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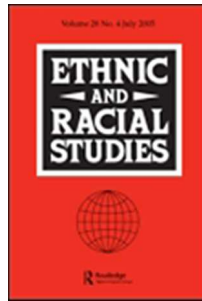
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Banal diasporic nationalism. Ghana@50 celebrations in Berlin.

Abstract

Although it has been highlighted by several authors that the notion of diaspora has become a politicised identity discourse, little is known about how it becomes a banal part of migrants' everyday lives. Based on a theoretical understanding of banality, the article focuses on the interaction of the banal and the non-banal within this context of the fiftieth anniversary of Ghanaian Independence in Berlin in 2007. It is argued that diasporic nationalist rituals are spaces of intersections between politicised and banal spheres of social life. By enacting and institutionalising particular forms of interaction that are 'banalizing' dissent and conflict among migrants the examined series of public rituals contributed to give life-worldly relevance to the otherwise questionable and contested identity category of diaspora. In this sense, the primary product was not group formation but the banalization of diasporic nationalism as a category of identification.

Keywords: Banality – Diasporic Nationalism – Ghana - Public Rituals – Transnational Migration

The relationship between sending states and transnational migrants is subject to historical change (Foner 1997; Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004) both in terms of their actual relationships and their forms of representation. In many migrant sending countries around the world, diaspora has become a buzzword that entails new policies of incorporation and identity politics (Levitt and De la Dehesa 2003; Bernal 2004; Glick Schiller 2005). It is used to address both a factual and aspired relationship between persons with a migration background and their countries of origin. The trajectory of the concept is related to the fact that sending states have developed interests in incorporating transnational migrants, including the maintenance of remittances flows, attracting migrants' human capital and pursuing foreign policy interests through migrant lobby groups in the receiving countries (Bauböck 2003; Fitzgerald 2009).

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3 In speaking of a construction of diaspora, I highlight that migrants are not a
4 diaspora just because they live outside their country of birth, but rather that diaspora
5 is a particular political and social form (Kleist 2008; Sökefeld 2008). It provides
6 countries, but also regions, ethnic groups or religious groups with a 'grammar of
7 identity' (Baumann and Gingrich 2004) that allows for the recurrent replication of
8 the distinction between those 'in the diaspora' and those 'at home', as two
9 specifications of the same people.
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12 Several authors have highlighted the ideological implications of the term diaspora
13 (Anthias 1998; Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002; Brubaker 2005). According to
14 them, the term brings the danger of confusing identity discourses with groups as
15 social entities capable of collective actions. It tends to downplay the internal
16 heterogeneity of a population and to gloss over the political agendas that are
17 suggested by it. In this context, some authors (Brubaker 2005; Kleist 2008;
18 Nieswand 2008) advocate refraining from using the notion of diaspora as an
19 analytical term and instead suggest to make the politics and pragmatics of the use of
20 the concept an object of empirical study.
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24 In Africa, where the term diaspora originally was used to refer to the descendants of
25 the victims of the transatlantic slave trade, it required only a minor semantic shift to
26 adapt the concept to post-colonial migration. Recently, a discourse on 'new
27 diasporas' (Koser 2003) emerged in several African countries, which implies a
28 significant reconfiguration of postcolonial nationalism.¹
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31 While during the times of decolonialization, the primary goal of the new states was
32 to nationalize their ethnically heterogeneous populations living within a territory
33 with arbitrary colonial boundaries, the 'new diaspora policies' aim to maintain the
34 loyalty of a geographically scattered population that is expected to be connected by
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3 primordial emotions of national belonging (cf. Nieswand 2011). However,
4 highlighting the politicized character of representing migrant populations as
5 diasporas neglects the question of how this discourse achieves life-worldly relevance
6 for migrant populations. Therefore, the central focus of this article is to examine how
7 a politicised category becomes translated into a banal identity category in the daily
8 life of a migrant population. It is argued that diasporic public rituals can contribute to
9 affirm and give life-worldly relevance to the otherwise questionable and contested
10 identity category of diaspora, by enacting and institutionalising particular forms of
11 interaction that are 'banalizing' dissensus and conflict among migrants. Before this
12 argument can be unfolded, I will introduce some theoretical basic concepts. Drawing
13 on different bodies of sociological and anthropological literature, I will bring
14 together thoughts about banality, nationalism and rituals. In this context rituals are
15 understood as institutionalised social spaces in which a dialectical and often fragile
16 relationship between consensus and contestation is negotiated and in some respects
17 banalized. Empirically, I will focus on the links between the formation of a Ghanaian
18 diaspora in Germany and the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of Ghanaian
19 independence in Berlin in 2007.

