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A HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE
COMMUNICATIVE ROLE OF RITUAL FESTIVALS IN GHANA

BY

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THESIS

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PREFACE

Ritual, defined as any formal, customary observance or procedure, played an important role in preliterate societies as a communicator and stabilizer of knowledge and behavior. As people developed more efficient methods of storing and retrieving knowledge through the use of the written word, the role of ritual became less conspicuous, if no less important. In developed countries such as the United States, ritual serves to reaffirm the cohesiveness of a society by evoking strong feelings of unity from those who participate in its ceremonies. In developing countries caught in the flux of technological change, the role of ritual is even more significant. It is the purpose of this paper to explore the historical development of ritual and its present day function in one such developing country, the West African Republic of Ghana.

FESTIVALS PAST AND PRESENT

The numerous Ghanaian tribal ceremonies known as "Festivals" have been chosen as the focus of this study for a number of reasons. I became interested in the formal sense of ritual that seemed to pervade all of Ghanaian life during the two-and-a-half years from 1973 through 1975 that I spent in that country as a Peace Corps Volunteer. Shortly after our arrival, my family and I were invited

to attend the Ga Homowo, a harvest offering of thanksgiving to the gods of the earth and the ancestors. Later we attended the Odwira of the Akan peoples, the Deer-Catching Festival, and as many others as we were able during our stay. I was fascinated by the pageantry, the diversity of the festivals, and by the fact that so many of our Ghanaian Christian friends participated so wholeheartedly in such obviously "pagan" rites. I was also curious that the Ghanaian government, although seemingly intent on de-emphasizing tribalism and promoting nationalism in the relatively young (Ghana became the first black African colony to gain independence in 1957) nation, not only permitted the individual tribal festivals, but encouraged them.

Many of our educated Ghanaian friends tended to write off the events as meaningless in present-day life; but others of these, and our servants and tradespeople with whom we came in contact assured me that the festivals were an integral part of their lives. The historical value of the festivals, both in conveying important bodies of knowledge, and in strengthening social cohesion within the tribes, was clearly evident. Their value in contemporary Ghanaian society was less obvious. It is only as a result of the research for this thesis that I feel I have been able to accurately assess this value as an element of stability in the lives of a people beset by change.

ADVANTAGES OF SUCH STUDY

The advantages of such a study are many and have been enumerated in detail by the anthropologists whose task this is. Suffice it to mention here only two of the more important ones: In societies in the state of rapid change, the often almost-indiscernible cultural changes that have transpired over several generations in Western cultures are kaleidoscoped and concentrated into a much shorter time-span--frequently less than a generation--thus making a convenient situation for research; and second, the study of this particular aspect of the communication system of another culture can make us more aware of this process within our own cultural setting.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Sources of direct information on the various festivals discussed in the main body of the thesis have included both expatriate and Ghanaian friends and servants, and my own personal observations. Dr. K. B. Dickson, Chairman of the Geography Department and acting Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ghana at Legon, spent the 1975-76 academic year on sabbatical at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and he has been kind enough to discuss with me the implications of the festivals in present-day Ghanaian life. His wife, a native of Sierra Leone who has become a Ghanaian citizen both in residence and in spirit,

has been a valuable source of information on tribal customs.

The Official Guide Book of Ghana lists over 100 festivals in different regions and different times throughout the year. In choosing the few that are not only considered major, but are, I feel, significant to the theme of this study, I have relied heavily on the advice of these friends, and upon A. A. Opoku's descriptive account of the festivals. In assessing the role of oral tradition, the works of Alagoa and Ong have provided the framework for my ideas; while the studies of Christensen and Bruner on the role of proverbs in contemporary Ghana have provided further insight into Hayakawa's theory of the evolution of directive language to ritual.

Lastly, my committee members have been invaluable in their assistance, particularly my chairman, Dr. Albert Pryor of the F.T.U. Communication Department, who first guided me in this direction in a course on modern communication theory; and Dr. Allyn M. Stearman, of the Sociology Department at F.T.U., who led me to explore the greater anthropological implications of the festivals. The final work is, of course, my own, and any errors must rest with me.

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Chapter 1

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Man is a ceremonious animal. From the early pre-hominid who, lacking the ability to communicate verbally with others of his kind, was forced to develop and formalize patterns of expressive gestures to convey his meaning; to the highly articulate businessmen who faithfully attends his monthly lodge meeting, men like to gather together at intervals for the purpose of sharing certain customary activities, wearing special garments, eating together, and marching in parades. For the most part, the order and organization of these ceremonies is quite rigid, formal, and in many cases inviolate. New elements are seldom introduced except in extraordinary circumstances. Even if speeches are made, new information is seldom communicated in their contents.¹ These patterns of activity have become rituals; that is, they are accustomed sets of words and actions whose main purpose is not to convey information, but to invoke feelings to reinforce the group.

We know from anthropologists who have devoted a major portion of their time to the identification and description of man's ritual behavior, that ritual served an important communicative

¹S. I. Hayakawa, Language in Thought and Action (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), p. 82.

role in primitive or pre-literate cultures. The use of the adjective "traditional"--meaning conventional or customary--to describe such societies, aptly illustrates this point. On the other hand, contemporary American culture, which tends to operate much more informally, seemingly assigns to ritual a less significant role.² The qualifying word "seemingly" is used here, because we are seldom aware of the exact nature and role of such aspects of our own culture until we subject them to the dissecting knife of study; or until, for some reason, the culture itself changes the emphasis that is placed on them.

RITUAL AND CHANGE

Such is the case in many of the developing countries of the world, where rapid technological and political changes have produced corresponding changes in values. Many a traditional society has found itself reclassified as "transitional" before it has had a chance to say "yea" or "nay" to such change, and the resulting confusion as its members try to sort out and adapt their value systems can often be disastrous. Such situations are frequently tinged with irony, for at the very time that the innovators are calling for people to abandon their traditions and to adopt new attitudes of modernity, the need for

²Edward T. Hall, The Silent Language (New York: Anchor Books, 1973), p. 72.

the stabilizing influence of ritual is most important. Cooper, for example, in his study of the effects of culture and modernity within three groups of nations--traditional, transitional, and modern--notes that one of the results of rapid change is turmoil, a form of civil violence that he defines as "relatively spontaneous, unorganized strife with substantial popular participation," including activities such as demonstrations, political strikes, riots, political clashes, and localized rebellions.³ Ong classifies such reactions as a type of schizoid behavior that is typically manifested in oral cultures by the illiterate or newly-literate who is subject to extreme stress.⁴

THE WIDENED RANGE OF EXPERIENCE

Cooper attributes this stress to the fact that in transitional societies, expectations frequently outdistance capabilities--a situation which, ironically, is provoked in large part by the advances of modern communication and transportation. Millican states:

Of all the technological changes which have been sweeping through the traditional societies of the underdeveloped world in the last decade--changes in

³Mark N. Cooper, "A Reinterpretation of the Causes of Turmoil," Comparative Political Studies, VII (October, 1974), 267.

⁴Walter J. Ong, S. J., "World as View and World as Event," Intercommunication Among Nations and Peoples, ed. Michael H. Prosser (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 32.

the production of energy, in the process of agriculture, in the techniques of industry, in the nature of weaponry--the most fundamental and pervasive in their effects on human society have been the changes in communication. The dramatic upheavals in the economies, the politics, and the social structures of the new nations. . .all have their origins in a radical alteration in the perceptions of the average man, in the two-thirds of mankind which for centuries has been traditional, as to the nature and extent of the world in which he lives.⁵

Man's image, after all, is shaped by his experience, and for the overwhelming bulk of humanity, this experience until recently, was limited to direct contacts with the small numbers of other human beings with whom each person associated daily in a small geographic area--limited by the distance he could walk in a day. More important, the alternatives he could grasp for his future were circumscribed by his immediate experience of the past in his own community, and by what was transmitted orally from his elders. Of course, traditional society has always been influenced to some small extent by the wider vision of the outside world conveyed by the occasional traveler penetrating the remoteness in which most people lived, and by those few citizens who succeeded in escaping to the more cosmopolitan life of the capital city. But modern technology has begun a transformation of a totally

⁵Max F. Millican, "The Most Fundamental Technological Change," Communication and Change in the Developing Countries, eds. Daniel Lerner and Wilbur Schramm (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1967), p. 3.

different order. The airplane (and in many of the developing nations the landing strip often precedes the roadbed), the road, the bus, have greatly widened the range of direct experience of the average citizen. Even more profound has been the explosive extension of vicarious experience through the printed word, the radio, and the motion picture.⁶

The Ghanaian author Cameron Duodu has written with great perception of the ensuing "turmoil" that this widened range of experience brings. In his novel, The Gab Boys, he describes troubled young men:

You see, to be quite frank, we had nothing to live for. We respected nothing and nobody and no-one respected us, no-one cared two hoots about us. There we were, none older than twenty, a whole pack of us, our imagination fuelled to combustion-point by the many action-packed American films we saw each time we took a trip to a big town. And yet we had no creative occupation to keep us busy and away from mischief. We had all "finished" school, and yet we had no work. . .it was not because we were bad but because there were no jobs. Tell us to go farm-- to "go back to the land"--and we would say, "Look here, Sir! if we wanted to be farmers like our fathers, we would not have gone to school to get whipped and driven about and taught simple interest and other sums which made our heads reel. If we wanted to be farmers we would not have wasted a full ten years learning to read and write. No Sir."

In fact our fathers would be annoyed if we suggested that we should follow their footsteps and become farmers. . . No, your father sent you to school to become a clerk who wore a white shirt and whom he could show off as me ba krakyenii no (my son, the educated man). . .Such was the purpose of educating his son. He should wear a white shirt and a nice wristwatch and get people to look

⁶Millican, pp.3-4.

at him whenever he walked in the streets.⁷

Duodo tells very effectively of the problems besetting the young half-educated village men of Ghana at a time when their expectations greatly exceeded their own and their society's capabilities. Quietly, gently he shows how they have gone wrong, how they have gotten lost in the world of gabardines and "talking" shoes; how they have been cut off from the values of the old life to which their parents cling, yet unable to discover new values of their own. In such cases, the way frustrations are mediated, the way people are integrated into society, takes on added importance, and the role of ritual becomes significant in reaffirming social cohesion.⁸

THE STATIC CULTURE THEORY

Surprisingly, while sociologists such as Cooper have been concerned with the effects of technological change on societies of men and their rituals, they have, unfortunately, all but ignored the corresponding effect of ritual upon change. In regard to anthropological and sociological research in Africa, Owusu feels this neglect is a direct result of the European interest in finding out about the "exotic 'dark' continent whose

⁷Cameron Duodo, The Gab Boys (Accra: Ghana Publishing Corp., 1970), p. 132.

