# Ghanaian Migrants in Germany and the Social Construction of Diaspora

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**Abstract**

This article explores diasporic discourses and practices among Ghanaian migrants in Germany. Instead of presuming that 'diaspora' is a stringent theoretical concept or refers to a bounded group in a sociological sense, it is argued that it provides migrants with a grammar of practice that allows for the situational and contextual construction of different types of 'diasporas'. Empirically, three social sites of construction are identified. Firstly, the Ghanaian nation-state and the reconfiguration of Ghanaian nationalism play an important role for promoting diasporic discourses. Secondly, the discourse of development and 'charity rituals' of ethnic and 'hometown' associations are of particular relevance for the proliferation of Ghanaian 'diasporas'. Thirdly, Ghanaian chieftaincies are involved in diasporic activities. The article is based on data collected in thirteen months of multi-sited ethnography conducted in Germany and Ghana between 2001 and 2003 and the analysis of video tapes, newspaper articles and web pages.

**Keywords**

diaspora, Ghana, Germany, migration, long-distance nationalism, hometown associations, chieftaincy, transnationalism

## Les migrants ghanéens en Allemagne et la construction sociale de la diaspora

**Résumé**

Cet article explore les discours diasporiques et les pratiques trouvées parmi les migrants ghanéens en Allemagne. Plutôt que de présumer que la « diaspora » est un concept théorique strict ou fait référence à un groupe délimité dans un sens sociologique, il est soutenu qu'il fournit une grammaire de pratiques qui permet la construction situationnelle et contextuelle de différents types de « diasporas ». Empiriquement, trois lieux de construction sociale sont identifiés. Premièrement l'Etat-nation ghanéen et la reconfiguration du nationalisme ghanéen jour un rôle important pour promouvoir des discours diasporiques. Deuxièmement, le discours du développement et des « rituels de charité » des associations ethniques et des « villes natales » a une pertinence particulière pour la prolifération des « diasporas » ghanéennes. Troisièmement, les chefferies des tribus

ghanéennes sont impliquées dans les activités de la diaspora. Empiriquement, cet article se base sur treize mois d'ethnographie, conduite en Allemagne et au Ghana entre 2001 et 2003, et sur l'analyse de bandes-vidéos, d'articles de journaux et de sites web.

## Introduction

The notion of diaspora evokes emotions of belonging to a distant 'homeland' and ideas of a geographically dispersed community linked by blood and culture. It 'reconciles' the fact of residence in one locality with an idea of belonging to somewhere else.

It appears that the global career of the concept of diaspora is linked to the fact that it gives a meaningful social form to often ambiguous and complex pathways of migrant inclusion in different socio-spatial contexts. The inflationary use of the term by migrant and minority populations invites empirical studies of how particular discourses are constructed, how different actors use them and how they articulate to different political and social contexts.

The empirical case of Ghanaians in Germany is of interest because a transnational institutional infrastructure emerged here only recently to facilitate the construction of a Ghanaian diaspora. But beside the Ghanaian nation-state, which has made significant efforts to promote a diaspora policy in the last decade, also 'traditional' Ghanaian states and their royal representatives have made efforts to include transcontinental migrants. While migrants can gain symbolic recognition and political influence by participating in diasporic discourses and practices (cf. Goldring 1998; Mohan 2006), institutions and persons in Ghana are particularly interested in the migrants' economic capital, which has become one of the major sources of foreign currency in Ghana. According to the IMF (2005: 7), private remittances to Ghana increased from US$ 500 million in 2000 to US$ 1.3 billion in 2004 and amounted to 15 percent of the Gross National Product. Different from more conflict and war-riddled countries, in the Ghanaian case, collective diaspora activities of migrant associations normally evolve around a relatively apolitical discourse of development.

## Diaspora

Analytically, the notion of diaspora was employed in the broader anthropological and sociological discourse to conceptualise pre-national, national and

post-national forms of cross-border interconnections and identities of migrant and minority populations (Cohen 1997: 520). Most importantly, the term was influenced by Jewish history, in which it originally referred to the forced dispersion and enslavement of the Jews after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in the 6th century BC (Cohen 1997: 3-5). During the 20th century, the Jewish experience of diaspora culminated in the Shoah and the foundation of the state of Israel, which both left their impact in the semantic connotation of the term. Apart from the Jewish case, the term diaspora was also prominently applied to the experiences of forced migration of Africans in the context of the slave trade, Irish emigration during the 19th century and the forced migration of Armenians after their deportation by the Turkish army to Syria and Mesopotamia in 1915 (Cohen 1997: 27-28).

In the last decades, the notion of diaspora has been successively expanded and applied to all kinds of migrant or minority populations that maintained a certain consciousness of originating from 'somewhere else.' Within this process of semantic opening, the notion of victimhood, which was central in the Jewish and the Afro-American narratives of diaspora, was sometimes supplemented by a notion of resistance against state policies of assimilation (Clifford 1994; Hall 1990) or it was replaced by a more descriptive usage that plainly referred to transnational ways of belonging (Akyeampong 2000; Koser 2003; Sheffer 1995).

Altogether, at least three elements can be identified that have contributed to the career of the term diaspora in the field of migration studies during the 1980s and 1990s:

Firstly, it provides a conceptual framework that is able to grasp the generation-spanning maintenance of minority identities and transnational relationships. The narrative of persistence of diasporas offers an alternative to the assimilationist narrative of successive dissolution of ethnic difference and transnational social relationships.

Secondly, the existence of diasporic social fields and the circulation of culture within them gave evidence of the fact that cultural features and identities could be produced and reproduced over long geographical and temporal distances among dispersed populations. In doing so, the term diaspora linked up with the anthropological critique of holistic and territorialised models of culture (i.e. Appadurai 1996; Gupta and Ferguson 1992).