20 21 22 **Banality, Diasporic Nationalism² and Public Rituals**

23
24 In examining the connection between public rituals and the banalization of diasporic
25 nationalism, I will follow a sociology of knowledge perspective. In this framework,
26 the understanding of migrants as a diaspora becomes perceivable as a contingent and
27 historical form of representation. Generally, sociologists of knowledge assume that
28 societies and groups have to transform complex social potentialities into a relatively
29 predictable social reality that provides actors with a sense of stability and facilitates
30 the coordination of daily life (Berger and Luckmann 1994 [1966]: 3). Berger and
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3 Luckmann considered objectifications of ideas (e.g. actions, media representations
4 and infrastructures) and institutionalizations of meanings (e.g. conventions, rituals
5 and organizations) as key devices through which everyday life achieves sufficient
6 intersubjectivity and expectability (ibid: 36-97). They facilitate the actors' trust in the
7 reliability and persistence of social reality on which the experience of their
8 environment as 'world known and taken for granted' (Garfinkel 1963: 189) relies.
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16 This sociology of knowledge perspective puts a strong accent on the role of
17 consensuality in the primary experience of social reality. Pierre Bourdieu (1993
18 [1980]: 51-2) picked up on these ideas and confronted them with Marxist
19 conceptualizations of society as a struggle between different groups of interests (ibid:
20 250-2). He argued that both struggles between groups of interest and the actors' tacit
21 affirmation of what he called *doxa*, a system of implicit knowledge that dominates a
22 context, constitute a social field (Bourdieu 1993 [1980]: 126). Society can neither be
23 explained by consensus nor by struggle alone but instead by the dialectical
24 relationships between contestations and affirmations of a status quo.
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36 The critical literature on nationalism highlights the ideological character of
37 nationalism and its historicity. In this context, representations of history (e.g. in
38 school books), symbols (e.g. flags), formal documents (e.g. passports), national
39 statistics, print media and public rituals (e.g. national celebrations) are identified as
40 means for the objectification and naturalization of nationalist ideologies (Anderson
41 1998; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Torpey 2000). In accordance with a sociology of
42 knowledge perspective, Billig (1995) argued that it is in particular the life-worldly
43 banality of the objectifications of nationalism that constitutes their *doxic* character.
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54 His paradigmatic example is the inconspicuous omnipresence of the Stars and Stripes
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3 in the United States, which constitute a primary perception of the nation-state and its
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5 corresponding ideologies as being a self-evident given.
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8 Going back to Durkheim (1994 [1912]), rituals, as collective and public
9
10 objectifications of ideologies and beliefs, were often interpreted as a step in the
11
12 process of transforming ideas into a 'self-evident' and 'obvious' social reality shared
13
14 by larger sections of a population. It was argued that ritualistic activities transform
15
16 ideologies in an experiential reality that individuals encounter as an objective given
17
18 and disguises their character as a historically contingent set of ideas (Althusser 1994
19
20 [1970]: 126). This understanding of rituals, as being a mechanistic societal device for
21
22 the naturalization of ideas, faced criticism. For example, Elegenius (2011)
23
24 emphasized that nationalist rituals often fail to achieve their intention to create
25
26 consensus, and Etzioni (2000) highlighted that they might still aggravate tensions
27
28 between a minority and the majority in a pluralistic context, even if they succeed in
29
30 increasing cohesion among one segment of the population. Most prominently,
31
32 Clifford Geertz (1973: 124) and Victor Turner (1969) criticised the assumption that
33
34 rituals would necessarily be a conservative means of reaffirmation of a pre-defined
35
36 status quo. Instead, they highlighted the transformative power of rituals to change
37
38 society. Gerd Baumann (1992) highlighted the point that an adequate understanding
39
40 of collective rituals in plural societies has to take their audiences into account. They
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42 often have different layers of meaning that refer to and are differently received by
43
44 different audiences with different expectations and world-views (e.g. Schiffauer
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46 2010: 150-157).
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52 It becomes clear that a post-Durkheimian notion of rituals does not any longer
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54 understand them as mechanistic device for reproducing the cohesion of a society.
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56 Instead, they are seen as inherently pluralistic spaces of interaction. Gardner and
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3 Grillo (2002: 187) summarized the meaning of rituals in the context of transnational
4 migration as follows:
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7 In this way, rituals become arenas of contestation about wider
8 issues: power, status, and boundaries of 'community', history
9 and identity. (...) Rituals are a fertile terrain through which
10 participants may (...) navigate the individual and collective
11 transformations wrought by migration under conditions of
12 transnationalism.
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20 However describing rituals as 'arenas of contestation' overlooks the dialectical
21 entanglement of contestation and consensus that was highlighted by Bourdieu. As
22 mentioned above, he argued that the struggles and contestations, that constitute a
23 social arena, rely both on a tacit consensus about of a field's basic rules as well as on
24 the recognition of capitals, for which individuals and groups compete in its
25 framework. In light of an understanding of rituals as social arenas and Bourdieu's
26 point of the dialectic relation between contestation and consensus, Gardner and
27 Grillo's understanding of the link between rituals and migration can be expanded.
28 Rituals are not mere 'arenas of contestation'. Instead they are arenas in which the
29 *relationship* between contestation and consensus is negotiated through social
30 interaction.
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45 Against the background of these more general theoretical reflections, I will
46 come back to the notion of banality, which will guide my case analysis. Generally, I
47 distinguish two analytical dimensions.
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51 Firstly, I use banality similarly to Michael Billig's use of the term and to the
52 concept of self-evidence that was employed by sociologists of knowledge (e.g.
53 Berger and Luckmann 1994 [1966]). In this sense, banality highlights that important
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3 qualities of what actors perceive as reality are not created by the 'noisy', contested
4 and extraordinary aspects at the centre of social attention, but rather by the more
5 silent and unobtrusive aspects that remain barely noticed in the background of a
6 social event.
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11 Secondly, banality can also address the question of how influential an activity
12 is within a given context in relation to an event's structure of meaning. It refers to the
13 point that some aspects are more banal in the sense that they matter less than others.
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17 Both dimensions underlies a relational understanding of banality. This means
18 that banality does not signify absolute qualities but refers to something else that is
19 either (1) foregrounded in the course of a social event *or* (2) becomes distinguished
20 from something that has a more significant impact. Against this background, the
21 question of this article can be formulated more precisely: The following case study
22 will focus on the interaction of the banal and the non-banal within the context of the
23 Ghana@50 celebrations in Berlin and asks about the implications of this for the
24 constitution of the social reality of a Ghanaian diaspora.
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36 **Ghanaians in Germany and the Ghanaian Nation-State**