⁸Hayakawa, pp. 80-83.

traditions they erroneously considered unchanging," rather than in a thorough examination of the impact of colonial policy:

Long before colonial rule, tradition to Africans had become not an immutable system, but something that could be and was constantly manipulated, trimmed and even broken or replaced in response to the adaptive requirements of changing ecological and demographic pressures. This fact was missed by anthropologists who took for granted the static background of pre-European societies.⁹

Henige, in his study of stool succession (chieftancy) among the Akan people of Ghana, notes this tendency in most early scholars who viewed pre-colonial Akan political life as "normative," rigid and structured, implying that the present-day variegated succession practices are a direct result of colonial rule. On the contrary, Henige argues, the principles and patterns of pre-colonial life were not only as variegated and extemporaneous as they are today, but the adaptability of such practices is intrinsic to the nature of the Akan political system.¹⁰

Unfortunately, this "static culture" theory prevails even today. We are far more interested in reading descriptions of behavior that is different than ours, than in discovering why this behavior developed in the first place, and what its present function is, although the value of such knowledge is readily

⁹Maxwell Owusu, "Policy Studies, Development and Political Anthropology," Journal of Modern African Studies, XIII, 3, (1975), 370-71.

¹⁰David Henige, "Akan Stool Succession Under Colonial Rule-- Continuity or Change?" Journal of African History, XVI, 2 (1975), 299.

acknowledged. For this reason, the purpose of this thesis is to explore the development of one type of ritual and its present role in the further development of a particular society that is presently undergoing a state of rapid change from the traditional to the modern.

EFFECTS OF CHANGE

Possibly, the most sympathetic treatment of the effects of Westernization on the diverse groups of peoples and political structures that make up the present day Republic of Ghana is Apter's remarkable work, Ghana in Transition. First published in 1955, reprinted with a new preface in 1958, and subsequently revised and reprinted both in 1963 and in 1972, this is the author's words, "a case study of political institutional transfer,"¹¹ with particular concern for the behavioral consequences that result.

Culture, according to Apter, can be defined as the "learned symbols and artifacts held and transmitted by members of a society." In part he continues:

. . . culture provides perceptive forms by which members construct their world, their orientational universe. The symbols and concepts held by members of a tribe provide psychological and social security on a relatively homogeneous basis. The introduction of secular political forms demands a substitution of new culture forms, new symbols and artifacts either to supplant the old as relevant guides to action or to

¹¹David E. Apter, Ghana in Transition, (Princeton: Univ. Press, 1972).

replace them.¹²

Both Cooper and Ong are concerned with the turmoil that ensues, even when this substitution occurs over a relatively prolonged period of time, Cooper with the social frustrations that lead to group civil unrest and Ong with the individual consequences of a society's transition from oral to written communication. In discussing the social consequences of thrusting western democratic political forms into a tribal environment, Apter cautions that "human beings are not steel bridges; we cannot calculate their response to strain. We do not know what is foundation and what is superstructure in social life."¹³

Langer expands upon this in her treatment of ritual as the "active termination of a symbolic transformation of experience."¹⁴ There is nothing practical or rational about ritual, she claims; in fact all ritual practices are hopelessly inappropriate to the preservation and increase of life: "My cat would turn up his nose and tail at them."¹⁵ Yet they are born of an "elementary need" in the human brain.

Where Langer describes ritual as neither practical nor communicative (though it may be both effective and communal), but

¹²Apter, p. 15. ¹³Apter, p. 16.

¹⁴Susanne K. Langer, Philosophy in a New Key (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 45.

¹⁵Langer, p. 45.

simply "expressive," Hayakawa and Ong feel that ritual serves a much more utilitarian purpose. Ong recognizes the role of formalized oral expression (myth, folklore, which he classifies as ritual) as teacher, historian, and law giver; Hayakawa carries this one step further by arguing that where oral language is not sufficiently affective to produce the desired results, the elements of ritual are added as re-enforcers.¹⁶

¹⁶Hayakawa, pp. 90-96.

Chapter 2

THE ORAL TRADITION

From as far back as its history can be traced until as recently as two decades ago, the Republic of Ghana has been what Ong describes as a dominantly "oral-aural" culture; that is, one that relies mainly on the spoken word as its means of communication. The world of such an oral culture is of necessity, traditional, its traditionalism being closely related to the problems of acquiring, storing and retrieving knowledge in a voice-and-ear system of communication operating without a means of producing written records. In such a situation, nothing can be "looked-up": words are sounds, and sounds exist only as they are going out of existence. Thus, how to keep knowledge stable is a major problem.¹⁷

Basically, the solution to this problem, for the oral culture, is to standardize utterance, making it highly traditional. By contrast with verbal expression, which is composed in writing, Ong describes such oral expression as "thematic and formulaic, filled with epithets, and prolific of heroic figures," whose

¹⁷Ong, p. 32.

stable character helps anchor knowledge for retrieval.¹⁸ Ong cites examples from the oral tradition of ancient Greece: if Nestor is always wise, then around a story about Nestor can be clustered what society knew and could later treat more scientifically as wisdom. Wily Odysseus serves to store and retrieve what was known about wiliness, Achilles what was known about bravery.¹⁹

By the same token, among the ancient Ashanti (a sub-group of the Akans) of Ghana, most of the folk tales are known as "Anansesem"--spider stories--since they have to do with the spider, Ananse. In spite of his small size, Ananse had a brain as smart as any animal in the entire forest, and he cleverly induced the great God Nyame to make him the subject for all folk tales in the world. Thus are the esteemed Ashanti virtues of cleverness, common sense, and industry embodied in a host of tales of the mythical spider.²⁰

PROVERBIAL WISDOM

Among the Fante, another of the ethnically related groups known as the Akan, the proverb provides another example of formulary oral expression utilized as teacher. "A wise child is

¹⁸Ong, p. 33. ¹⁹Ong, p. 34.

²⁰J. Kirk Sale, The Land and People of Ghana (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincot, 1972), p. 54.

talked to in proverbs," is a Fante maxim that is widely observed, for the proverb is commonly used to admonish the child who misbehaves as well as to praise the obedient one.²¹ Proverbs dealing with the respect due to elders, obligations to kinsmen, or the proper attitude toward chiefs are often used to indoctrinate children in acceptable standards of social behavior. Christensen notes the following among proverbs that are oriented toward the rearing of children:

"The monkey jumps to where it can swing," (Look before you leap.)

"Short palm tree, stop complaining, for the tall palm started as you."

"The child who provokes his mother and father eats food without salt."²²

The dynamic nature of proverbs in present day Ghana is noted by Bruner, who found "the world of oral literature everywhere-- in truck signs, in clothes, even in a lizard's antics."²³ Printed on the backs and sides of the mammy wagons--the overcrowded,

²¹James Boyd Christensen, "The Role of Proverbs in Fante Culture," Peoples and Cultures of Africa, ed. Elliot P. Skinner (Garden City: Doubleday, 1973), p. 518.

²²Christensen, p. 519.

²³Charlotte Bruner, "Oral Literature: Make Sure of All Things, Hold Fast to What is Fine," Africa Report, Sept.-Oct., 1973, p. 24.

honking lorries which serve as public transportation within and between the larger towns and cities--one finds messages of piety and reassurance:

Sea Never Dry
Praise Allah
Why Worry
All is Vanity

And frequently humor:

Fear Woman
When?
Poor No Friend
Sweet Not Always

Further stimuli to reflection are found in the names of shops and restaurants, such as "Jesus Saves Nuts and Bolts," "Forget Your Wife Chop Bar," or "Always Willing Travel Agency."

In clothing, the ceremonial silk kente cloth is a combination of hand woven and stitched patterns of special significance, many of which are proverbial in nature. Rattray has catalogued over 100 patterns including "The liar is put to shame," "They met the enemy;" "All my subjects are in peace;" and the very popular Adweneasa, meaning "My ideas have come to an end," or "There is no more," because in this particularly intricate design, once worn exclusively by kings, the weaver had exhausted all his skills and all variations of his art.²⁴ Among handwoven cotton designs, Rattray lists 137, including "I lack even a penny," "The

²⁴R. S. Rattray, Religion and Art in Ashanti (London: Oxford University Press, 1927), p. 237.

fowl may beat the parrot until it kills it," "Does a mosquito cross the sea?" and "When the ofuntum (large tree) dies, the matatwine (a creeping plant) also relaxes its hold."

Further examples of proverbial wisdom are found in Adinkra, the traditional mourning cloth, on which are stamped a variety of specific motifs in black, block-printed with calabash blocks in columns or squares. Rattray²⁵ lists over fifty different design motifs, such as "A hen treads upon her chicks but does not kill them;" "It is no taboo to return and fetch it when you forget;" "Two crocodiles share the same stomach, but still they fight over the food;" and "He who would burn you, be not burned." Adinkra itself means farewell or goodbye; hence its use on cloth for funeral occasions. Nowadays, printed cotton representing the embroidered and stamped adinkra cloth is available by the yard and worn for every day.

THE POET AS HISTORIAN

Accustomed as we are to noetic conditions, where virtually everything that man has ever known can be looked up on a designated page in a locatable book on a specified shelf in a library, it is easy to underestimate the role of the poet or storyteller in a pre-literate society. One of the most frequent

²⁵Rattray, Religion and Art, pp. 265-268.

criticisms of the Anansesem, (and of the Homeric poems) is their lack of originality or creativity. However, it is important to note that this was not their purpose. The role of the poet is not simply that of an inventor or entertainer who surprises his audience with the unexpected; he is rather a recaller and a repeater of the expected, and if he and others like him were not around, what knowledge the society has would simply disappear.²⁶ Even today in Africa, and to a lesser extent in other areas of the world, the concept of oral tradition remains of paramount importance in communicating about the present through the past. Alagoa calls the preservation of Africa's oral tradition the most important supplement available for studying the archeological history of a site such as Koumbi Saleh, the capital of the ancient kingdom of Ghana, which was located by the combined use of written records and oral tradition.²⁷ It is significant that the contemporary Ashanti storyteller always precedes his tale with the ritual utterance, "Kodzi wongye nni O!" (A story is not meant to be consumed).

"Wogyie Sie!" the listeners answer (It is meant to be stored).²⁸

²⁷Ebiegberi Joe Alagoa, "Oral Tradition Among the Ijo of the Niger Delta," Journal of African History, VII, 3 (1966), 405-19.

²⁸Sale, p. 54.

THE INACCURACIES

Unfortunately, in spite of the devices employed to ensure it, memory in oral society is never verbatim on any appreciable scale. This has been shown as an indisputable fact in the case of the prodigiously skilled memory of Yugoslavian epic singers; recordings show that they never sing any epic exactly the same way twice, despite their protestations (also recorded) that they do.²⁹ Rattray notes that among the Ashanti, the same tale is never re-told quite the same way, the details varying depending upon the mood and personality of the teller and the local circumstances at the time.³⁰ Alagoa also notes this indirectly in his discussion of the wisdom of making or publishing recordings of traditions, the contention being that "once oral traditions are recorded and published, all variant traditions are extinguished in favor of the published version," and a rich alternate source of information is thereby cut off.³¹

THE REINFORCER

There are, however, certain bodies of knowledge that are of such importance to a society, that if formal language itself is

²⁹Ong, p. 34.