Thirdly, the discourse of diaspora resonated with the academic criticism of Western modernity (Bauman 1991; Foucault 1983; Wimmer 2002). The experiences of several diasporic groups revealed the violent elements of minority-major-

ity relationships and assimilation policies, which were often underrepresented in the official representations of national histories. In this sense, diasporic histories are often a critical comment on the Western narrative of modernisation and rationalisation (Clifford 1994; Gilroy 1993; Hall 1990).

Probably the most fundamental point of critique of the concept of diaspora is that it does not distinguish between identity discourses and actual groups (Brubaker 2005; Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002: 324). It was argued that by taking a group's self-description as a diaspora at face value, the scientific observers reify a holistic and essentialist imaginary of large and internally diverse populations as communities. Brubaker (2005: 15) advocated in this context to study the impact of diasporic discourses on social reality instead of reifying them as scientific concepts. Following up on Brubaker's argumentation, I will examine in the following the empirical modes of how an imaginary of a Ghanaian diaspora is constructed.[1]

In Ghana two historical layers of diaspora discourses co-exist. Going back to the Gold Coast's role in the transatlantic slave trade and Nkrumah's commitment to Pan-Africanism, Ghana is one of the focal points of Afro-American 'roots tourism' on the African continent (Commander 2007; Gaines 2005; Lake 1995; Schramm 2004). Only recently has the diaspora discourse become expanded to transcontinental Ghanaian labour migrants. Nevertheless, the 'new' diaspora discourse[2] has a much larger impact on the political field in Ghana. While the inclusion of Afro-Americans often remains rhetorical, state representatives are much more interested in the practical incorporation of transcontinental migrants with Ghanaian citizenship.

Parallel to the increase in the significance of the diaspora discourse for the political field, it was also used in the academic literature on migration from Ghana (Akyeampong 2000; Van Hear 1998: 204-211; Takyi 1999). Recently the term became more important in the field of development studies and development cooperation. In this context it was used to highlight migrants' contributions to social and economic development in Ghana and other parts of Africa (Mohan 2006; Koser 2003: 6-7).

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[1] The point that different empirical forms of diasporas exist and should be studied in a comparative analytical framework has been frequently made in academic literature on diasporas (i.e. Butler 2000; Byfield 2000; Cohen 1997; Koser 2003; Schramm 2008). Nevertheless, I found that Brubaker most clearly distinguishes between analytical concepts and empirical objects of study.

[2] The 'new' diaspora discourse on transcontinental Ghanaian labour migrants included semantic imports from the 'older' diaspora discourse of African Americans (cf. Schramm 2008: 9).

**Ghanaians in Germany**

At the time of its independence in 1957 the prosperous south of Ghana was not an emigration but an immigration area. Labour migrants from different parts of West Africa migrated in the search of jobs to Ghanaian cities, cocoa plantations and mines (Caldwell 1969; Rouch 1956). In the mid-1960s it was estimated that between 10 and 15 percent of the population was born outside the country (Peil 1974: 369).

In the course of Ghana's severe post-independence political and economic crisis the direction of migration was gradually reversed. First, 'foreigners' left the country, partly due to their expulsion in 1969 (Peil 1971). Ghanaians started to leave the country in larger numbers in the 1970s. Recent estimations assume that between 5 and 20 percent of the Ghanaian population lives outside their country of birth, which amounts to a number of between one and four million people (Peil 1995: 365; International Monetary Fund 2005: 7).

During the 1970s and early 1980s, most Ghanaian migrants went to other African countries, in particular Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire, in search of work. An estimated one million Ghanaians worked in Nigeria as teachers, physicians, nurses, artisans, petty traders, construction workers and workers in the oil industry during the oil boom of the 1970s. As a political reaction to Nigeria's economic crisis, hundreds of thousands of Ghanaians were expelled in 1983 and 1985 (Adepoju 1986; Brydon 1985). In 1983 an estimated 700,000 returned to Ghana at the nadir of its recent history. Beside political instability, violence and economic chaos, Ghana had suffered a serious drought and disastrous bush fires destroyed food and cash crop plantations all over the country. Many refugees reinvested their savings from work in Nigeria into leaving Ghana again (Van Hear 1998: 204). Since alternatives that could have provided sufficient material and political security were rare at this time, many travelled to Western Europe, although this often meant a devaluation of the migrants' cultural and social capital, like language skills, educational degrees and work experiences.

The great majority of the more than 20,000 documented Ghanaian migrants that came to Germany did so after the end of foreign labour recruitment in 1973. This means that most of them did not enter Germany as legal labour migrants but by other means, in particular as asylum seekers, as tourists, as students, as undocumented migrants or in the framework of family reunion. Until 1993, asylum seeking was a major avenue for Ghanaians and many other migrants for attaining a temporary legal status in Germany that was often transferred into a more permanent legal status by other means. Between 1977

and 1993 the official numbers of Ghanaians in Germany grew from 3,275 to 25,952.[3] During the 1980s and the early 1990s between 1,700 and almost 7,000 Ghanaians applied annually for asylum in Germany.

German anti-migration policy, which reacted to the sharp increase in asylum seekers, cumulated in 1993 when article 16 of the German constitution, which guaranteed the right of asylum, was changed. This year also marks a caesura in the recent history of documented Ghanaian migration to Germany. Ghana became one of eight countries that were reclassified as safe countries of origin in the annex of the German asylum procedure law. Since then, it has been practically impossible for Ghanaians to obtain political asylum in Germany and the decision-making process has been substantially accelerated. Partly as a result of these policies, partly as a reaction to Germany's own economic problems after reunification, the official numbers of Ghanaians in Germany declined from more than 25,000 in 1992 to 20,600 in 2006.