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38 Due to the political and economic instabilities that Ghana experienced in the 1970s
39 and 1980s it was, for a long time difficult, for Ghanaians in Germany to relate
40 positively to their country of origin. Since then, Ghana's economic situation has
41 significantly improved; the country has become politically stable, it has experienced
42 a profound democratization and has regained international recognition. In this
43 respect, the golden jubilee celebrations of Ghanaian independence in Berlin, in 2007,
44 took place in a favourable political climate. An important change, that was reflected
45 in the way the Ghanaian nation was celebrated, was that since the mid-1970s,
46 Ghanaians have in increasing numbers dispersed over the high- and medium-income
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3 countries of the globe (Peil 1995; Van Hear 1998; Bump 2006). Between one and
4
5 four million Ghanaians live outside their country of birth and their remittances have
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7 become one of the country's largest sources of foreign exchange (International
8
9 Monetary Fund 2005, p. 7). The Ghana@50 celebrations offered a public occasion
10
11 for representatives of the Ghanaian nation-state as well as for migrants to express and
12
13 negotiate their understanding of what the Ghanaian nation is and how the Ghanaian
14
15 diaspora relates to it.
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18 The most significant increase of Ghanaians in Germany happened between
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20 1977 and 1993, when the official number of Ghanaians in Germany rose from 3,275
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22 to almost 26,000.³ For many of these migrants, German asylum law was the legal
23
24 entry door into Germany.⁴ Since only few Ghanaians were granted political asylum,
25
26 safe legal status was far more often achieved by other means.⁵ In 1993, article 16 of
27
28 the German constitution, which guaranteed the right to asylum, was changed. It
29
30 induced a profound decrease in the number of asylum applications. The official
31
32 number of Ghanaians fell from about 26,000 in 1992 to 20,500 in 2006. This
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34 negative balance of Ghanaians is related to several factors, such as the decrease in
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36 immigration from Ghana due to German anti-migration policies, the naturalization of
37
38 Ghanaians, the correction of national statistics, the increase in undocumented
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40 migration and the on-migration of Ghanaians to other countries within the European
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42 Union.
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47 The fact that the asylum seekers claimed to be persecuted by the Ghanaian military
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49 government complicated the relationship between the migrants and the Ghanaian
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51 Embassy. This situation particularly changed when President John Agyekum
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53 Kufuor's government took over power in Ghana in 2000 and initiated an active
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55 diaspora policy. It included changes in the definition of citizenship rights and offered
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3 new opportunities for Ghanaian migrants in receiving countries like Germany for
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5 recognition and political participation.
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8 As a part of this new diaspora policy, the representatives of the embassy who
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10 were sent to Germany after 2000 promoted the idea of the foundation of local
11
12 diaspora associations and a national umbrella organization, which started its
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14 activities in 2003 (Nieswand 2009). A representative of the embassy explained this
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16 as follows in 2002: 'We are still working on that the people need representatives in
17
18 every German city in order to work on their behalf.'⁶
19
20