³⁰R. S. Rattray, Akan-Ashanti Folk-Tales (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), p. viii.

³¹Alagoa, p. 405.

not sufficiently affective to produce the exactness of memory which is required, other means must be found to obtain the desired results. Among these bodies of knowledge are those that Hayakawa calls "directives with collective sanction"-- that is, those utterances about matters which society as a whole regards as essential to its safety, and through which it tries to impose patterns of behavior on its members.³² These directives, often known as laws, must be made so powerful that no individual will fail to be impressed with his obligations. For this reason, language is supplemented with nonverbal affective appeals of many kinds, some of which have become so standardized as to become rituals.³³ In our own culture, these can range from the simple hand gesture to accompany the words "Come Here," to the brass bands, flags, parades, picnics, and free cigars used by a political candidate to supplement his speechmaking.³⁴ Other forms of ritual include the preliminary disciplines of various kinds

³²Hayakawa, pp. 90-96.

³³One facet of Fante culture in which proverbs play a prominent role is judicial procedure, where, according to Christensen, they are repeated as a traditional part of the hearings and are cited by the litigants in much the same manner as precedents are cited during hearings in the U.S. In this sense, proverbs "may be regarded as the verbalization of social norms or 'laws' which govern interpersonal relations." Christensen, pp. 511-13.

³⁴Hayakawa, p. 96.

that often precede the formal and public utterance of vows: initiation ceremonies involving physical hardships such as fasting and self-mortification before induction into warrior status; the activities and gestures that accompany the occasion itself, such as kneeling, standing, processions and costumes, to impress the occasion on the mind; and the feasts, dancing and other joyous manifestations that follow the utterances of these important bodies of knowledge.

The common feature of all these activities, according to Hayakawa, is the deep effect they have on the memory:

Every kind of sensory impression from the severe pain of initiation rites to the pleasures of banqueting, music, splendid clothing, and ornamental surroundings may be employed; every emotion from the fear of divine punishment to pride in being made the object of special public attention may be aroused. This is done in order that the individual who enters into his compact with society... shall never forget.³⁵

³⁵Hayakawa, p. 95.

Chapter 3

THE GHANAIAN FESTIVALS

To celebrate the important events of life, pre-literate Ghanaian culture evoked various rites and rituals which continue to play a central, if somewhat altered role in present day society. Among these are the rites of childnaming, of puberty and initiation, and of marriage and death--the ceremonies accompanying an individual's life crises, which Van Gennep designated rites de passage because they signify one's achieving new statuses from birth to death. According to Van Gennep, such changes of condition do not occur without disturbing the life of society and the individual, and it is the function of rites of passage to reduce their harmful effects.³⁶

Among certain peoples, this series of human transitions has been linked to the celestial passages, the revolutions of the planets, and the phases of the moon. This cosmic conception relates the stages of human existence to those of plant and animal life, joining them to the rhythms of the universe.³⁷

³⁶Arnold Van Gennep, Rites of Passage, trans. Monica B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Coffee (Chicago: University Press, 1960), p. 13.

³⁷Van Gennep, p. 194.

Chappell and Coon follow Van Gennep in calling the ceremonies organized around individual life crises "rites of passage;" however, they further distinguish between these and the cosmic ceremonies associated with seasons and other regular occurrences that bring about changes in human activity as "rites of intensification." The function of these annual and seasonal festivals which bring together the whole people of a town or of a tribe is to restore equilibrium where changes in social interaction impended or had occurred.³⁸ They afforded the opportunity for the renewal of relationships, both between the tribal leaders and their peoples, and among the individual tribal members themselves. They intensified the bonds of the group, and furthered the cohesiveness of that particular society. In this sense, these rituals assume a far greater importance for the total society than rites of passage, which are of significance only to the small family or clan circle.

Such is the nature of many of the tribal festivals which are celebrated throughout Ghana. Their significance as communicators of tribal history, as arbitrators of social norms, and promulgators of social cohesion in pre-literate society has been discussed briefly in the preceding sections. Their role in contemporary Ghanaian society will be considered in the remainder of this thesis;

³⁸ Van Gennep, p. xii.

however, because of the significance of land and its usage in these ceremonies, it is essential to make some preliminary statements concerning the major tribal groupings and their relationship to the land.

THE MAJOR TRIBAL GROUPS OF GHANA

One of the major difficulties confronting a researcher who attempts to conduct a sociological study of any of the West African nations and their peoples is the very diversity that makes such a study significant. Ghana is a case in point. It is a land of many peoples, many religions; isolated groups, and groups having a long history of intermingling through trade, migration and intermarriage. The concept of nationhood is still quite new and quite fragile. When the European colonial powers drew arbitrary lines to denote their respective territories, they took little account of the ethnic boundaries of the various tribes who inhabited those areas. Thus one finds in present-day Ghana three main groups of peoples--the Akan, the Ga-Adangme, and those of the Northern regions--and among these, many subgroups whose number ranges from 16 to 53, depending on which estimate one chooses to accept.³⁹ Each of these groups represents considerable

³⁹See for example, John Fynn, Ghana Today (Accra: Ghana Information Services), pp. 2-16; or G. T. Anim, ed., Official Guide Book of Ghana (Accra: National Tourist Corp., 1969), p. 13.

cultural and historical differences, and widely differing local customs.

For a good overview of the history of Ghana dating from the time of the first European contact in the fifteenth century, through the advent of independence in 1957, Ward's A History of Ghana is not to be surpassed.⁴⁰ Many of Ward's theories of the ethnic origins of the present-day Ghanaian peoples are enlarged upon by Dickson, who in addition brings to his study the indigene's unique understanding of the importance of the historical perspective to the understanding of contemporary human geography of Ghana.⁴¹ Dickson seeks to identify the forces behind the evolution of the cultural landscape from the earliest times (the West African Stone Age) to 1957, and to sum-up through an examination of the changing vegetation cover and the cultural landscape substituted for it, the salient features of man-land relationships.

The importance of these relationships to the study of ritual is brought out by a number of historical and ethnographic studies, particularly J. K. Fynn's history of the Asante nation and their neighbors in the period from 1700 through 1807,⁴² and

⁴⁰W. E. F. Ward, A History of Ghana (London: 1958).

⁴¹Kwamina B. Dickson, A Historical Geography of Ghana (Cambridge: University Press, 1969).

⁴²J. K. Fynn, Asante and Its Neighbors 1700-1807 (London: Longman, 1971).

Agbodeka's study which covers the period from 1868 through 1900.⁴³ It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that the customary laws regarding the ownership and disposition of land are one of the roots upon which the complicated lineage systems of tribal society, and many of the subsidiary forms of customary law and political authority, rest.

Akan Land-Tenure

From the Akan point of view, land is not to be regarded as a single immovable entity or possession, but may be said to have three distinct aspects:

1. The land itself, in its most literal sense, i.e. the soil, the earth.
2. The usufruct, the use to which the soil may be put.
3. Crops, trees and houses, which are regarded as separable from the soil in which they are rooted or on which they stand.⁴⁴

The earth itself is believed by the Akan to have a power or spirit of its own, conceived as a female principle, which is helpful if propitiated and harmful if neglected. When the earth grants a good harvest, the farmer is expected to return thanks

⁴³Francis Agbodeka, African Politics and British Policy in the Gold Coast 1868-1900 (London: Longman, 1971).

⁴⁴Madeline Manoukian, Akan and Ga-Adangme Peoples (London: International African Institute, 1964), pp. 47-50.

by pouring libation or making a sacrifice. The territory of the land belongs to the ancestors, and it is from them the living have inherited the right to use the land. They are believed to keep watch over the land and see that it is used properly and fairly. The land is thus a link between the ancestors and their living descendents, according to Manoukian:

The Stool (symbol of authority) symbolizes the unity of the ancestors and their descendants and the Chief occupies the Stool: 'the land belongs to the Stool' or 'the land belongs to the Chief' both mean the same thing: 'the land belongs to the ancestors.'⁴⁵

The chief is thus the custodian of the land, and as such, the intermediary between his people and the royal ancestors. By virtue of this role, he is the central figure in various organized rituals, the most frequent of which are the Adae in honor of the departed; and the Odwira or cleansing ceremonies, both of which will be discussed in the main body of the thesis.

The Ga-Adangme Land Customs

Among the Ga-Adangme peoples, land tenure is also significant to the study of ritual, for again, the land itself (the soil) is distinguished from the usus, the use to which the soil may be put. In each 'town' (i.e., the grouping of families in a clan devoted to a particular deity) the land itself is considered to be owned by a God or Gods who also own the lagoons,

⁴⁵Manoukian, p. 47.

so that both farming and fishing are forbidden on the day of the week sacred to each particular God. The most important of the Ga festivals, the Kpledzo, which takes place at the time of corn planting and involves ceremonies of thanksgiving to the gods and requests for their blessings on all the townspeople; and the Homowo or feast of 'hunger-hooting' at harvest time, where gods and ancestors are thanked for good things of the past year, grow out of this religious respect for the land.

Originally, the high priest who is the central figure of these celebrations, was also the only ruler of the 'town,' but it became necessary, especially with the coming of Europeans, for purposes of negotiation, warfare and alliances, for him to delegate much of his secular authority either to lesser priests or to the military officials. Today the chief priest's formal authority is confined to ritual occasions: he officiates at public worship, offers libations to his god, interprets to the people the wishes of this god, prays for the people and advises them in time of trouble. Nevertheless:

His is the final voice in any dispute about right and wrong and anyone may take a case to him if dissatisfied with the decision of other courts. The senior priest is also often the nominal landlord of the town.⁴⁶

⁴⁶Manoukian, p. 81.

Peoples of the North

In the northern regions, land tenure differs somewhat from that of the Akans and the Gas. The religious aspect of land ownership is less closely related to the religious functions of chieftancy, partly due to the fact that the suzerain chiefs of the north are recent arrivals, having conquered the indigenous inhabitants. In most areas, the new chiefs respected the traditional pattern of land tenure, forming an alliance with the religious figures caring for the land.⁴⁷ Thus a separation of tribal authority and land trusteeship occurs. Hailey explains:

. . .all religion centered on the worship of the Earth God and the ancestral spirits. The land itself was mapped out into a network of well-defined areas, each of which had its own particular designation, as a domain of the Earth God. The principal mediator between the people and the Earth God was the tendaana, a priest holding an hereditary office, who lived the life of a recluse in communion with the god and the ancestral spirits, and had considerable control over the lives of the people in his particular area. . . (but) could not propitiate the Earth God or ancestral spirits of another. The area came to be recognized as a land unit with its own established boundaries.⁴⁸

The tendaana was the trustee of the land, and was the final authority on any land issue, such as the allocation of the bush for cultivation; but the chiefs, whose jurisdiction

⁴⁷Apter, p. 54.

⁴⁸Lord Hailey, Native Administration in the British African Territories (London, 1951), pp. 259-60, quoted by Apter, p. 54.

derived from other than land tenure sources, were the traditional figures of authority in other areas.