Roughly three phases of Ghanaian migration to Germany can be distinguished, the period between the late-1950s and the mid-1970s, when the relatively small Ghanaian population in Germany was dominated by students, the period between the mid-1970s and 1993 when the asylum law was for many Ghanaians a major way of achieving a temporary legal status and the phase between 1993 and today in which a tendency towards diversification of the Ghanaian population in Germany in terms of duration of stay, age, gender and legal and socio-economic status can be observed. On the one hand, larger parts of the Ghanaian population, who have often lived for more than 20 years in Germany, have legally and socially 'accommodated' themselves in Germany. This tendency of localisation becomes visible in the increase in families and in 'second generation' Ghanaians, the activities of migrant organisations, the foundation of churches and the spread of shops adapted to the specific demands of African migrants (Nieswand 2008: 113-151; Tonah 2007). On the other hand, a larger and sometimes very mobile group of undocumented Ghanaian migrants exists that lacks possibilities for achieving a secure legal status.

## The Ghanaian 'diaspora' and the Nation-State

In Ghana migrants to Western Europe were viewed with suspicion during the Rawlings[4] period because many of them claimed political asylum and were

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[3] Source: Statistisches Bundesamt, 2008.
[4] J.J. Rawlings was the leader of two coup d'états in 1979 and 1981. He was in power from 1981 until 2000 in different functions, including that of a democratically elected President.

suspected to be supporters of the opposition. In the last ten to fifteen years, the discourse has changed fundamentally (Mohan 2006: 878-879). Although "brain drain" is still raised as a complaint in the context of the emigration of physicians and nurses, it is often highlighted that migrants' remittances and their loyalty to the Ghanaian nation-state are a resource for the development of the country.[5] In particular, the NPP government led by President J.A. Kufuor pursued an active pro-diaspora policy when it took over power in 2000 (Owusu 2003: 406). It introduced dual citizenship in order to give Ghanaians the possibility to acquire the citizenship of the receiving country without losing the Ghanaian one. In 2001 a "homecoming summit" was organised in which the President and several ministers of state participated. In this framework, they discussed with affluent Ghanaian migrants how 'the diaspora' could contribute to the development of the country. As a result the Non-Resident Ghanaian Secretariat was established in 2003, which was to co-ordinate 'diaspora' activities and communication processes. Another step aiming at the promotion of migrants' inclusion was the so-called Representation of the People Amendment Act, which was passed by the Ghanaian parliament in February 2006 granting Ghanaian citizens who live outside the country the right to vote. Moreover, Obetsebi-Lamptey became the first Ghanaian Minister of Tourism and Diasporian Relations in 2006.[6]

By employing the concept of diaspora and creating state institutions for migrant inclusion, Ghana has adapted its discourse of national belonging to the conditions of mass migration and to its own economic dependency on migrant remittances. This process of adjustment included an essential modification of the political definition of citizenship.[7]

These changes do not only serve the state's economic interests in the migrants but also migrants' aspiration of participating in and having an impact on the Ghanaian political field. In this respect the diaspora policies create new opportunities for Ghanaians in the receiving countries. An ethnographic example of how these policies affect migrants' organisations is the founding in 2002 of the Ghana Community in Berlin – a voluntary association, which claims to represent the Ghanaians in the city.

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[5] Cf. The Statesman, 06.01.2007: http://www.thestatesmanonline.com/pages/news_detail.php?newsid=1913&section=1.€.

[6] The term 'diaspora' in the name of the ministry refers to both the 'African-American diaspora' as well as to the 'Ghanaian diaspora.'

[7] Before Ghana, several other emigration countries from the 'South', such as the Philippines, Mexico and Haiti (i.e. Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994; Smith 1998), had already introduced political measures to facilitate the political inclusion of transnational migrants.

In the late 1980s the Ghana Union, the predecessor of the Ghana Community, started its activities as a self-help organisation of Ghanaian non-student migrants, often asylum seekers. At this time the suicides of two young Ghanaian men who were facing legal difficulties in Germany had emotionalised the atmosphere among the Ghanaians in the city. Steven Owusu, who was involved in the founding of the Ghana Union described the situation as follows:

> Actually, we took this decision at the cemetery. A Ghanaian who was living here died suddenly. According to the rumours, he was so depressed that he jumped into a canal and died. (…) Finally, we heard from the police: "This boy is going to be buried." (…) But when we went to the cemetery at the time they gave us [sic] – about 10 o'clock – they told us, "The person has been buried already." (…) So we actually stood there, looked at each other's faces and said, "So! Is that how they are going to die in Germany, here?" (…) So, we had to get ourselves organised. We had to form a group of union.[8]

The fact that the man had killed himself because of the legal and economic predicaments he encountered in Germany and was buried without others having the chance to pay their last respects was a poignant marker of the widespread feelings of insecurity and vulnerability among Ghanaians in Berlin. The constitutive significance of funerals for the idea of personhood in the Ghanaian context (cf. Fortes 1987 [1973]) contributed all the more to generating an emotionally agitated atmosphere.

A main function of the Ghana Union was to be a mediator between the migrants and the German administration in problematic cases, like deaths, deportations or arrests. Its activities were particularly important because the relationship between the migrants and the Ghanaian embassy was tense during this period in which many claimed to be politically persecuted by the Ghanaian government.

> So they were without any support, any protection, and because they were asylum seekers they were reluctant to go to their embassies. They had the feeling or they were told that if (…) you are asylum seeker you have said something wrong about your government so you can't come to your embassy (…) and the embassy did also not come to them.[9]

In the mid-1990s the Ghana Union terminated its activities because of management problems and internal conflicts. In fact, at this time many of the former asylum seekers had attained a relatively secure legal status in Berlin and the relations to the embassy had improved themselves. Therefore, the decline

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of the Ghana Union reflected in some sense the relative loss of its functional importance.