21 In Berlin, an association of Ghanaian migrants called Ghana Union already
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23 existed in the late 1980s. Since there was mutual distrust between the embassy and
24
25 the migrants, the Ghana Union overtook an important function as a representative
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27 body of Ghanaians and a mediator between migrants and German state institutions.
28
29 The former president of the Ghana Union summarized the situation as follows:
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32 They [the migrants] had the feeling or they were told that if
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34 (...) you are asylum seeker you have said something wrong
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36 about your government so you can't come to your embassy
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38 (...) and the embassy did also not come to them.⁷
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41 The activities of the Ghana Union were oriented towards the immigration
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43 context. In the mid-1990s, when the relations between the embassy and the migrants
44
45 had improved, the Ghana Union terminated its activities. In 2002, a new association
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47 of Ghanaians in Berlin, the Ghana Community, was founded. In contrast to the
48
49 Ghana Union, the Ghana Community had a close relationship to the Ghanaian
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51 Embassy from its very beginning. In the early 2000s it appeared important to have a
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53 migrant association that was able to organize meetings of migrants and
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55 representatives of the Ghanaian State who came from time to time to the capital city
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3 of Berlin and wanted to express their inclusive attitude towards 'the diaspora'. The
4
5 Ghana Community organized a meeting with President Kufuor when he visited
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7 Germany in June 2002, a discussion with the Ghanaian Minister for Economic
8
9 Planning and Regional Integration in August 2002, it arranged a meeting with the
10
11 Senior Minister John Henry Mensah in 2006 and became active in the course of the
12
13 Ghana@50 celebrations in March, June and July 2007. The discourse of a Ghanaian
14
15 diaspora became implemented in a close interaction between representatives of the
16
17 Ghanaian nation-state, who aimed at a paradigm shift in the relation to its
18
19 transnational migrants, and the representatives of the Ghana Community who were
20
21 receptive for the new forms of attention that were offered to them. It is noteworthy
22
23 that the main persons that were encouraged by the embassy to found the Ghana
24
25 Community, had already played leading roles in the Ghana Union. Despite this
26
27 continuity in the personnel, there were very obvious differences between the two
28
29 organizations. While the Ghana Union had been an organizational reaction to the
30
31 disconnect between the migrants and the Ghanaian nation-state, the Ghana
32
33 Community was a reaction to the wish of the Ghanaian nation-state to connect with
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35 'its' migrants. The Ghana Union mediated between the demands of a relatively
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37 recent migrant population, which had no effective representation in the city, and the
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39 city administration, which was in need of assistance in dealing with a growing group
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41 of migrants who faced problems mostly due to their precarious legal position. While
42
43 the Ghana Union was financially and logistically supported by the city administration
44
45 of Berlin, the opportunities for a Ghanaian migrant association in Berlin had changed
46
47 when the Ghana Community was founded: 1) the Ghanaian Embassy had taken
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49 responsibility for Ghanaian citizens again; 2) due to the fact that many Ghanaians
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51 had legally and socially accommodated themselves in the city, fewer problems
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3 occurred in the interaction with the German administration; 3) financial support was
4 no longer granted to national African migrant associations by the city administration
5 because of the city's financial crisis.
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10 However, the most important migrant associations for the daily life of
11 Ghanaian migrants are not national or ethnic associations but churches that had been
12 founded by Ghanaian migrants since the mid-1980s. In 2002, I identified twelve
13 churches in Berlin that were initiated and/or dominated by Ghanaian migrants. In
14 total 500 to 800 Ghanaians attended the churches' Sunday services in the summer of
15 2002, while often only ten to twenty persons attended the regular meetings of the
16 Ghana Community. The foundation and expansion of the churches was closely
17 connected to the (neo-)Pentecostalist revival which Ghana has been experiencing
18 since the late 1970s. From the 1980s onwards, more religiously enchanted migrants
19 came to the city and stimulated institution-building among the growing Ghanaian
20 migrant population, especially the younger generation. Although the pastors of the
21 churches, in contrast to the members of the Ghana Community, aimed not to
22 represent Ghanaian diaspora as a whole, their position in the churches made those
23 among them who presided in one of the larger and better organized congregations
24 important figures in the local arena. Moreover, the dividing line between the leaders
25 of the Ghana Community and the pastors was emphasized by the fact that most of the
26 former were either part of mainline churches (Catholics or Presbyterians) or did not
27 go to church regularly. In both cases they were sceptical of the (neo)-Pentecostal
28 pastors who led the largest church congregations in Berlin. As I will show below, the
29 tensions between these two groups, whose power claims relied on different types of
30 cultural capital (religious vs. political), were expressed in particular in a dissensus on
31 the role of traditional culture in the representation of the Ghanaian diaspora.
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Ghana@50 in Berlin

The Ghana@50 celebrations were a multi-sited event. Aside from the central celebration in Accra on 6 March 2007 (Lentz and Budniok 2007), smaller events took place in several other cities with significant Ghanaian populations in Western Europe and North America. The events' ritual landscape, which emerged in interaction between the centre of the celebrations and the different peripheries, allowed groups to participate in them independently of their place of residence, and gave sufficient space to adapt the celebrations to local demands. By supplying the embassies with financial resources to support celebrations in some receiving areas, the Ghanaian government actively encouraged migrants to take part.⁸ Altogether five events took place in the framework of the official Ghana@50 celebrations in Berlin between March and July 2007. Each event varied in character, took place at a different location and targeted different audiences. The series of events started with the grand opening of an exhibition of Ghanaian commercial products on the premises of the embassy on 1 March.⁹ This event in particular aimed at potential German clients but also involved migrants, both as participants and as an audience. On 6 March, the actual anniversary of Ghanaian independence, a formal reception was held by the embassy. It targeted mainly the diplomatic body of Berlin, including a German minister of state. Nevertheless, a selection of Ghanaian migrants was also invited. Complementary to this exclusive event, a public party was organized by the Ghana Community and co-financed by the embassy on 7 March at the *Rathaus Schöneberg*.¹⁰ While at the beginning the event's historical background was strongly emphasized by the organisers, it became less relevant throughout its course.