TYPES OF FESTIVALS

Should a measure of the importance of festivals in Ghana be reckoned strictly by their number, that alone would prove significant. The guide book of the National Tourist Corporation lists over 100 annual festivals.⁴⁹ Admittedly, some of these are minor celebrations and there is some overlapping, as the same ceremony frequently is celebrated at different times in various regions of the country. However, from an unpublished calendar of festivals compiled by the Institute of African Studies, it appears that there is no single month in the year during which one or more festivals of major significance are not celebrated.⁵⁰

Although it is difficult to generalize, these traditional festivals appear to be of two types. One is seasonal, marking the new fishing season or the harvest. Such celebrations are often associated with the group's gods who are responsible for granting a successful crop. The community therefore gives thanks for past help and makes sacrifices to ensure continued success. The second type marks the period of remembering the dead

⁴⁹G. T. Anim ed. Official Guidebook of Ghana (Accra: National Tourist Corporation, 1969), pp. 51-58.

⁵⁰C. A. Ackah, "The Historical Significance of Some Ghanaian Festivals," Ghana Notes and Queries, V (1963), 16-27.

and the recounting of the tribal history. In this type of celebration the ancestral stools--the shrines of the spirits of the group's forebears--are ritually purified and "fed."⁵¹ Past deeds are enumerated, and dramatic scenes from the tribe's history are frequently re-enacted. Both types reveal some common features and beliefs:

There is, first and foremost, the belief in life after death and in the nearness of dead ancestors to their living descendants. Secondly, through these festivals, the people remember their past leaders and ask for their help and protection. Thirdly, the festivals are used to purify the whole state so that the people can enter a new year with hope and confidence.⁵²

Gluckman distinguishes a third type of ceremony among societies of southeastern Africa which Norbliss subsequently enlarged to include Africa. These are the "rituals of conflict," during which rules of behavior are seemingly suspended temporarily--rulers and chiefs are reviled, criticized and threatened by those subject to their authority, and men are similarly subjected to various ritual expressions of putative hostility enacted by women, who are their inferiors.⁵³ Norbliss describes such rites as "institutionalized departures from everyday practice, norms for special occasions that

⁵¹A.A. Opoku, "Festivals Change to Match Today's World," Africa Report, April 1972, pp. 23-24.

⁵²A.A. Opoku, Festivals of Ghana (Accra: Ghana Publishing Corporation), p. 4.

⁵³Max Gluckman, Custom and Conflict in Africa (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1959), pp. 109-136.

oppose year round norms,"and interprets them as a mode of integrating groups of unequal status and maintaining social balance through direct or indirect expressions of hostility towards individuals or social groups.⁵⁴

Although rites of conflict are abundantly evident in the Ghanaian festivals, it is the opinion of the researcher that they are more properly classified as elements of the seasonal and remembrance festivals outlined above, than as a distinct type of ceremony. Following Van Gennep⁵⁵ they are better interpreted as serving the common function of making memorable and enhancing the importance of the social occasions upon which they are observed, and will be treated as such in this thesis.

HARVEST FESTIVALS

Throughout a wide area of West Africa, one of the most important traditional functions in the calendar is the harvest celebration known as the New Yam Festival, or more commonly, Yam Festival, which is celebrated annually in September and October, and appears to be common among several widely varying cultures.⁵⁶

⁵⁴Edward Norbliss, "African Rituals of Conflict," American Anthropologist, LXV (1963), 1255.

⁵⁵Van Gennep, pp. 8, 22, 169.

⁵⁶D. G. Corsey, "The Cultivation and Use of Yams in West Africa," Ghana Notes and Queries, IX (Nov., 1966), p. 50.

Yam (Dioscorea L.) is a tuberous-rooted legume that is an indigenous staple food crop in the area stretching from the Central Ivory Coast to the Cameroon mountain chain, and from near the coast to the limit of cultivation in the Savannah, at about 10° N. Five countries are included in this so-called "yam-zone"-- Ghana, Ivory Coast, Dahomey, Nigeria and Togo. The tuber is both hardy and adaptable, and is grown in both forest and southern savannah conditions, although commercial production in the present day is mainly in the latter area.⁵⁷

The cultivation of yams in West Africa almost certainly antedates European contact. They are mentioned as important food crops in what are now Guinea, the Nzima area of Ghana, and Eastern Nigeria, by Pacheco Pereira (1505-08).⁵⁸ Corsey presents additional evidence that several varieties of wild yam were gathered by Palaeolithic West African man, and notes that their importance in the development of West African civilization has given rise to the term "the civilization of the yam" to describe the peoples of this area.⁵⁹

Further indication of the antiquity of yam cultivation is the great volume of religious and superstitious practices associated

⁵⁷D. G. Corsey, "The New Yam Festival Among the Ewe," Ghana Notes and Queries, X (Dec., 1968), p. 18.

⁵⁸Corsey, "Cultivation and Use," p. 48.

⁵⁹Corsey, "New Yam Festival," p. 13.

with the cultivation and utilization of the crop, which are not associated with important non-indigenous staple crops such as cassava, cocoyam, plantain and rice, that were introduced into the West African diet at later stages of development.⁶⁰

In nearly all Ghanaian communities, for example, yam is considered so precious a staple food that it is the main offering that is presented to the gods and revered departed ancestors during the performance of rites and ceremonies. Among the Akan peoples, the small child who begins to walk a year or so after birth is for the first time given a boiled egg and yam mashed with palm oil; puberty celebrations for girls include her eating mashed yam; and members of a family include in the rite of purification of a relative who has served a term of imprisonment the eating of yam mashed in palm oil. Yam is thus believed to have sacred properties.⁶¹

There are several essential features that are common to most celebrations of the Yam festival among the tribal groups of Ghana, and throughout West Africa. These include:

1. Yams may not be eaten from the new crop until the festival has been celebrated.
2. The Festival is a time of general rejoicing.

⁶⁰Corsey, "Cultivation and Use," pp. 49-50.

⁶¹Ackah, pp. 18-19.

3. The time of the Festival is fixed only after serious consultation of the-ancestral spirits by the chief or village elders.

4. The first portion of the new crop yams are offered to the ancestral spirits, and thereafter the whole community or selected representatives thereof, partake of the crop.

5. In many, but not all, cases, neighboring communities are informed that the Festival is taking place, and are invited to participate.⁶²

The significance of the taboo on eating of the new yam is religious, according to Ackah, for the gods and the spirits of departed ancestors are first to be served with some of it, usually in ritual during which the chief or other official sprinkles some of it for these spirits. This deference to the spirits is believed to win their good will and ensure the use of their powers in bringing prosperity and peace and happiness to the community--a request which is actually made on behalf of the people by the spokesman when he pours libation.⁶³

Corsey suggests that certain of these elements may derive from the fact that early in the process of the ennoblement of yams, they may have been toxic before a certain stage in their development, and the tabu on their consumption prior to the

⁶²Ackah, p. 50. ⁶³Ackah, p. 18.

Festival, which is still very rigidly observed in some areas, may once have had a very real practical importance. Alternatively, the rites may go back even further to the proto-agricultural phase, when they marked the time after which the yams could be cut from the semi-wild plants without danger of killing them.⁶⁴ Both Corsey and Opoku note that the justification for the joyous celebration of the harvest of the yam lies in the fact that yams are extremely demanding in their cultivation, and require a great deal of hard labor.⁶⁵ Bray estimates that a man-year of labor at normal West African working rates produces only about three tons of yams, which compares very unfavorably with the production of cassava or rice.⁶⁶

YAM CELEBRATIONS AMONG THE EWE

Among the Ewe, a major tribe of Akan peoples who inhabit the Volta region of Ghana, the basic form of the Yam Festival is the same in its major aspects, although it differs in detail through different sections of the tribe. One of the more interesting examples of the use of ritual to communicate a body

⁶⁴Corsey, "Cultivation and Use," p. 50.

⁶⁵Corsey, "Cultivation and Use," p. 46; and Opoku, Festivals in Ghana, p. 62.

⁶⁶F. R. Bray, "A Study of Yam Farming in North Mampong, Ashanti," (Legon: Faculty of Agriculture, University of Ghana, 195?), p. 7 (mimeographed).

of knowledge that is vital to a society's well-being occurs during the Yam Festival celebration of the Ewe at Peki, for included in the chanted dialogue of the celebration is a veritable Farmer's Almanac course of instruction in the proper methods for planting and harvesting yam.

The Pekis at one time in their history were ruled by the Akwamus, a Twi-speaking tribe of the Akans who calculate their year in the 40-day cycles known as Adae,⁶⁷ and have adopted the Twi method of fixing important dates of the traditional calendar. According to calculation, one of these dates falls on the first and second Sunday (Akwasideae) in September, the sixth month after the planting of yam, and it is on this Sunday that begin preliminary preparations for the main Festival on the following Friday. The chief fetish priest, who is the central figure in the ceremonies, calculates the dates and informs the Fiaga (paramount chief) of their approach. On the morn of Akwasideae, royal drums summon every chief and his elders to the Fiaga's palace, where they offer ritual sacrifices and libation for the safety and welfare of all the chiefs and citizens and the success of the endeavors. The chiefs then return to their towns to offer their own libations with the elders, and drumming and dancing

⁶⁷A full description of Adae appears in the section on Odwira (remembrance festivals) pp. 68-69.

continue throughout the day. That evening the Fiaga's town crier announces to the people in all the towns of the Peki traditional area that Tuesday is the day of general cleansing and purification.

When Tuesday arrives, every town is weeded and swept clean; every housewife weeds around her house and sweeps it; and after dinner, every fire is put out, the fireplace swept clean, and the wood ash and charcoal collected in containers and carried by the women along the main road to the outskirts of town where it is thrown away in a heap across the road. Here, the fetish priest carries out a purification ceremony, and places a ritual bundle in the ash-heap, with prayers by him and the people that no evil should overstep the heap and enter the town.⁶⁸

On Thursday morning, the townspeople go to their farms to dig up their yam tubers in preparation for the celebration the following day. Because no new yam must enter the town before sunset, the tubers are hidden in the bush on the outskirts of the town, where they are then collected from dusk to about 8p.m., and from dawn to 8a.m. on Friday, and carried home amidst great rejoicing. Onlookers intone the following words as the yam tubers are carried along:

⁶⁸Opoku, Festivals of Ghana, pp. 64-65.

Here is yam,
 Cooked, sliced yam, sliced by the hand.
 Could you have carried it if it were a
 bundle of firewood?
 You are delighted to carry this.
 Has the yam head not developed
 Into a tuber?
 He who stays at home must not
 expect to have any yam.
 You stooped to work; are you denied the joy of
 eating it?⁶⁹

Frequently, the onlookers rush after the yam-carrying farmers, and with clenched fists gently hit the bottom end of the yam tubers they fancy.