In 2002 a new voluntary association of Ghanaians in Berlin was founded, which was called the Ghana Community in order to distinguish it from the Ghana Union and the conflicts that had led to its dissolution. Nevertheless, since the core activists of the former Ghana Union had the organisational know-how about how to set up a voluntary self-help institution in accordance with German bureaucracy, they were of strategic importance in founding the Ghana Community.

By 2002 the relationship of the Ghanaian embassy to the migrants had changed profoundly. The representatives of the embassy who were sent to Germany after 2000 carried out a much more active diaspora policy in Germany than their predecessors. Rowland Issifu Alhassan, the Ghanaian ambassador to Germany between 2001 and 2006, and members of his staff promoted the idea of the foundation of local 'diaspora' associations as well as of a national umbrella organisation at meetings with migrants in different cities.

The embassy was interested in local counterparts, which could, with some legitimacy, represent the migrants in German cities with significant Ghanaian populations. These associations provided their core group members, often older men with a higher education, with the possibility to get their interests and issues, like citizenship issues, passport and visa fees, tax and customs regulations, communicated to Ghanaian state officials. On public occasions other persons, such as undocumented migrants, used the social space created by the associations to address their specific problems and to ask for more active support on the part of the embassy.

Between 2002 and 2003, which was a period of significant activity for the Ghana Community in Berlin, a number of public events and meetings were organised. Generally, the association's activities were not limited to 'diaspora issues' as they had multiple addressees, including German politicians.

After the initial period, the main function of the Ghana Community became to produce formal legitimation for a small network of relatively established migrants to organise 'diaspora' events in the name of the Ghanaian population in Berlin and to mobilise audiences that could fill in the 'diaspora-slots' of the Ghanaian state.

The necessity for collaboration in this respect became obvious in the context of a meeting with the Ghanaian Minister for Economic Planning and Regional Integration, Dr. Kwesi Nduom, in August 2002. In his capacity as chairman of the National Development Planning Commission, Nduom met with Ghanaian citizens in order to "share ideas for the (…) development of

Ghana"[10] in all regions of Ghana as well as in Great Britain, the United States, South Africa and Germany. Nduom spoke of 'the diaspora' as equal to the regions of Ghana. In doing so, he paid symbolic recognition to the migrants as citizens and included them in the Ghanaian political field.

The fact that these discussions took place evidenced the reality of the diaspora discourse. The problem of how the thirty or forty mostly older male migrants, who attended the meeting in Berlin, related to what was perceived as the Ghanaian diaspora, was excluded from direct consideration. It was nevertheless included by referring to the institutional claims of the Ghana Community.

Another step in the construction of a Ghanaian diaspora in Germany was the foundation of the Union of Ghanaian Organisations in Germany (UGAG) in 2003.[11] In 2005 it consisted of 15 local associations. Practically, the UGAG fulfils co-ordinating functions, is involved in the celebration of Ghana-related events and supports charity activities of its member organisations. The Ghanaian embassy was made a permanent member of the union's advisory board, which confirms that the migrants themselves have an interest in intensifying communication with the embassy.

The history of the Ghana Community in Berlin and the development of the UGAG demonstrate that the main emphasis of the work of Ghanaian migrants' organisations has changed from self-help and protection against German anti-migration policies to transnational inclusion. Generally, diaspora associations such as the Ghana Community or the UGAG are multi-sided organisations that can connect to different audiences and socio-spatial units of reference in the receiving country as well as in the country of origin. Changes in the opportunity structures of inclusion can easily shift the accentuation from one field to another.[12]

Another incident in which the Ghana Community in Berlin functioned as an interface for long-distance nationalist activities was when the Ghanaian President John Agyekum Kufuor visited Germany with a delegation of ministers and private sector executives in 2002. Part of his official programme was, beside consultations with German government representatives, meetings with the 'Ghanaian diaspora' in Hamburg and Berlin.

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[10] Field protocol, 13.08.02, Berlin.

[11] National umbrella organisations of Ghanaians were recently founded in several Western European countries.

[12] For instance, the German *Land* of North Rhine-Westphalia, which has signed a co-operation contract with Ghana in 2007, actively supports the foundation of African diaspora organisations. This increases their chance to achieve recognition by public institutions in this *Land*.

When the President arrived in Berlin he was formally welcomed by a delegation of migrants at his hotel, where a youth dancing group performed 'traditional' Ghanaian dances and a member of the Ghana Community poured libation. At the evening meeting, three to four hundred migrants were present, including most 'dignitaries' of the 'Ghanaian community' in Berlin, including physicians, businesspeople and pastors. Two Ghanaian television teams and a local Ghanaian video filmmaker documented the event.

When the President and his delegation, which included the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, entered the room all participants stood up and sang the Ghanaian national anthem. The President and his delegation took a seat at the centre table around which representatives of the embassy and the organisation committee were positioned. A Ghanaian pastor spoke an opening prayer and the women's choir of the Ghanaian branch of the Seventh Day Adventists in Berlin sang a song to welcome the guests of honour. Afterwards the ambassador and two Ghanaian physicians from Berlin held speeches. Before the President started to speak a man dressed in a 'traditional' *kente* cloth enthusiastically introduced him in formal Twi like an Akan king. Cultural symbols originating from the context of chieftaincy were, half ironically and half seriously, used at different stages of the event to express the President's outstanding position.

Highlights in Kufuor's otherwise relatively 'antiseptic' speech about the development policy of his government were when he referred to the migrants' significance for their country of origin.