Due to climatic conditions in Germany, the *cultural durbar*, which was supposed to be the ceremonial climax of the celebrations, was postponed until 30 June. As a

1
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3 closing event, an inter-denominational church service was planned on 1 July. Since
4
5 the last two events were most interesting with respect to the way imaginaries of
6
7 diaspora were negotiated and objectified by the migrants, I will focus on them in the
8
9 following sections.¹¹
10

11 **The Cultural Durbar**

12
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14 In September 2006 a representative of the Ghanaian Embassy contacted the president
15
16 of the Ghana Community in Berlin. Together, they developed the idea to organize a
17
18 public event in which migrants from all administrative regions of Ghana were to
19
20 showcase their cultural traits. This idea was based on the tacit assumption that the
21
22 Ghanaian diaspora in Germany could and should be represented as a miniaturized
23
24 copy of the Ghanaian nation based on a code of ethnic-regional pluralism. Given that
25
26 Ghanaian migrants to Germany are not a statistical cross-section of the Ghanaian
27
28 population, demographic problems emerged in course of the planning. In the case of
29
30 four regions, it was difficult to find migrants in sufficient numbers to form a regional
31
32 team. Therefore, two regional clusters had to be created. The three northern regions¹²
33
34 were integrated into a single group. Additionally, the Western Region was merged
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36 with the Central Region. Each of the seven groups was supposed to provide some
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38 basic information about their region(s), performing songs and dances and dressing in
39
40 typical clothes.
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45 Although the idea to represent all of the administrative regions of Ghana in cultural
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47 performances was unprecedented in Berlin, the code of traditional culture had been
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49 frequently used as a marker of Ghanaianess in the context of migration. Therefore,
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51 the reference to ethnic-regional pluralism was banal in the sense that it relied on a
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53 shared understanding among the actors as to how to represent Ghanaianess that did
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55 not require extensive discussions and legitimations. As a consequence of the
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3 application of the code of ethnic-regional pluralism, the organization committee,
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5 which included the leaders of the regional teams as well as a representative of the
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7 Ghana Community and the embassy, paid special attention to representing the
8
9 regions in an even-handed way. The duration of the presentation of each group was
10
11 assigned proportionally, according to the number of regions a team had to represent.
12
13 Moreover, the regional teams' order of appearance was drawn by lot beforehand.
14
15 Despite these precautions, criticism and dissensus emerged during the cultural
16
17 durbar, about the issue of whether the different ethnic groups were in fact equally
18
19 represented. Some members of those groups that were represented by small and
20
21 relatively unobtrusive teams, felt illegitimately dominated by the stronger and noisier
22
23 groups, namely the Asantes. Moreover, the role of Asante Twi, which was used in
24
25 addition to German and English as a language of communication by the masters of
26
27 ceremony, became a target of criticism. One of my non-Asante informants
28
29 complained to me during the celebration that he found the use of Asante Twi and the,
30
31 in his view, dominant performance of the Asante, to be inadequate for an occasion
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33 that was intended to celebrate Ghana's independence.¹³ In a similar vein, some
34
35 internet users wrote critical comments on an online article about the Ghana@50
36
37 celebrations. One of them summarized the criticism as follows: 'It's Ashanti culture
38
39 [that was] portrayed. (...) Ashanti culture cannot represent Ghanaians in general.'¹⁴
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45 However, these reactions do not indicate a failure in the attempt to represent the
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47 Ghanaian diaspora in the code of ethnic-regional pluralism, but rather they reflect the
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49 banal consensus about the legitimacy of the code among larger parts of the
50
51 participants. It was only the way in which the code of ethnic-regional pluralism was
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53 put into practice by the organisers that was criticised. Since the criticism had neither
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55 a strong impact on the event, nor was it surprising to the main actors, it remained
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3 banal in the second sense that was introduced above. It was a grumbling footnote to
4
5 the event that did not seriously challenge its underlying structure of meaning.
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8 It is very remarkable that ethnic-regional performances played only a
9
10 subordinated role in the context of the Ghana@50 celebrations in Accra (Lentz and
11
12 Budniok 2007). It suggests that the display of cultural opulence in Berlin was, in no
13
14 little way, related to the migration context that forms the event's banal socio-spatial
15
16 context. In Berlin, like in most cosmopolitan cities, conspicuous cultural
17
18 performances of migrant groups are a more or less conventional genre of activity. It
19
20 is a gesture of cultural self-confirmation that creates a counterweight against
21
22 racialized devaluations and it is a pathway of incorporating a migrant group in the
23
24 city according to locally well established multiculturalist discourses. This implicit
25
26 reference to the local context became also obvious by the fact that the celebration of
27
28 the durbar was shifted from the day of Ghanaian independence in March to the
29
30 German summer. Moreover, the event was advertised in the Berlin underground and
31
32 several Germans were personally invited to the event. This double reference – to the
33
34 Ghanaian nation-state, which was conspicuously at the centre of the event, and the
35
36 German immigration context, which remained less obvious in the background –
37
38 gives a characteristically diasporic touch to this nationalist event.
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43 **The Interdenominational Church Service**