Ritual Instruction in Agriculture

When the tubers have thus entered the town, the chief fetish priest cuts off the head of a prize yam tuber and plants it in a corner of the fetish house, all the while intoning--in a manner reminiscent of the cataloging of ships in the Illiad, or of the description of shipbuilding in the Odessey--instructions on the preparation of the ground, the required conditions of weather, the quality of tuber to be used, and the care that is required for a bountiful harvest. This plant will sprout several weeks in advance of the normal yam planting season, giving the priest the first yam tuber of the new year. He keeps close watch over this yam as it grows, and as soon as he sees any sign of its developing a tuber about the size of a child's fist,

⁶⁹Opoku, Festivals of Ghana, p. 65-66.

he digs it up, splits it and presents it to the fetish (the deity), placing it on a small mound in the fetish house. This is a public announcement to Peki farmers that the harvest season is near, for the fetish has "tasted" the first new yam in the new year.⁷⁰ As planter and keeper of the fetish yam, the fetish priest fulfills a dual role among the Peki, as both religious leader and professor of agriculture. To consider his latter role as strictly ritual or obsolete in contemporary society, however, would be highly inaccurate; for although the national literacy rate for Ghana is one of the highest in West Africa, this is still less than 50 percent, and the majority of literate adults are concentrated in the larger urban areas.⁷¹ Thus, even with the abundance of printed agricultural information available through the Ministry of Agriculture or USAID, it is not uncommon to find no single person in the village who is able to read it. The fetish priest in such cases is the keeper and transmitter of a body of knowledge that is essential to the survival of the tribe, both through his recital of the ritual, and through his actions as he cultivates and cares for the fetish yam through its growing season.

⁷⁰Opoku, Festivals of Ghana, p. 68.

⁷¹William A. Hachten, Muffled Drums: The News Media in Africa (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1971), p. 277.

Innovations

Festivals in other Ewe traditional areas include elements which probably are of recent origin. In Kpedze-Awhime, the festival is held annually on the ninth of September. On the preceeding day, the fetish priest makes a large mound just outside the town, upon which he sacrifices to the ancestors a hard boiled egg and a new yam which is split in half, in order to discourage them from attending the main Festival. The next day, the chiefs assemble, and farmers each bring a yam to the town square, where they are judged and a prize awarded to the best. Speeches on yam farming are made by the more successful farmers, and by government agricultural agents who have been invited as honored guests. Similar features are prominent in the festivals in Wodze and Banko, where an exhibition of yams is held after their introduction into the town, and the owner of the best is hailed as the "Yam King," and carried around town amidst general celebration.⁷²

In Have Ableme, where the festival falls annually on the 15th of September, and lasts for eight days, farmers bring their yams into town on the first day to be judged. The grower of the largest yam is declared as the chief farmer for the year, and a number of "assistant chief farmers" are also installed. The rest of the period is devoted to drumming, dancing and

⁷²Corsey, "The New Yam Festival," p. 20.

enjoyment, and to lectures on various aspects of yam farming.

Corsey feels that this emphasis on agricultural aspects of the festival, such that it now more resembles an agricultural show than a religious ceremony, may be of recent origin, although the practices of judging yams and selecting a chief farmer or "Yam King" may well be traditional.⁷³ However, Aduamah points out that purification is the essential core of the festival; "Agricultural Shows," according to his interviews with various elders, are foreign elements incorporated into festivals, having first been introduced at Kpalime by the Germans to encourage crop production.⁷⁴

Influence of Christianity

Other innovations of recent origin indicate the influence of Christianity on Ghanaian society. In Beme, for example, the first day of the festival is marked by a Christian church service, after which the first meal of new yam is eaten by the townspeople; while in Siama, the festival is preceded the evening before by a purification ceremony featuring a procession of lighted candles around the various quarters of the town. The festival day itself commences with the sounding of drums

⁷³Corsey, "The New Yam Festival," pp. 21-22.

⁷⁴E. Y. Aduamah, "The New Yam Festival Among the Ewe: A Comment," Ghana Notes and Queries, XII (June, 1972), p. 31.

to summon the chiefs and people to the house of the Paramount Chief, where the elders each present him with a pot of palm wine. After further drumming and a procession, a sermon is preached by a catechist, then drumming, dancing and merrymaking continue into the night.⁷⁵

One Christian who is an active festival participant is the Rev. Vincent Burke, an American missionary priest and educator who has lived in Ghana for twelve years and speaks several tribal dialects fluently. Father Burke attends festivals frequently, especially when he is in rural areas, and is frequently invited to take part in the ceremonies by giving a blessing or a short homily. Father Burke feels that such occasions provide him with the opportunity to build a deeper rapport with the Ghanaian people and to communicate with them on a more personal and meaningful level than that provided by the "Sunday morning sermon."⁷⁶

Such participation by Christians in obviously pagan rituals may seem incongruous to Western observers, and indeed, practicing Christians in the recent past were forbidden to participate in the activities.⁷⁷ The nature of the problem is noted by Busia, who quotes an official report of the British

⁷⁵Corsey, "New Yam Festival," p. 21.

⁷⁶Personal conversations with the Rev. Vincent Burke, S.V.D., Accra, 1975.

⁷⁷Opoku, "Festivals Change," p. 23.

Colonial Government on the Ashanti tribes in 1905:

The tendency of Christian converts to alienate themselves from the communities to which they belong is very marked, and is naturally resented by the chiefs who claim their hereditary right, in which they are supported by Government, to make the converts in common with their fellow tribesmen obey such laws and orders as are in accordance with native custom, not being repugnant to natural justice, equity and good conscience.⁷⁸

The conflict was such that in 1912, a committee consisting of the Governor of the Gold Coast, the Chief Commissioner, three other officials, and representatives of the missions then working in Ashanti--Wesleyan, Basel and Roman Catholic--attempted to resolve the problem by ruling that "No Christian shall be called upon to perform any fetish rites or service, but shall be bound to render customary service to his chief on ceremonial occasions when no element of fetish practice is involved."⁷⁹ The committee further suggested that "an effort should be made to draw a distinction between fetish and purely ceremonial service," which as Busia points out, is a difficult injunction to carry out:

The ceremonial occasions when the services of the Christian converts were required could not be purely ceremonial. The convert may indeed be required to do no more than carry a chair or an umbrella or beat a drum; but the occasion may be the celebrations

⁷⁸K.A. Busia, "The Ashanti of the Gold Coast," *African Worlds*, ed. Daryll Ford (London, Oxford University Press, 1954), quoted on p. 207.

⁷⁹Busia, p. 207.

of an Adae, when the people express their sense of dependence on the ancestors, and pray to them for food and health and children and prosperity.⁸⁰

The present day Ghanaian Christians seem to have resolved the problem to their own satisfaction. Mr. George Aye-Bonte, a devout Roman Catholic and a member of the royal family of the Ga peoples, feels that his personal reverence for the ancestors is no more than the traditional Christian attitude toward saints. The animism inherent in the festivals and other traditional practices is no more than the symbolic manifestation of the Supreme Being in all things.⁸¹ The former idea seems to receive theological support from Sarpong, who notes that belief in the spirits of the dead and in their influence over the living is found among all peoples, and in every religion:

Christians believe in saints. . . Moslem worshippers believe in Muhammed. . . It is only the words which are used to describe the dead that differ. When Christians call their dead saints and refer to those of pagans as ancestors, they are not expressing different ideas. Both words express ideas about people who once belonged to their religious group, are now dead, and are supposed to be in a position of influence over the living.⁸²

Many Ashanti Christians, according to Busia, join the Adae (ancestor veneration) celebrations because they share with

⁸⁰Busia, p. 208.

⁸¹Personal conversations with George Aye-Bonte, Deputy Peace Corps Director of Education, Accra, 1973-1974.

⁸²The Rt. Rev. Peter Sarpong, Bishop of Kumasi, Ghana in Retrospect (Accra: Ghana Publishing Corp., 1974), p. 33.

their fellow non-Christian countrymen the sentiments expressed in the ceremonials: a sense of dependence on the ancestors.⁸³

Likewise, the Christian belief in a Supreme Being is by no means incompatible with the belief in animated nature and a pantheon of lesser deities, according to Sarpong, although it may be "at times difficult to explain rationally:"

The belief is that all the spirits (minor deities) are creatures of God, subject to Him in every way and only to do His will. In other words, God manifests himself through them. They are His sons and ministers. God it is who executes his plans through them.⁸⁴

Busia feels that the two belief systems are so easily reconciled among Ghanaians because Christianity has made only a superficial impact on Ghanaian culture. The Christian most probably still accepts the view of the universe and of man that has dominated tribal thought for untold generations. It is a part of his cultural heritage, and he has taken it on as he has done other aspects of his culture--including Christianity, without much difficulty, and without subjecting it to critical analysis.⁸⁵

SOCIALIZING, PAST AND PRESENT

The casual justification on the part of many Christian Ghanaians of their participation in what are primarily pagan

⁸³Busia, p. 208. ⁸⁴Sarpong, p. 19. ⁸⁵Busia, p. 208.

religious ceremonies may lead an outside observer to conclude that the religious significance of the festivals has been obscured to such an extent that the festivals are now merely social events, with only the pageantry and feasting remaining. To some extent this may be true; but if contemporary Ghanaians seem to place great emphasis on the purely social aspects of the festivals, it is also true that this socializing has always been one of the essential parts of the celebrations.⁸⁶ Where once these annual events afforded related groups of people divided by great distances an excuse to get together, today festivals are an opportunity for those who have left the traditional areas for city life to renew their links to the land and to the people from whence they came.

During an extended field expedition from 1934 to 1935, Fortes first noted the socially integrative functions of harvest festivals among the Tale peoples who inhabit the northern regions of the Gold Coast (present-day northern Ghana).⁸⁷ The Talles at that time were "congeries of peoples speaking different dialects of the Mossi-Dagomba language family with an ostensibly uniform culture, but lacking a centralized political organization."⁸⁸

⁸⁶Opoku, "Festivals Change," p. 23.

⁸⁷M. Fortes, "Ritual Festivals and Social Cohesion in the Hinterlands of the Gold Coast," American Anthropologist, XXXVIII (1936), pp. 590-604.

⁸⁸Fortes, p. 590.

There are no villages in this country, but:

For miles and miles, continuously, one mud compound follows on another. There is often nothing to mark the boundary between one settlement and another, nor can exact frontiers between dialect areas be established. A short ethnographic residence in the country shows that a notion of a fixed and demarcated tribal unit, either as a linguistic grouping or as a political grouping owing a common allegiance, does not exist. There seems, in fact, to be no structural unit larger than the clan settlement capable of exhibiting social cohesion.⁸⁹

These Tale settlements fall into two major groups, distinguished by their tradition of origin: the Namoos, who claim descendency from a common ancestor known as Mosur, who fled from the south and established the present clans more than two centuries ago; and the Tallis, who claim primacy of rank by virtue of the fact that their ancestors ostensibly emerged from the earth or descended from heaven and were already there when Mosur arrived. The two groups have a common cultural idiom, a single language, and an economic system that is uniform and inclusive of both communities; however, there is a long history of rivalry--at times open hostility--due to discrepancy of origins, which seems to be alleviated through the ritual practices of the two clans.⁹⁰ These ceremonies, although sometimes differing in content, are the same in form and dynamic character, particularly in those pertaining to the harvest and the veneration of the

⁸⁹Fortes, p. 590. ⁹⁰Fortes, p. 592.

ancestors. They serve as an important mechanism to preserve equilibrium among the two groups of people, and are described in detail in a later part of this thesis.