> What I intend to do tonight is not so much to give a speech to you but I rather want to interact and discuss with you (…) what we can do for the benefit of our country Ghana [cheerful applause of the audience]. (…) I will say a few words (…) about what my government is trying to do in Ghana and how Ghana looks to you as sons and daughters of Ghana to perform and to support the country.[13]

Kufuor created an imaginary of a transnational Ghanaian nation-state to whose development all Ghanaians, independently of their place of residence, could contribute. The applause confirmed that his gesture was appreciated by the audience. In his final remarks, Kufuor repeated this gesture of inclusion:

> I believe you continue to support your country, Ghana. I am sure that you continue to remit to Ghana. Because your remittances constitute, together with those of your brothers and sisters in America and in other parts of Europe, the third biggest factor in the national revenue [applause]. And I assure you that this government (…) will make you feel very

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[13] Video transcript, 05.06.02, Berlin.

proud to call yourself a Ghanaian. As you know the dual citizenship law is a reality. (…) And this will guarantee your right to vote back home.[14]

The applause with which the audience reacted to Kufuor's reference to the migrants' financial contributions expressed the attendees' desire to be formally recognised for their economic and social activities in Germany and Ghana. Generally, Kufuor depicted the migrants as a particularly respectable and honourable group of persons. The meeting with the President created a social space that provided the migrants with an arena for the enactment and experience of a positive status identity, which became ratified by the highest representative of the Ghanaian state himself.

Generally, personal meetings between Ghanaian politicians and migrants are part of the larger process of the transnationalisation of the Ghanaian political field. In this context, it was to be decided on the political level in how far the place of residence and the attainment of the citizenship of the receiving country should make a difference in terms of political rights in Ghana. Kufuor's government pursued in this regard a particularly inclusive policy. Migrants and government representatives argued that under the social and technical conditions of globalisation spatial distance should no longer be considered an obstacle to granting citizenship rights. Nevertheless, the emphasis of the differentiation between 'diaspora' and 'homeland' remained a basic element of the political discourse.

## The Imaginary of Development and the Proliferation of Diasporas

Although the political changes appear to be most significant on the national level, practically, the state is not able to monopolise the diverse flows of emotions, interests, resources and discourses out of which manifold diasporas situationally emerge and disappear. Different social units below the national level, ranging from schools, hometowns and ethnic groups to administrative regions in Ghana, recently became objects of diasporic discourses and practices. In the destination countries they often condense within voluntary migrants' associations. As already described for the example of the Ghana Community in Berlin, in the case of hometown and ethnic associations the focus also shifted from self-help to diasporic activities. The basic practice in which most migrant organisations and networks engage is some kind of fund-raising for the support of institutions in Ghana. Since periods of activity alternate with periods

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[14] Video transcript, 05.06.02, Berlin.

of inactivity, it is sometimes difficult to determine clear starting points and endpoints in the social lives of these organisations. Generally, most migrant associations participate in a general discourse on community development.

Many examples of development activities of Ghanaian migrants' associations can be found. For instance, the Asante Kruyo Kuo in Berlin collected money at different social occasions in order to buy medical equipment, which was sent to a hospital in the Ashanti Region in 2000.[15] In 2003, the Asanteman Union in Oberhausen donated money and goods to a hospital in Kumasi,[16] the Asante Union in Stuttgart handed over medical equipment to a representative of the *Asantehene*, and the association of the UK-based migrants from the Kwabre District in the Ashanti Region supported a hospital in Kumasi.[17] The union of migrants from Biemso No.1, another town in the Ashanti Region, who are resident in Canada and the USA, contributed money to the construction of a toilet facility, a school building and bulbs for the town's streetlights in 2003.[18] In 2004, the Ghana-German association Hanau donated money to three schools in Greater Accra.[19] The Jamasiman Kuo of New York and New Jersey raised money for the water supply of the town.[20] Migrants from Bompata in the Ashanti Region living in the USA donated money and equipment to the local health centre in 2005.[21] In the same year, former citizens of Asankrangwa in Ghana's Western Region resident in the United Kingdom handed over five computers and other equipment to the local Catholic Primary and Junior Secondary schools.[22] In 2006, the Asanteman Union in the Ruhr area in Germany donated equipment and money to the children's surgical ward of a hospital in Kumasi,[23] and in 2007 the association of Kwahu citizens in the United Kingdom supported the Presbyterian University of Akropong.[24]

These incidents are only arbitrary samples of some of the ongoing charity and development activities in which ethnic and hometown associations in Western Europe and North America are involved. Nevertheless, the list of

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[15]  Interview protocol, 07.09.02, Berlin.

[16]  www.ghanaweb.com: Diasporian News, 14.08.03.

[17]  www.ghanaweb.com: Diasporian News, 20.04.03.

[18]  www.ghanaweb.com: Diasporian News, 22.10.03.

[19]  www.ghanaweb.com: Diasporian News, 22.06.04.

[20]  www.ghanaweb.com. Diasporian News, 30.05.05.

[21]  www.ghanaweb.com: Diasporian News, 19.07.05.

[22]  www.ghanaweb.com: Diasporian News. 23.03.05.

[23]  www.ghanaweb.com: Diasporian News, 06.01.06.

[24]  www.ghanaweb.com: Diasporian News, 12.03.07.

cases reveals a pattern. Most charity activities target health care, education and local infrastructure, which are classical core activities of modern nation-states. Obviously, diaspora organisations represent themselves as collective actors who assume some of the responsibilities of the Ghanaian state.

Different from the immediate post-independence period, today state actors themselves emphasise the limited capacities of the state to develop the country. In the case of a migrant to Germany who donated an ambulance to the Walewale District Hospital in the north of Ghana, the Chief Executive of the region declared at the formal ceremony in which the ambulance was handed over that 'government alone could not provide all the social needs of the people in view of its numerous commitments.'[25]

The relativisation of the state's claims for being able to induce societal development appears to be the result of the neoliberal reforms of the last decades (cf. Barkan, *et al.* 1991; Mohan 2006: 877), on the one hand, and the general disappointment of the exaggerated post-independence hopes in the development state, on the other hand.