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45 While the described dissensus about whether the code of ethnic-regional pluralism
46
47 was enacted correctly remained within the same discursive frame, more fundamental
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49 tensions emerged between the two mentioned migrant elites whose claims to
50
51 represent the Ghanaian diaspora were based on different types of cultural capital. The
52
53 first group gravitates around the Ghana Community and is dominated by migrants
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55 with higher education who feel some attachment to what could be called a
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3 Nkrumahist type of Ghanaian nationalism, which puts a special accent on the
4 compatibility of 'traditional' culture and the 'modern' nation (Nkrumah 1961). It is
5 characterised by pan-Africanist ideas that suggest that the emancipation of the
6 African nations depends on the development of a positive and self-conscious relation
7 to their own cultural tradition. In contrast to them, the religious migrant elites deduce
8 their power claims from being pastors of migrant-initiated churches. Both elite
9 groups have higher degrees of formal education but the religious elite is, by
10 tendency, younger than its counterpart, to which some people belong who were sent
11 abroad as students with state scholarships by the Nkrumah government in the 1960s.
12
13 In contrast to the 'Nkrumahist nationalists', the pastors of the (neo)-Pentecostal
14 churches, who dominate the West African religious arena in Berlin, advocate a
15 pronounced religiously legitimated anti-traditionalism and perceive themselves as
16 part of a global religious movement (Meyer 1998; Nieswand 2010). Already in the
17 past, dissensus had evolved about the exercise of ancestor- or chieftaincy-related
18 'traditional' ritual practices, such as libations, which are interpreted as idolatry by
19 (neo)-Pentecostal Christians (cf. Meyer 1998, p. 189; Darkwa Amanor 2009), while
20 the members of the Ghana Community perceive them as important markers of their
21 Ghanaian identity. In order to address this issue, which had caused mutual
22 resentments, the Ghana Community organized a public panel discussion in 2005 to
23 debate the relation between tradition and religion with a Ghanaian neo-Pentecostal
24 pastor who strongly rejected ritual references to the ancestors. Rather than solving
25 the conflict, this public debate entrenched the fronts between the two groups.
26
27 If both elites had to cooperate in organizing the same event conflicts would have
28 been foreseeable about the modes of representing the Ghanaian diaspora. To avoid
29 irritations of the imaginary of the diaspora as a community that is connected by a
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3 primordial sameness, the embassy took some pre-emptive measures. They contacted
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5 a neo-Pentecostal pastor, Pastor John, who is the chairman of the council of African
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7 pastors in Berlin, and asked him to put together an organization committee for the
8
9 church service. At the same time, the embassy approached the president of the Ghana
10
11 Community and made clear that he should not interfere in the organization of the
12
13 church service.¹⁵ Obviously, the embassy was aware of the potential for conflict was
14
15 involved in finding a consensus on how to represent the Ghanaian diaspora in
16
17 Germany. The separation allowed each of the two groups to generate their own form
18
19 of representation in a separated public space.
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23 Pastor John, the chairman of the council of African pastors in Berlin, gathered
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25 six pastors with different denominational backgrounds to form the organization
26
27 committee. All of them were involved in different capacities in the church service.
28
29 The service was attended by about two hundred persons, mostly Ghanaians, of
30
31 different social and denominational backgrounds, including the ambassador and his
32
33 wife. Some representatives of the 'Nkrumahist nationalists', in particular the
34
35 president of the Ghana Community, were missing.
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39 As a way to keep the balance between the local pastors, a prominent a
40
41 charismatic guest preacher, Pastor Mensah from London, was invited to hold the
42
43 main sermon. During his sermon he developed a narrative in which he drew a close
44
45 connection between the historical achievements and failures of the Ghanaian nation-
46
47 state and the nation's commitment to Christianity. In this framework, the success of
48
49 being the first colony south of the Sahara to gain independence was ascribed to the
50
51 firm Christian beliefs of the fathers of Ghanaian independence.¹⁶ In contrast, the
52
53 post-independence crisis was interpreted as the result of national disunity, which was
54
55 depicted as a consequence of a contemporary weakness in resisting the offenses of
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3 evil: 'today is a time in which the political leaders are fighting political leaders.
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5 Church members are fighting church members. Pastors are fighting pastors. (...) If
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7 we want to come together we have to be aware of these offenses because they
8
9 destroy our unity.'¹⁷
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11
12 Reinterpreting Ghanaian independence in a Christian framework challenges
13
14 secular self-representations of the Ghanaian nation-state, which claim formal
15
16 neutrality in relationship to Christianity, Islam and 'traditional culture'. However,
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18 apart from some complaints about the absence of certain (though not all)
19
20 representatives of the 'Nkrumahist elite', I did not come across any criticism that
21
22 challenged this Christian appropriation of Ghanaian history.
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24
25 Summarizing the events, it can be stated that in the end, the pastors and the
26
27 organizers of the cultural durbar silently agreed to comply with the embassy's
28
29 solution to separate the events. Because neither party wanted to challenge the
30
31 arrangement and threaten the imaginary of national unity, which was a recurring
32
33 theme in the whole series of events, the conflict did not manifest although the lines
34
35 of social divisions were pre-structured and the arguments to enact the conflict were
36
37 pre-formulated. Obviously, the solution also worked out because the involved actors
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39 shared a basic understanding of pluralism that despite the involved disagreements
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41 allowed for accepting the differentiation between religious and cultural
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43 representations of the Ghanaian diaspora. This abstract pluralist consensus remained
44
45 banal in the sense that it manifested without being made an explicit issue.
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49 50 **Conclusion**

