 6 Mar. 2007; ‘The illusion and reality of nationhood’, *Daily Graphic*, 30 Apr. 2007.
- 34 ‘Anybody but Wereko-Brobby’, *The Chronicle*, 1 Aug. 2006.
- 35 ‘A look back @ March 2007’, *The Chronicle*, 29 May 2007.
- 36 ‘Ghana@50 in arrears; already spent \$60 million’, Ghana News Agency, 26 Jan. 2009; <http://www.ghanaweb.com> (accessed 27 Jan. 2009).
- 37 ‘CJA declares positive defiance’, *The Chronicle*, 20 Feb. 2007.
- 38 *Ghanaian Times*, 1 Mar. 2007.
- 39 ‘Group advises CJA against its intended march’, *Daily Graphic*, 20 Feb. 2007; on the march, see also ‘Court stops CJA’, *Daily Graphic*, 2 Mar. 2007; and ‘CJA loses again’, *Daily Graphic*, 3 Mar. 2007.
- 40 See, for instance, complaints from the Upper West Region, ‘Upper West in darkness about Ghana@50’, *Daily Graphic*, 10 Feb. 2007; and the Jubilee Secretariat’s standard assurance ‘Jubilee funds for all regions – Wereko-Brobby’, *Daily Graphic*, 21 Feb. 2007.
- 41 On the Freedom Flame, see ‘Freedom Flame begins journey from Wa to Accra’, *Daily Graphic*, 20 Feb. 2007; ‘Freedom Flame arrives in Accra’, *Daily Guide*, 6 Mar. 2007.
- 42 Another pertinent example is the peculiar fusion of European, Akan and ne-traditional styles in the Seat of State, on which the President sits when delivering an address in parliament; for details on this, see Lentz 2008.
- 43 Interview conducted by Jan Budniok with Jones Kugblenu, Director of Public Affairs (Parliament), Accra, 22 May 2007.
- 44 On the aesthetics and history of the Nkrumah statue, see Hess 2000: 35, 48, 54.
- 45 See, for instance, ‘The President’s attire on March 6’, *Daily Graphic* 14 Mar. 2007; some contributions to the ‘clothing’ debate can be found on <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/features/artikel.php?>: ‘Kufuor’s suit at Ghana@50 parade’ (14 Mar. 2007); ‘President Kufuor and the Kente myth’ (14 Mar. 2007), ‘Comment: Oyokoba please read this’ (14 Mar. 2007); all accessed 7 Sept. 2007. See also ‘Kuffuor’s clothing and Ghana’s agenda setting’, <http://www.blogger.com/feeds/4086309023051813855/posts/default>; all accessed 7 Sep. 2007.
- 46 ‘Comment: misplaced priorities of Ghanaians’, 15 Mar. 2007; <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/features/artikel.php?> (accessed 7 Sep. 2007).
- 47 For more details, see, for instance, ‘Veep salutes Zongos at Ghana@50 durbar’, *Daily Guide*, 6 Mar. 2007; and ‘Zongo communities hold durbar to mark Jubilee’, *Daily Graphic*, 6 Mar. 2007.
- 48 This was rather different in the German Ghanaian diaspora’s Jubilee celebrations in Berlin, as Nieswand 2008 shows; one of the reasons for this difference may be that these celebrations were mainly aimed at a different public, namely Germans who were to be treated to a ‘show’ of the richness and diversity of Ghanaian culture(s).
- 49 This sense of commonality is also closely connected with the desire to be proud of Ghana’s image on the international stage. The presence of the diplomatic corps and representatives of other nation-states during the celebrations received extensive media coverage, and indeed much of the money voted by government for the festivities was justified with the necessity to provide decent accommodation and transport for the foreign dignitaries. National unity, in this field, is constituted according to the well-known principles of segmentary opposition, namely that fault lines dividing Ghanaians ‘internally’ are suspended when it comes to presenting the country vis-à-vis the world at large. A closer examination of these issues is beyond the scope of this paper, but they are certainly worth further scrutiny.