The climax of the migrants' activities is what can be called the *diasporic charity ritual*. During these public events representatives of migrant associations hand over donations to recipient institutions in Ghana. These performances can be understood as what Moore and Myerhoff called "secular rituals" (1977: 4). They translate central ideas and ideologies implied in the Ghanaian diaspora discourse into a set of formalised practices to thereby legitimise and evidence them at the same time.

The ceremonial contexts of collecting and donating resources provide migrants with social arenas in which they can gain recognition as affluent and generous patrons of 'their people at home.' The ratification of these identity claims by local authorities as well as by the media coverage of these events is a constituting part of a successful charity ritual.

A typical form of news coverage in a national newspaper was an article about the already mentioned donation of the Asanteman Union in Oberhausen in 2003:

> Speaking at the presentation ceremony, Mr. Peter Osei Sampenen, General Secretary of the Union, said the aims and objectives of the Union are to assist and support the efforts of the government to bring healthcare delivery to the doorsteps of every Ghanaian. (…) Mr I. Offeh Gymiah, Director of the Administration of the hospital, who received the

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[25] www.modernghana.com/news/33574/1/ghanaian-in-germany-donates-ambulance.html, 13.04.2003.

equipment, praised the member for their concern to improve upon health care delivery in the region and the nation as a whole.[26]

Despite the pronounced development rhetoric, which migrants as well as the addressees of charity activities use, it is sometimes unclear in how far activities framed as contributions to development can be considered as such in a practical sense. An incident that made this clear to me was the case of the alumni association from a school in Kumasi, which had raised funds through dinners and other occasions in the German Ruhr area in order to support their old school. In 2000 the association sent money and material to Ghana for the foundation of a German language centre, which was handed over to the schoolmaster by the president of the German chapter of the alumni association. When I visited the school in Kumasi in December 2001 and wanted to have a look at the German language centre, the schoolmaster explained to me that there was none. Since German is not part of the national curriculum, the Ghanaian state does not pay for German teachers. Moreover, it is difficult to find German teachers on the local labour market. According to the headmaster, it was not sure if they will ever start teaching German.[27]

This incident is not meant to discredit the migrants' efforts as such but to shift the attention to the distinction between discursive and practical aspects of development and to highlight that the symbolic dimension of the migrants' activities is sometimes only loosely coupled to their effectiveness, relevance and sustainability.[28] Many collective migrants' activities focus on a relative small number of more or less prestigious institutions in cities and towns, like well-known hospitals, schools or chieftaincies. The rural hinterland is less often the target of transnational charity activities. These patterns of selectivity reflect the high relevance of the symbolic dimension of these practices.

Generally, it seems that there are alternating trends of evaluating the nexus of migration and development. While in the 1950s and 1960s there was much optimism that rural-urban migration could stimulate development of the rural hinterland (Beals and Menezes 1970; Berg 1965), the atmosphere changed in the course of the 1960s. In the 1970s and 1980s migration was often discussed in the pessimistic terms of 'proletarianisation', 'underdevelopment' and 'brain drain' (Meillassoux 1991[1975]; Plange 1979; Gregory and

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[26] Daily Graphic, 24.08.2003.

[27] Interview protocol, 03.12.01, Kumasi.

[28] This also applies to state-sponsored development activities. It would be too much to expect migrants, who often have working class jobs in the receiving countries, to be able to do what the Ghanaian state and international development agencies are unable to do.

Piché 1978). More recently the general discourse has become more optimistic again. Against the background that the hopes as well as the suspicions of the past have often turned out to be exaggerated, it seems to be advisable to remain sceptical in how far the labour migrants' contributions can initiate a broader process of societal development (cf. Grillo and Mazzucato 2008: 186).[29]

To understand the specificity of the imaginary of diaspora constructed by transnational charity activities, the fact that most migrants' money is spent on health care and education must be considered. These areas represent, more than others, uncontested goals of community development. Therefore, they are of distinctive value for an upright display of altruism before a broader public in Ghana by means of which claims of belonging to a community can be substantiated. The modernist state-oriented discourse of societal development – and connected to it the social fields of health care and education – forms a symbolic background against which the migrants generate and consume recognition.

### Chieftaincy and Diaspora

As mentioned above, the nation-state is not the only state-like formation involved in diaspora activities. Some of the contemporary remnants of the precolonial states in southern Ghana have also become active in promoting the inclusion of migrants. Similar to the nation-state itself, these 'traditional' states have an organisational infrastructure at their disposal, which functions as an interface for channelling diasporic flows. In particular the institutional figure of the *ohene* (king/chief) is a powerful and representative resource in this context. The *ohene* symbolises the ethnic identity of a particular population if not even the 'existence of a community' as such (Schildkrout 2002: 600).

The relevance of chieftaincy to cultural identity explains why chiefs would have reached out to 'the diaspora'. In his function as representative of the *Asantehene*,[30] Nana Adusei Atwenewa Ampem, the *Omanhene* of the Tepa Traditional Area, for instance, travelled to North America in 2003 to attend the 'enstoolment' of the head of the Asante in New York (*Asantefuohene*).[31] In this

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[29] As Mazzucato and Grillo suggest (2008: 186) it would need more empirical studies on the medium and long term effects of diasporic activities to achieve a more realistic picture of their significance.

[30] The head of the Asante state.

[31] Some Asante organisations in the USA use the symbolic code of chieftaincy and 'enstool' chiefs while others use a 'modern' code and elect executives. In contrast to the USA, according

context he also became involved in a conflict between three Asante organisations in Washington D.C. competing for the legitimate representation of the Asante in that city.