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52 The Ghana@50 celebrations were part and parcel of the process of constructing and
53
54 implementing the discourse of a 'Ghanaian diaspora' in Germany and filling it with
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56 images and experiences. Nevertheless, it was not a unitary imaginary that was
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3 created by the series of events. In the context of the cultural durbar, the diaspora was
4
5 dominantly represented as a miniaturized copy of the homeland. The practical
6
7 problems inherent in maintaining this image revealed the limits of this mode of
8
9 representation. In particular, aspects that refer to the social and political conditions of
10
11 the receiving country were excluded from what was foregrounded in the event. For
12
13 instance, the differentiation between first and second generation and their different
14
15 relations to Ghana was not addressed, although it is an issue for many migrant
16
17 families. Moreover, inequalities among Ghanaians, e.g. concerning migrants' legal or
18
19 socio-economic status that were related to the receiving country, were not an issue at
20
21 all. Additionally, it is noteworthy that the political and economic turmoil that had
22
23 stimulated mass migration from Ghanaians and, thereby, had contributed to the
24
25 subsequent construction of a Ghanaian diaspora was almost completely omitted.
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29 The imaginary of diaspora was detached from the political economy of migration. Of
30
31 course, it would be misplaced to expect migrants' celebrations of diasporic
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33 nationalism to convey a meticulous overview of the diversity of a given population
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35 and the complexities involved in their relations to the country of origin and the
36
37 destination country. Nevertheless, the banality of these simplifications and omissions
38
39 does not contradict but instead underlines the difference between the everyday reality
40
41 of a Ghanaian migrant population in Germany and the social construction of
42
43 diaspora.
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47 At the beginning of this paper, I introduced two notions of banality which
48
49 were then applied in the course of the case descriptions. First, I used banality to refer
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51 to the forms of consensus, which were self-evident and unquestioned from the actors'
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53 perspective. Second, I used it to distinguish aspects of lower and higher impact and
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55 relevance. Moreover, I argued that banality is a relational concept. Something only
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3 appears as banal in a given context in relation to issues that are more explicit and/or
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5 have a higher impact.
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7 The case study showed that there were different layers of dissensus and
8
9 contestation that corresponded to different layers of consensus and affirmation.
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11 Within the cultural durbar, it was contested whether the ethnic-regional pluralism
12
13 was enacted correctly. This happened on the basis of the assumption that ethnic
14
15 pluralism in the eyes of many actors was considered a legitimate way to represent the
16
17 Ghanaian diaspora. Although the dissensus itself about the adequate performance of
18
19 ethnic-regional pluralism was made explicit – which means that it was *not* banal in
20
21 the first sense – it nevertheless was banal in the second sense because it remained a
22
23 grumbling footnote to the event.
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27 On the contrary, the dissensus between the Pentecostalist and the Nkrumahist
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29 elite on the role of tradition in the representation of the Ghanaian diaspora was not
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31 banal in the second sense. It touched a fundamental dissensus about what should be
32
33 dominant in the representation of the Ghanaian diaspora – a diasporic nationalism
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35 based on an anti-traditionalist form of Christianity or a diasporic nationalist with an
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37 affirmative attitude towards ancestral cultural traditions. However, the embassy's
38
39 solution of differentiating the events was successful in banalizing this non-banal
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41 dissensus. This means it initiated activities that were successful in keeping a tension
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43 that had the potential to become a centre of attention and contestation, silent in the
44
45 background. This banalization was only successful because the actors involved
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47 finally complied with the solution. Despite their different opinions on the issue, they
48
49 shared a silent 'overlapping consensus' (Rawls 1987) about the legitimacy of
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51 pluralistic norms in the context of representing the Ghanaian diaspora. This
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53 background assumption underlies not only the single events but also the whole series
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3 of events. However, the consensus on the legitimacy of pluralistic norms was based
4
5 on an even more fundamental and more banal consensus: it was presumed that there
6
7 is a social entity that at least theoretically could and should be adequately
8
9 represented, namely the Ghanaian diaspora in Germany. This consensus about the
10
11 social reality of the Ghanaian diaspora remained banal in both dimensions. First, it
12
13 was a tacit background assumption inherent in the events' meaning structure and,
14
15 secondly, not much followed from it. In particular, it did not provide any answer to
16
17 the problems that remained in the event's foreground: namely *how* to represent it. If
18
19 we take into consideration that the diaspora discourse became only prominent to
20
21 refer to Ghanaian citizens residing outside their country of origin in the last ten or
22
23 fifteen years, the presumption of its existence appears less banal from an observer's
24
25 point of view. Moreover, put in a broader context it becomes observable that the
26
27 banalization of the discourse diaspora, in terms of becoming a self-evident part of the
28
29 migrants' life world, is entangled in the political process within which transnational
30
31 migrants were identified as a resource for national development by the Ghanaian
32
33 government (Nieswand 2009). Therefore, we get drawn back to the dialectics of
34
35 banality. The most banal assumption in relation to the meaning structure of the
36
37 Ghana@50 celebrations in Berlin, the existence of the Ghanaian diaspora, is the
38
39 least banal in broader political terms. The imaginary of diaspora is an important part
40
41 of the political reconfiguration of Ghanaian nationalism under the conditions of
42
43 transcontinental mass emigration. Framed in this way, the efforts taken by the
44
45 embassy to encourage institution building among migrants and to influence the
46
47 Ghana@50 celebrations make sense. However, in the given case it would be
48
49 distorting to depict the Ghanaian nation-state as an 'institutional apparatus'
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51 (Althusser 1994 [1970]) that silently inscribes its definition of reality into the brains
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3 of a migrant population. In fact, the Ghanaian state has very little institutional power
4 over the migrants to enforce their definition of reality in the context of the receiving
5 country, and only few resources to offer to migrants in order to motivate them to
6 participate voluntarily. The embassy could only recognize, encourage and convince
7 migrants who were ready to be recognized, encouraged and convinced. Even for
8 many of the Ghanaian migrants who participated in the series of events, not to speak
9 of the silent majority of migrants who did not, the enacted diasporic nationalism
10 lacked existential importance. Even in the context of the cultural durbar, the
11 ceremonial peak of the celebrations, I met several migrants, who were much more
12 concerned with the outspokenly banal aspects of the events like the comparatively
13 high prices for drinks or, as one informant put it, that 'one would always see the
14 same old faces in these kinds of events', instead of being enchanted by the event's
15 nationalist spirit. Nevertheless, as I argued before, the Ghana@50 celebrations
16 processed a layered configuration of consensus and dissensus that was based on the
17 banal consensus of the existence of a Ghanaian diaspora. Thereby, their most
18 important effect was both to display and constitute the banal social object of
19 diaspora, to which the involved actors could refer to despite the profound differences
20 between them. Being a shared point of reference, the imaginary of a Ghanaian
21 diaspora opened up an arena for the negotiation of the relationship between
22 contestation and consensus over a Ghanaian diasporic nationalism. In this sense, the
23 Ghana@50 celebrations were a visible mark and shared moment of attention to
24 which future representations of a Ghanaian diaspora can relate and, as such, it is a
25 banal part in the contingent and on-going process of constructing the Ghanaian
26 diaspora. Of course, the identified banality of Ghanaian diasporic nationalism is only
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3 a snapshot which does not imply that Ghanaian diasporic nationalism cannot become
4 more assertive and pervasive under different political conditions.
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7 Generally, this article addressed an underreflected and underresearched point in the
8 literature on transnationalism and diaspora. Although it has been highlighted by
9 several authors that diasporas have to be understood as politicised categories of
10 identity, little is known about how they become a banal part of migrants' everyday
11 lives. Since sending states have much less power over populations and the symbolic
12 representations in migrant-receiving areas than in the context of their own territory,
13 the banalization of diasporic nationalism faces problems which are different from
14 those that have been described by the general literature on nation-building (e.g. Billig
15 1995). It was emphasized that public rituals offer a social space that allows for the
16 negotiation of the relationship of consensus and dissensus about the representation of
17 migrant populations as diasporas. The primary product of this process is not a unified
18 group in a factual sense but the banalization of diasporic nationalism as a category of
19 identification.
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44 the paper.
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53 *in the relevant footnotes.*
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25 **Notes**