At this point, however, it is the socializing function of the festivals that is of interest; for although ritual is the dominant theme for the chiefs and elders who bear the greatest responsibility for the communities' welfare, it is the dancing and festivity, the fellowship of jubilation, that are the major value for those of lesser social responsibility. For everybody, these are the rituals of reunion in which family and kinship receive special emphasis. Among the Tallis, the Boyarram Festival, which celebrates the harvest of the new guinea corn, has traditionally been the time that married daughters return home with gifts of special food and guinea fowls from their husbands, and men who have migrated to distant parts try to return for the ceremonies.⁹¹

Likewise among the Namoos, the celebration of Gingaun, and Daa, the New Year Festival which immediately follows, brings Namoo women who have married away back to their clan, bearing gifts from their in-laws; and Namoo men return from near and far to renew their bonds with family and community. Daa, particularly, is an occasion for the whole settlement to dress in their best and gaudiest finery, and assemble at the Chief's compound to

⁹¹Fortes, p. 601.

present him gifts and good wishes. Great quantities of food are cooked, both communally and within each family; there is visiting and counter-visiting, and everyone congratulates his neighbor on having seen another year.⁹²

GA TRIBESMEN RETURN FOR HOMOWO

Possibly one of the most colorful and prominent examples of the socializing function of the harvest festivals is the annual celebration in August of Homowo by the Ga peoples who have settled in southern Ghana in Accra and the surrounding coastal plains. The festivities are highlighted by the return to their traditional areas of the Soobii--the "Thursday people"--so called because these are Ga citizens who have traveled to live and farm in other towns and villages, and return on the Thursday preceding the Festival Saturday. These travelers assemble on the outskirts of the town at a point called Mukpono, where they are met by their families and friends, and escorted into town, amidst rejoicing and singing, carrying loads of food and gifts covered with nets and decorated with farm produce such as pepper, corn, onions, okra, and garden eggs.

The song of the welcomers--"You left behind, you left behind/

⁹²Fortes, p. 598.

Your mother/You left behind your father," is joyously sung today, although it originated—as a song of ridicule. According to oral tradition, a great famine occurred among the Gas many years ago, and many people migrated in search of food. Later when there was again plenty for all, the deserters returned amidst the jeers of those who had persevered at home.

E. A. Ammah, the Ga traditional historian, has traced the origin of Homowo to the Jewish Passover, pointing out the striking similarities between the two rituals, including the use of unleavened corn meal for the ritual food, the application of red clay to the door posts, and the hurried and communal manner in which the food (kpekple) is eaten.⁹³ However, the version preserved in oral tradition seems to have more validity, for Homowo is literally translated as "hooting at hunger," and is related to the traditional vocations of the Ga people, farming and fishing. During the celebration, a colorful parade marches through all quarters of the town, tossing ritual food in the streets to commemorate the first bumper crop which enabled their ancestors to jeer and hoot at the hunger which had plagued them.

The Homowo cycle actually begins with the coming of the rains in early May when the seven principal priests, one from each of the seven quarters of Ga Mashi, the traditional name for Accra,

⁹³Ackah, p. 24.

perform the ritual sowing of corn. At this time the state patriarch, the Ga Mantze, prays for more rain, more grain, and thanks the gods for the previous year's harvest. Thirty days before Homowo day, a ban is placed on drumming and dancing and all other forms of noisemaking, the significance of which is not clearly understood by the Gas themselves, but seems homologous to a similar ban on all "merry-making and loitering in the towns and streets," that is invoked among the Akuapem peoples of Aburi at the beginning of the yam harvesting cycle.⁹⁴ This is to encourage the farmers to retire to their villages and farms to care for their crops in order to ensure a large harvest. With the arrival of the Soobii, the ban is lifted by the Ga Mantze pouring libation to thank the gods and ancestors and ask their blessing for prosperity and success in the coming year.

The day after the Soobii arrive marks the lustral day of all twins, who are commonly believed by the Gas to be not ordinary mortals, but deities who have to be "worshipped" by their parents if trouble is not to come to the family. Clad in white, twins and their parents and relations make merry in their homes with feasting, singing and dancing. They are given a ritual meal of yam, eggs and chicken prepared on a special

⁹⁴Opoku, Festivals of Ghana, p. 28.

hearth and eaten only by them. In mid-afternoon they are carried through the streets to cast the remains of their meal into the sea. During the procession, which is accompanied by drumming and dancing, twins frequently go into a trance-like state of possession. This is an awe-inspiring sight, and it is taken as a highly beneficent sign, as the twins are said to have been "possessed" by the deities.

At the same time as the feast of the twins, Ga women in every household are making final and feverish preparations for the Homowo feast on the following day. The milled corn, the oil palm, the fish and the faggots must be readied; the hearths must be polished and the lintels of the main gateway into the house smeared with red clay. Long before dawn of the following day, the women are preparing Kpokpoi from steamed unleavened corn dough, and palm soup, so that all cooking is finished by mid-morning, and dished out into traditional earthenware pots and bowls.

In the afternoon, kinsmen gather in the ancestral home to partake of the feast, first sprinkling some of the Kpokpoi around all doorsteps of the house, so the spirits of the departed can also enjoy the meal. What each individual family head does in his household, the Mantsemei (chiefs) are also doing within

the areas of their influence or authority.⁹⁵ Accompanied by drumming, flourishes of horns, singing and dancing, each Mantze leads a royal procession through the lanes and streets from one principal household to another, sprinkling Kpokpoi.

When the ancestors have been fed, all male members of the household, young and old together, gather round the ritual meal and eat from the same bowl. Status and class are forgotten in the scrambling that ensues as everyone tries to get the best part of the fish or meat in the bowl. Fathers must tussle with their sons--sometimes even beg for a morsel of fish, while the women share in the fun by cheering and applauding the youth for their cleverness in beating the older folk in the struggle.

The Homowo Durbar

The climax of the Homowo is the "durbar" which is held that afternoon on the grounds of the Ga Mantze's palace. Perhaps the closest approximation of a durbar in western society would be the combination of a state dinner and a political or fraternal rally. Special invitations are issued to certain honored guests from outside the Ga peoples, but everyone is welcome--and everyone usually comes, Ghanaians and expatriates alike--for here is a rare opportunity to observe and participate in a colorful kaleidoscope of music, dance, ritual and feasting--

⁹⁵Opoku, Festivals of Ghana, p. 55.

all that is noble and worthy of preservation in the cultural heritage of the Ga peoples.

Dressed in their traditional kente robes of red, gold, green and blue; wearing crowns or circulets studded with gold, and bearing gold-hilted swords, the Ga Mantze and all his chiefs and heads of tribes and clans are borne through the streets in palaquins. Each is sheltered by a large multicolored umbrella that is continually twirled to add rhythm to its colors. When they reach the royal palace, where a huge canopy has been erected, the Ga Mantze is seated in state in its center, flanked in a horseshoe formation by the lesser chiefs and their retinues. Surrounding them are seated the government dignitaries and honored guests, as many as the canopy will hold. They are, indeed, the chosen ones, sheltered from the tropical sun for the long afternoon ahead; all others must scramble to find choice seats in the open field from which to view the panorama about to unfold.

After all the chiefs have been seated, they are led one by one by their linguists (spokesmen) and swordbearers to pay homage to the Paramount Chief. As they approach the royal dias, each bares his chest and slips off his sandals before shaking his master's hand. The chiefs are followed by other local dignitaries and guests, then any citizen who wishes may likewise pay homage in the same way.

When all have had a chance to express their loyalty, the

Ga Mantze returns the compliment through his linguist--for chiefs are considered too noble to ever address their subjects directly in an official capacity--and the pageant can now begin.

The royal drums, which all the while have been busy, are now the focus of attention. These are the famous "talking drums," which reproduce the tonal patterns of the tribal language to convey many types of information, including a complete drum-history of the clan.⁹⁶ Each has a message for this special occasion, that can be understood only by the initiated, but appreciated by all for its unique and intricate rhythms. The flourish of horns fills the air, mingling agreeably with the staccato sounds of the drums, and the dancers begin their performances.

Significance of the Dance. Much has been written about the role of music and dance in African life, and the reader who is interested in pursuing the subject further will find ample material available. The very brief explanation that follows is given only to illustrate its significance for Homowo (although this is generally true for most Festival dancing), and to share with the reader some of the emotional qualities of the occasion.

For the African, life, with its rhythm and cycles, is Dance.

⁹⁶Leonard Doob, Communication in Africa (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1966), pp. 100-103.

The Dance is a language, a mode of expression, which addresses itself to the mind through the emotions, using related, relevant and significant movements which have their basic counterparts in everyday activities. It is life expressed in dramatic terms-- the labor, the culture, the aspirations, history, social and economic conditions, religious beliefs and disbeliefs. Its complete identification with life is such a vital truth that the young, throughout infancy and adolescence, are exposed to rhythm continually, in many forms and graded complexities. The African learns to dance before he learns to speak, and in much the same manner. He dances when he is happy and when he is sad; he dances alone in a private expression of feelings, and with his people in communal celebration.

The most important events in the community have special dances to enhance their meaning and significance, and such is the nature of those performed during the durbar. Each village and clan has its own "official" dance ensembles, representing both sexes and ages, and although the overall form of a particular dance may be traditional and quite uniform, there is much spontaneity on the part of each individual dancer, as he literally becomes a part of the music and rhythm.

The dancing goes on for several hours, as each group vies to present the most spectacular presentation. Spectators are seldom that for very long, and soon everyone is in the crowd is a participant, moving and swaying to the rhythms. At

some point, a temporary halt is called, and the Homowo feast is served, first to those under the canopy, then to all who are present. These are the finest of traditional dishes prepared by the community and there is never any charge, for hunger has been "hooted away," and there is plenty to share.

Nationalism Through Tribalism

When all have been served, the honored guests are called upon, each in turn, to deliver some Homowo message to the festival-goers. Although tribal festivities have been de-emphasized by the governments in many African countries as "impediments of national unity," the present Ghanaian government has seen fit to take the opposite approach, seeing such occasions as Homowo as a unique opportunity to communicate with large numbers of people about national goals and policies. Such was the case during the Homowo celebration attended by the researcher in August, 1973. The head of the Ghanaian government, Col. I. K. Achempong, although a member of a different tribe, was nonetheless an enthusiastic and honored guest at the Ga festivities. Called upon to speak, Achempong conveyed the good wishes of the government to the Ga peoples, congratulated them on their prosperity and high productivity in past years, and outlined the strides that had been made by the government for the benefit of the people. These included continued subsidies for farmers who produce sufficient quantities of crops for export, a

report on the progress of building a large irrigation dam at Dawhenya (situated in the Ga population area), and the granting of an increasing number of import licenses and loans for the purchase of tractors and mechanized farm equipment from abroad. He exhorted the people to continue to work hard and support governmental policies to "further Ghana's nationhood," in spite of the temporary hardships they might incur.