Another incident of the transnational mobility of the head of a 'traditional state' was that of the *Okyenhene*, Osagyefo Amoatia Ofori Panin, the *ohene* of the Akyem Abuakwa Traditional Area in Ghana's Eastern Region, who visited the USA in 2002[32] and Great Britain in 2003. In a speech in London he emphasised the migrants' obligations to contribute to the development of their 'home community':

> It is the moral and social responsibility of all sons and daughters of the motherland resident abroad to give something back either as individuals or collectively through their community associations for the socio-economic transformation of the country.[33]

Yet another example is that of the *Dormaahene*, Osagyefo Oseadeeyo Agyeman-Badu II, of the Dormaa Traditional Area in the Brong Ahafo Region, who was 'enstooled' in 1999. Subsequently, he started efforts to mobilise transcontinental migrants in Western Europe and North America. In 2001 he was invited to visit London, Brussels, Paris and several cities in Germany and the Netherlands. Kojo Yeboah, a transcontinental migrant who came to Europe in the mid-1970s, played a major role in the organisation of this fund-raising trip. He was symbolically treated as a 'firstcomer' and founder of the 'Dormaa community' in Germany, which he was supposed to represent.

At the fund-raising event in Berlin the *Dormaahene* was dressed in his royal attire: *kente* cloth, crown and gold jewellery. He was followed by a royal suite consisting of his delegation from Ghana and dignitaries from Berlin. It included among others two members of the royal court of the Dormaa Traditional Area, the *Dormaahene*'s wife, Kojo Yeboah and the *Tufuhene* of Akropong, who is a transnational migrant who lives part of the year in Berlin and part of the year in Akropong.[34] At the public fund-raiser in which mostly working class migrants participated, some individuals and small groups donated between 1,000 and 2,500 German Marks while many others gave between fifty and several hundred German Marks.

After the *Dormaahene* had returned to Ghana, the collected money was invested in a hospital and a police station in Dormaa Ahenkro. The *Dormaahene*

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to my information, Ghanaian migrants associations in Germany do not 'enstool' heads of the community.

[32] www.ghanaweb.com: General News, 25.06.02.

[33] www.ghanaweb.com: Diasporian News, 04.06.03.

[34] Interview protocol, 29.06.02, Berlin; 19.07.02, Berlin; 20.07.03, Berlin.

remained in control of how the money was spent. After his return he offered Kojo, as recognition of his efforts and the success of the journey, the office of the head of the Dormaa community in Germany. Reflecting on the potential consequences, Kojo refused to take on this office, because he suspected that his investment in terms of time and money would by far outstrip any potential symbolic benefits.[35] Although the *Dormaahene*'s power of recognition is an effective resource in the context of transcontinental migration, Kojo's rejection demonstrates that chieftaincy's capacities of expanding its organisational infrastructure are limited.

In the summer of 2003, the *Dormaahene* travelled to the USA and Canada. The king had been invited to attend the inauguration of the Council of Brong Ahafo Associations of North America (COBAANA) in Denver and extended his trip to other cities in the USA and Canada. In his speech at the inauguration meeting, he stressed that the migrants remained part of their 'home community' and that they had to fulfil their responsibilities for the development of the region. Afterward he travelled to Chicago, New York, Washington D.C., Atlanta and Toronto. Altogether he collected roughly US\$ 80,000, some technical equipment and an ambulance.

His return to Dormaa Ahenkro was another ceremonial climax of the transnational charity ritual. On the day of his return, a car convoy went to welcome the *Dormaahene* and his delegation and to escort them on their way back to Dormaa Ahenkro. When they arrived in the afternoon, several hundred people had gathered in front of the palace.[36] A sheep was slaughtered over which the *Dormaahene* stepped in order to symbolically reconstitute his power over his *oman* (state) before he entered his palace. The royal drums were played, songs of praise were sung and shell horns blown to announce the return of the *Dormaahene*. In the inner yard, which was already filled with his joyful subjects, the dignitaries of the traditional state dressed in their ceremonial clothes, two Ghanaian television teams and two radio stations, which documented the event for the regional and national news, were present to welcome the king.

In his speech the *Dormaahene* gave a detailed account of where he had gone and what had been donated by the migrants. Particularly generous migrants or migrants who were involved substantially in the organisation of the trip were mentioned by name. In the end it was ceremonially announced that the total

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[35] Interview protocol, 20.07.03, Berlin.

[36] Field protocol, 03.10.03, Dormaa Ahenkro.

sum of US$ 80,000 was collected. A spokesman for the *Dormaahene* finally announced in his name:

> I and my elders will make some good use of the money. I promise to do so. Before I will come to an end, I want to thank those of us abroad who have given generously so much money. May God bless them and all my people.[37]

On the one hand, by referring to the migrants' status of being his subjects, the migrants' contributions 'to the development of their hometown'[38] were represented as a duty deriving from their primordial ties to the *Dormaaman* (state of Dormaa). On the other hand, by expressing his gratitude, the *Dormaahene* framed the donations as generous gifts, which had to be reciprocated by thankfulness. This ambiguity of the status of the migrants' contributions between being a gift and being a fulfilment of an obligation was not resolved but upheld in the course of this multi-sited event.

Nevertheless, the diasporic charity ritual created an imaginary of a transnational Dormaa community linked by mutual obligations and solidarity. In their participation in the various geographically disparate stages of the event, the *Dormaahene*, the migrants and the inhabitants of Dormaa Ahenkro contributed jointly to its construction. The ambiguity between the essential equality of all Dormaa people and the differentiation between the people 'at home' and those in 'the diaspora' was constitutive to the discourse. The *Dormaahene* became a source of public recognition of the migrants as respectable and resourceful members of the imagined community. His power to convert money into legitimate status was an incentive for the migrants to participate in the diasporic ritual. However, only because they subjected themselves to the discourse of the chieftaincy with its courtly norms of conduct and hierarchies were they able to achieve his symbolic recognition. In this sense the charity ritual facilitated a reconfiguration of the power relations between the 'diaspora' and the representatives of the 'traditional' state in favour of the latter.