26
27 ¹ In the context of this article, nationalism is used in an encompassing way. It refers
28
29 to identificatory discourses, ideologies and practices referring to nations and nation-
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31 states but does not imply a value judgment (cf. Billig 1995).

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33 ² Diasporic nationalism is closely related to what is called 'long distance
34
35 nationalism' (Anderson 1998). However, I want to highlight that the discourse
36
37 diaspora adds a certain quality that is not reflected by mere reference to geographical
38
39 distance.

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43 ³ Statistisches Bundesamt Deutschland (2005).

44
45 ⁴ Between 1980 and 1993, 3,348 Ghanaians on average were annually registered as
46
47 asylum seekers in Germany (UNCR 2001).

48
49 ⁵ A frequent way of securing one's legal status was a marriage with a German or a
50
51 foreigner with a secure legal status in Germany

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54 ⁶ Interview, 09 September 2002, Berlin.

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57 ⁷ Interview, 11 April 2002, Berlin.

⁸ Interview protocol, Moses Oppong, 25 June 08. All names of persons are fictionalized. Mr Oppong is a member of the Ghana Community who played an important role in the organization of the events.

⁹ Video transcript, Exhibition, 1 to 7 March 2007, Berlin.

¹⁰ *Rathaus Schöneberg* is the town hall of one of the administrative districts of Berlin.

¹¹ The accounts are based on interviews with four persons who were involved in the organisation of the events, my own participation in the cultural durbar, the study of the video documentation and the analysis of internet articles.

¹² The three northern regions of Ghana are Northern Region, Upper West Region and Upper East Region.

¹³ Field Protocol, 30 June 2007.

¹⁴

<http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/diaspora/artikel.php?ID=126448&comment2983292#com>

¹⁵ Interview protocol, Moses Oppong, 25.06.08.

¹⁶ Video transcript, Interdenominational Church Service, 1 July 2007, Berlin.

¹⁷ Ibid.

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