At that particular time, the Republic of Ghana was in the throes of a severe economic crisis, as a result of the world oil crisis and government shortage of foreign exchange currency. Many import items, including gasoline, motor vehicles, foodstuffs such as sugar and flour, and paper products, were severely restricted and in very short supply. None of these were mentioned by Achempong and likewise seemed to be forgotten by his audience, who greeted his announcements with wild enthusiasm. They were for the moment not only tribesmen of the Ga nation, but members of the more extensive "tribe" of Ghana.

When all the speakers have finished, the dancing resumes again, and will continue into the night. This is, however, the official end to the durbur, and many of the younger people are ready to enjoy more modern types of entertainment, such as a "Homowo Hot Session," at the Grand Hotel, or High Life dancing at the many nightclubs in Accra.⁹⁷

⁹⁷The Daily Graphic (Accra), August 25, 1973, p. 4.

Re-Affirming Social Cohesion

The importance of the durbur in reaffirming the social cohesion of a tribe or community cannot be over-emphasized. The Homowo durbar, literally known among the Gas as the "feast of feasting," has long been a traditional element of the festival celebration. Here transpires that renewal of social bonds that keep together all members of the state, expressed both in loyalty to the chief, and in the very coming together of peoples from all parts of the traditional area. Likewise, durbars are of considerable importance in the cultural set-up of the Akan tribes in their celebrations of Adae and Odwira, that are discussed in later pages, and point up the historical background of a people who attach great importance to social unity. The significance of durburs in contemporary Chanaian society, however, is evidenced in the fact that they are gradually being introduced into celebrations of festivals which they did not originally form a part and are often anticipated with greater enthusiasm than the original ceremonies. Ackah notes, for example, that a durbar marked the climax of the Kundum harvest observances in western Nzima, for the first time in 1963,⁹⁸ and this has since become a permanent element of that festival.

⁹⁸Ackah, p. 26.

Sunday, the day following Homowo, is marked by Christian services in many churches throughout the Ga traditional area. Christian and non-Christian alike, Chief and commoner, attend these harvest services and make offerings in cash or kind that are later used for religious and secular development projects.⁹⁹ The rest of the day is spent in visiting relations, friends and in-laws to exchange traditional Homowo greetings, and bid a fond farewell to the Soobii, most of whom will depart before the day is out. The Ga Mantze, however, is still involved in affairs of state, for at this time he will usually call a general assembly of chiefs and elders to evaluate the past year's progress and plan for the year to come. Voluntary and mandatory contributions are made by each clan toward projects such as the provision of rural water supplies, sanitary facilities, school buildings and chief's houses.

FESTIVALS AND SOCIAL COHESION AMONG THE TALLENSI

One of the most striking examples of the use of ritual as a mechanism for achieving social cohesion among a scattered and diverse group of peoples is documented by Fortes in his description of the harvest festivals of the Tallensi in the

⁹⁹Opoku, "Festivals Change," p. 26.

northern regions of Ghana.¹⁰⁰ As mentioned in an earlier part of this paper, the two major groups of the Tallensi, the Namoos and the Tallis, are culturally equivalent communities, dwelling in close juxtaposition, sharing a common language, yet separated by a history of mutual feelings of antagonism and open warfare that spring from their traditions of origin. Thus we find among the two tribes a homogeneous social and economic structure, upon which is superimposed a political structure, the essence of which is a polar opposition defined and emphasized by the most stringent ritual observances.

This polarity is expressed in symbolic taboos which separate the head of each clan (known as the Naa or Chief among the Namoos, the Tendaana among the Tallis); in the oral traditions of each tribe, which recount tales of mutual hostility and superiority of one over the other; and in the ceremonial flinging of derogatory taunts and challenges of one tribe to another in their funeral celebrations. It serves to isolate the two tribes to a degree that discourages open conflict between them.

Nonetheless, because the Namoos and Tallis are forced by the necessities of everyday life into a situation of economic and social dependence, the degree of antagonistic differentiation

¹⁰⁰The details of the Festivals presented in the ensuing paragraphs are taken from Fortes' account, unless otherwise designated.

that is tolerable is limited, and a social equilibrium must somehow be maintained. The ritual harvest festivals which are common to both tribes, and which require reciprocal participation between them, are among the most striking mechanisms for maintaining this equilibrium.

The Namoo Celebration of Gingaun

During the rainy season, roughly from April to September, ritual and group activities in the two tribes are almost completely replaced by agricultural chores. In July and August, the early millet is harvested, but the major crops, the guinea corn and late millet, stand until September, at which time the ceremonial cycle known as Gingaun, is inaugurated among the Namoo. At this time, the Baari Tendaana (the chief of the Baari clans of the Tallis), by right of his primacy of origin, ritually "throws away the water"--i.e., abolishes the rains. A delegation of elders is then sent to the Namoo chief at Tonga, who must fulfill his traditional obligation of summoning a diviner to take sacrifices of thanksgiving to the ancestors, and determine whom in the tribe the ancestor spirits have selected to carry the sacred Gingaun drum, ostensibly brought to the tribe by their ancestor Mosur, to the festival. The sacrifices have a double intention: first, to thank the ancestors for a successful harvest of early millet and for the standing crop of guinea corn; and to beseech them to avert the quarrels and disputes which might occur when

great concourses of people flock to the coming festival.

During the ensuing fortnight, while the guinea corn is harvested, the dedicated dancing ground is the nightly focus of social attention as adolescents and young adults practice their dancing songs in anticipation of the festival. The coming of the "Moon of Daa" signals the primary phase of the festival, at which time the older men, expert dancers, are in charge, though the younger ones and even women and children are free to join in. The Tallis from the surrounding areas flock to watch the dance, but are prohibited from participating.

The festival reaches its climax during the dance which occurs on the fourteenth night.

Well after midnight, when the moon is at its highest and the dance is at a pitch of intensity, a dozen solemn figures begin to press slowly towards the center of the dance. Spectators and dancers make way for them. They stand in rank, shoulder to shoulder, unlike the dancers who form a file. The dancers shuffle, leap and stamp, but they bob gravely from foot to foot, erect, faces set like masks, chanting a low, wordless chant. They wear faded red caps and gorgeous, though sometimes tarnished gowns--the garb of chiefs--and carry spears. They represent their grandfathers and ancestors who had been chiefs and men of rank. The natives delight both in the dramatic contrast, and in identifying the chiefs whom the mummers represent.¹⁰¹

On the fifteenth night there is no dancing, and no one stirs out of doors after dark, for that is the night all the ancestors come to dance Gingaun, and he who hears or sees

¹⁰¹Fortes, p. 596.

the phantom dance will die at once. The following day, the Baari Tendaana calls upon the Namoo Chief, bringing a small pot of consecrated beer, which all present must drink, and the ancestors too, for a gourd-full is sent out to be poured on the grave of Mosur. The Chief ceremonially addresses the Tendaana, noting that the day has returned for the tribes to meet as their ancestors used to, and to do as they did so that both tribes shall have untroubled sleep, marry new wives, and beget many children. We have had a good harvest, he reports; may we all live to see Golib (the new cycle) and sow our millet in that moon successfully. May the chiefly ancestors and Mosur permit this and permit us to gain new life so that next year at this time we again celebrate the harvest.

The Tendaana responds with a similar blessing, invoking Baat Daa (the supreme deity of the Tallis) and Mosur to jointly prosper the land. The Tendaana then departs, returning again two days later to visit the Chief and invoke more blessings for the coming year. Final sacrifices to the ancestors are made, and that same evening the Gingaun drum is escorted to Baari, where similar rituals and dancing occur. Now the Tongos flock to Baari to dance with great enthusiasm on a traditional spot outside the grove of Baat Daa.

A few hundred yards away, the young men of Baari, carrying pots of consecrated beer, assemble with the Baari Tendaana. In a solemn and silent procession, they three times encircle the

dancers, who continues to dance as if oblivious. The procession then files away into the sacred grove, where the Tendaana pours libations of beer to Baat Daa, and sends a small pot out to the representative of the Tongo Chief, who is among the dancers. The beer is drunk, and a chant begins, "Mosur wants to go home," the ritual signal to return the sacred drum to Tongo, thus ending the celebration of Gingaun.

The next three days are given over to the gayest festivities of the season among the Namoo--the celebration of Daa, the New Year. This is the time when all who have left the community for reason of jobs or marriage return to renew the bonds of kinship. On the evening of the first day, the Chief and Tendaana meet in ceremonial to renew the rite of chieftancy.

As sundown approaches, a brother of the Tongo Chief arrives at the dancing ground at Baari, a dedicated area that is thought to be the site of the first Tendaana's compound when he received Mosur. Wearing the red cap and gown that are the insignia of the chief, and followed by boys carrying pots of consecrated beer, the Chief's brother takes his seat on the flat rock on which every newly elected chief sits to await the Tendaana. For an hour or two he sits gravely there, as a temporary ritual chief, receiving the humble greetings of men of Tongo. Then the Tendaana, escorted by men of his lineage, arrives to greet the mock-chief. The beer is portioned out among

those present, then the Tendaana retires a dozen paces, and in a voice inaudible to the Namoos, he calls upon his ancestor, the first Tendaana, to ask the blessings of a good harvest, wives, children, and happiness in the coming year. The mock-chief dismisses his people and takes the homeward path, followed at some distance by the Tendaana and his people. When he arrives at the Chief's compound, he and every other person, including the Chief himself, hides behind closed doorways in the rooms. The Tendaana enters a silent and empty compound, and proceeds to the secret place where the sacred Chieftainship fetish is kept. He pours a libation to it, asks blessings for the Chief and all the land, then enters the Chief's room to offer him New Year greetings, and so departs. In such a way is the Chief every year renewed by a symbolic drama re-enacting his first installation.

Antagonism and Dependence. Fortes notes two essential elements in this series of ritual celebrations among the Namoos. First, they express clearly the ambivalent relationships between the Namoos and the neighboring Tallis tribes, and the "bridging function" of the Tendaana. It is, comments Fortes, "as if they were joined in a mutual responsibility each for the other, based upon a profound antagonism."¹⁰² Second, the rites seem to recreate and regenerate the religious and traditional bulwarks

¹⁰²Fortes, p. 598-99.

of the social life of the Namoos, the latter of which is clearly evident in the reinforcement of oral history which occurs during the pantomime dance of the ancestors on the fourteenth night.