The role of the *Dormaahene* resembled in a sense that of the *Asantehene* in the 19th century. In this period the status system of the Asante state, the unity of which was symbolised by the *Asantehene*, was exposed to the centrifugal forces of an emergent capitalist market economy. The economic restructuring and the loss of the state's power to control the means of accumulation of wealth facilitated a process of economic differentiation (Wilks 1993: 156). One important means of reintegrating the ascending class of wealthy merchants

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[37] Video transcript, 03.10.03, Dormaa Ahenkro.

[38] Video transcript, 03.10.03, Dormaa Ahenkro.

was the *Asantehene*'s power of distributing honorary titles and other forms of public recognition. For instance by subjecting themselves to a public ritual, wealthy men could achieve formal recognition as *asikafo* (wealthy people), which entitled them to wear a cloth with a special design on public occasions (Arhin 1983; McCaskie 1983).

Although 'traditional' heads of state like the *Dormaahene* are far from being able to monopolise the formal acknowledgement of personal status under contemporary conditions of transnational migration, the migrants' demand for recognition has resuscitated this function of traditional authorities. This is also related to the fact that in post-industrial Western societies, such as Germany, Ghanaian migrants often lack access to alternative forms of public recognition.

## Conclusion

I have described three key themes around which Ghanaian diasporas are constructed. Firstly, I discussed how changes in the relationship between the Ghanaian state and transcontinental migrants in Germany have led to the creation of an organisational infrastructure that functions as an interface for 'long distance nationalism' (cf. Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001). This institutionalisation has created forums through which fluid homeland-related emotions, claims and interests can crystallise as diaspora discourse. The imaginary of diaspora was important for reconfigurating Ghanaian nationalism under the conditions of transcontinental mass migration and dependency on migrant remittances. Since the discourse relies on a dehistoricised idea of primordial belonging, it has to systematically under-represent its novel and innovative elements.

Secondly, I described the case of ethnic and hometown associations and their rather apolitical development discourse within which contributions to hospitals, schools and infrastructure are transformed into public recognition, the focus of such collective diasporic activities. The charity rituals, the moral discourse on obligation and development and the imaginaries of communities divided into a 'diaspora' and the 'people at home', are mutually constitutive.

Thirdly, I presented examples of how chieftaincies were involved in the construction of diasporas. In this respect I focussed on the *ohene*'s power of recognition and the reciprocal subjectivation of transcontinental migrants.

On a general level these incidents demonstrate that the diaspora discourse is fluid and adaptable to different kinds of migrants' homeland activities and

identity discourses. By its situationally changing references to different cross-cutting taxonomies of 'home', diaspora appears as a grammar of practice rather than a stringent theoretical concept or the description of a bounded group in a sociological sense.

The distinction between diasporic discourses and practices is important if one wants to observe the tensions between the egalitarian and communitarian discourse and the way differences of power and status are marked and negotiated practically. This concerns not only the relationship between those who act as 'the diaspora' and those who act as the 'people at home' but also the internal differentiation among migrants. In public speeches the diaspora is often represented as a homogeneous group that acts as a corporate body. Nevertheless, the distinction between those migrants who are at the centre of the public performances – because they speak on behalf of the migrants, sit at the head table or are mentioned by name – and the rest of the audience is a more than obvious feature of diasporic events. In this respect, class differences between transcontinental migrants become practically important. In particular, older men of higher education dominate diaspora organisations and gain the most recognition. Migrants of lower educational and occupational status as well as women often appear in less prominent roles or as audiences at these events. But the educated older male migrants claim to speak on behalf of the 'Ghanaian community' and are addressed by Ghanaian officials as representatives of 'the diaspora.' By focussing in practice on this thin layer of 'respectable elders' the diaspora discourse produces systematic silences about the predicaments of less privileged Ghanaians in Germany, like the significant group of undocumented migrants. The social selectivity in terms of who and what was represented was constitutive to the imaginary of diaspora as a corporate body, which acts as a patron of their 'communities of origin' in the 'homeland.'

Another aspect of practice that contradicts the imaginary of a united diaspora is the tendency to break up unto factions within and among Ghanaian migrant organisations. Disputes often arise around questions of legitimate representation and seniority claims in the context of leadership.

For instance, until recently the divide between the Ghana Students Union and the Ghana Union/Ghana Community and their respective claims of representing Ghanaian migrants became relevant regularly in the run-up to public events in Berlin. Another example is the Ghana Union of Hamburg, which refused to join the UGAG because of irreconcilable differences as regards to the question of how the size of the Ghanaian population of a city should determine the influence an association has in the umbrella organisation. The Ghana Community in Berlin stopped its active participation in the

UGAG because of dissonances that came up with the elected executives' style of leadership.

Although ethnic divides are less relevant in the Ghanaian case than in the case of more conflict-ridden African countries, suspicions are easily evoked that one group could illegitimately dominate a particular association or event. Another important line was drawn between Ghanaian (neo)-Pentecostal Christians and those migrants who felt close to cultural traditions associated with chieftaincy. This led to conflicts where, for instance, it had to be decided whether a libation, which includes the reference to the ancestors, was to be done on a public occasion or not. Generally, the discourse on the unity of the Ghanaian diaspora was constantly accompanied by other discourses on the differences among Ghanaians and the contestation of claims of leadership. In this respect, public events in which the unity of the diaspora was to be displayed often enhanced pre-existing tensions and fission tendencies.

Although an ideological reduction of the empirical complexities of the relationship between migrants and their country of origin, diaspora discourses stimulate transnational activities. They motivate people to act, which, then, becomes evidence for the adequacy of the representation of migrants as diasporas. Discourses and practices interact to stabilise a self-referential social reality in which diasporas and homeland are reified as ontological units connected by primordial ties and obligations and separated by economic inequalities and geographical space. Thereby a transnational social field is created that provides Ghanaian migrants and non-migrants a forum for the negotiation and re-negotiation of social status, citizenship, power and identity.

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