The Tallis Celebrations

Due to its clandestine nature, Fortes is unable to describe in much detail the Tallis celebration of Boyaraam, which begins the week after the Namoo ceremonies, except to note that the ritual "is at the same time communion, initiation, and offering of first fruits."¹⁰³ Namoos are excluded from any knowledge of its rites, despite centuries of intimate contact, under pain of instantaneous death; and in fact, refuse to hear of it, for fear of the consequences. At the conclusion of the ritual days, however, public feasting and dancing are in order, as well as reciprocal visits by the Namoo Chief to the Tendaana. As with the Namoos, Tallis sons and daughters living abroad return to join in the festivities. The dancing and drumming are continuous, but as each clan dances by itself, the Boyaraam dancing is neither so impressive nor so great a focus of social interest as Gingaun. This time the Namoos are the onlookers, for they may not enter the Tallis dances.

¹⁰³Fortes, p. 599.

COHESION AND ISOLATION

Thus it is seen that these harvest festivals both bind and differentiate the Namoos and the Tallis. As Fortes notes,

On the one hand it seems as if each community consolidates itself socially and morally by the very act of repulsing its neighbor. Behind its stone wall of exclusiveness, even to the date of its festival, each community celebrates its release from the hazards of the past year and especially of the food-growing season, and fortifies itself by magical and religious techniques for another year. Nothing could more strikingly demonstrate the factors of dichotomy and antagonism in the polarity. . . than the difference between the rites of the Hill Tallis and those of the Namoos. It is true that every Tale ceremonial activity expresses the exclusiveness of the group performing it; but in these rituals the expression of difference has a political validity because it is reciprocal.¹⁰⁴

The very opposition of the two communities seems to engender a mutual dependence which is clearly evident in the ceremony at Baari, in the reciprocal visits of the Baari Tendaana and the Chief, and in the ritual re-enactment of the Chief's installation at Tongo. It is notable how these rituals vividly insulate each group from the other, while at the same time uniting them in common responsibility for the welfare of the tribe.

Fortes concludes that social cohesion, both within and between the major communities which constitute Tale society, is not an ultimate attribute of that society, but is achieved by

¹⁰⁴Fortes, pp. 601-602.

the specific social mechanism of the ritual festivals. Its significant feature appears to be the fact that this integration is engendered as an equilibrium between opposed groups, overriding the tendencies to conflict inherent in the system.¹⁰⁵

FESTIVALS OF REMEMBRANCE

Festivals of remembrance are common to most tribal groups in Ghana and signify the importance that these people attach to their ancestral origins and tribal history. Not only are they religious ceremonies for the veneration of the dead, but they are times when people come together to renew family and social ties. Their implications are political, religious, historical and social.

Among the Akan peoples, in particular, ancestor veneration is such an integral part of their life that in addition to the major celebration annually of Odwira, a minor day of worship, known as Adae, is observed every forty-three days.

The Calculation and Meaning of Adae

The Akan calendar is divided into nine cycles of forty days called Adae, from which comes the name of the memorial day on which the chief and his elders purify the sacred stools. There are actually two Adae memorial days observed in each of

¹⁰⁵Fortes, p. 604.

these nine cycles: the Sunday Adae, known as Akwasidae, and the Wednesday Adae, or Awukudae. The method of calculating Adae days is somewhat confusing: One begins counting on the Monday following Akwasidae, and counts forward 23 days; the twenty-fourth day is Awukudae, and is excluded from the count. Seventeen days beyond that marks the fortieth day, Dapaa, the Saturday of preparation; and the next day marks the second Akwasidae. The ninth and final Adae falls in September, and is usually referred to as Adae Kese, or Big Adae. In most Akan states, Adae Kese marks the beginning of the state festival of Odwira, a week-long festivity that celebrates the end of the old year and the beginning of the new.¹⁰⁶

In order to comprehend the significance of the Adae celebrations, it is necessary to have some acquaintance with three basic and interrelated elements of Akan culture: the Akan belief in a special relationship between the dead and the living; their concept of land tenure, or "usufruct;" and the reverence with which they regard the office of chieftancy.

It is often and well said that the Akan live with the spirits of their dead. They believe that the souls of their dead relatives are still near to them, and can be called upon in times of trouble. They pour libation to them on all special occasions to

¹⁰⁶Opoku, Festivals of Ghana, pp. 7-13.

ask their guidance and blessings, and make them offers of drinks and food.¹⁰⁷ Although the practice has been forsaken by many of the younger Ghanaians, it is common for the older people who take their duties to the ancestors seriously to leave a cup of water and a small bit of food by their bedside each night for the spirits to partake.¹⁰⁸

The concept of land tenure is related to the role of the ancestors. The Akans believe that land is the entity that cannot be owned -- the land they inhabit belongs to the ancestors and the living have inherited from them only the right to use it, and must in turn hand it on to their children. Hence the expression, "The land belongs to the stool," or "the land belongs to the chief." They both mean the same: the land belongs to the ancestors; the stool and the chief are their symbols.¹⁰⁹

Thus, in the Akan conception, the ancestors sustain the tribe, for they have given the land; they watch and protect the living tribal members; they send them the things they need. The chief is the living representative of the ancestors, symbolized by the stool, or throne upon which he sits.

He is thus important not only as a civil ruler who is

¹⁰⁷Sarpong, pp. 33-44.

¹⁰⁸Personal conversations with George Aye-Bonte, Accra, 1975.

¹⁰⁹Busia, p. 204.

the axis of the political relations of his people, and the one in whom the various tribal lineage find their unity; he is also the symbol of their identity and continuity as a tribe and the embodiment of their spiritual values.¹¹⁰

Departed chiefs are particularly revered, and their spirits are thought to be highly influential in the affairs of the tribe. The stool of each chief is different, designed and carved by the royal stool-maker to indicate some particular characteristics of its owner--his clan, his position or his historical background, or even a special symbolic or proverbial message.¹¹¹ The stool, along with the chief's kuduo--a small, ornately decorated brass pot which is presented to him at his enstoolment ceremony--is retired upon his death, for it is believed that the spirits of the departed chiefs come to rest in their stools, and can be called upon by the living on such special occasions as Adae. The stools are blackened with soot and the yolk of eggs to preserve them, then wrapped in camel-hair blankets and laid on their sides in a dark sacred room known as nkonguafieso.

Adae, which means a resting or sleeping place, is the day on which the present chief and his elders go to the stoolhouse to "feed the stools," bringing to them water, food and rum, in order

¹¹⁰Busia, p. 202. ¹¹¹Sarpong, p. 104.

that, as Rattray puts it, they may "be induced to continue to use their new and greater spiritual influence in the interest of those over whom they formerly ruled when on earth."¹¹² Not everyone is permitted to enter the stool-house; only those who perform the rites and a few who are related to the chief have this distinction.

The Preparation

Dapaa, the day preceding Adae, is a busy one, not only for those directly involved in the ritual, but for the entire community. Food, firewood, drinks and all the sacrificial articles required for the ceremonies must be prepared on Dapaa, for no work or travel may be done on Adae except duties connected with the celebration. The house and its surroundings must be tidied; villages and towns and wells, and the footpaths leading to them must also be cleaned. In the chief's compound, attendants and stool-carriers scrub the stools and calabashes; the hornblowers and state drummers tune the instruments they will use to usher in Adae. At sundown, when all preparations are complete, the drummers assemble in the compound and drum late into the night.¹¹³

The next day, the "Divine Drummer," the chief's principal drummer rises early in the morning and drums the following piece, to

¹¹²Rattray, Religion and Art, p. 138

¹¹³Opoku, Festivals of Ghana, p. 8.

notify the spirits of past drummers:¹¹⁴

Cheng, cheng, cheng, heng, heng, heng,
Ofuruntum tree, tweneboa tree,
Tall drummer Amponua the Gunpowder,
Great Owora and Nnummire Akurampon String,
Obua Kwaku, the drummer's wedge and prop,
Divine Drummer says: I have bestirred myself.

He then continues calling upon the illustrious chiefs of
the past, and sounding their praises:

Mighty and Valiant Ofori,
When the Creator created things
What did he create?
He created the ohene (the chief)
He created the court-crier,
He created the drummer,
He created Okyere Kwawuo, the
Mighty one
That feeds on human heads.
He found two, three little birds;
Which part of me would you have for meat?
Dwamena will have my middle part.
Oboama Dwamena Antwi the fearful one,
Mighty King of Okyere Kwawuo, the
Mighty one,
I salute you sir,
I bid you good adae dawn.
Great Nyankomago will return with the Divine Drummer;
Great Nyankomago came in company of the Divine Drummer;
Okotommififa Gyanadu the fair coloured one,
Ampasakyi that swallows the elephant,
Elephant that breaks the axe,
Elephant, the Divine Drummer says
He has bestirred himself at dawn,
This early, early, early morn

¹¹⁴The verses that follow are translations by Opoku of the pieces sounded by the Divine drummer in the Akan state of Akim. The same ritual is enacted in other Akan states; however the words vary from place to place, to describe the individual characteristics and deeds of the ancestors and the present chief in that particular community.

The hooked stick that bends and pulls
 The thicket and thorny climbers;
 Won't you come and join with me in play?
 King that captures kings,
 Go fetch me drink,
 Fetch me rum that I may drink.

The present chief is now called upon to arise and perform
 his ritual duties:

Great and Valiant Ofori,
 I am off to Abirem Akyem,
 I am going to the stool house
 Where room encloses room.
 King of hosts
 Who is ever sought for an ally in battle,
 Benevolent great killer
 Vanguard amongst equals
 Unconquerable one,
 Dread of the old and the young
 Grandson of Ofori and the Asona Clan
 He that balances the keg of gunpowder upon his head
 And somersaults over the flames,
 He that bends the sword with ease
 Out, and come with me!
 Out, and come with me!

This soon brings the chief and those others involved in the
 ritual, who proceed the short distance to the stool-house. At the
 entrance, the chief stool attendant pours a calabashful of water,
 thereby inviting the spirits to come out and wash their hands in
 preparation for the feast to which they are invited.

Ritual food of mashed yam or plantain is then brought into
 the room, and the chief moves from one sacred stool to the next,
 ladling out portions of the food on each one. He begins with the
 first stool of the dynasty and ends with the one immediately preceding
 him in office. All the while, he prays:

Spirits of my grandsires,
 Today is Adae;
 Come and receive this food
 And visit us with prosperity;
 Permit the bearers of children
 To bear children;
 Grant health to your servant;
 Grant health to the Queen Mother;
 Grant health to the Nation.
 Let no evil come upon the town;
 To him who wishes evil
 Let evil fall upon himself.

At the end of each line of the prayer, the hornblower blows his horn in praise of the ancestors. He recites their names, a few each time, and recalls their great deeds to remind the ruling chief of what is now expected of him.

When the spirits of the chiefs have been fed, the remainder of the food is taken and sprinkled in the courtyard for the spirits of the dead courtiers and attendants. A sheep is now brought into the courtyard and ritually slain, the blood collected in a wooden bowl to be smeared on the seats of the stools. The sheep is flayed and roasted on a fire made in the courtyard; then it too is placed upon the stools, where it will remain with the other offerings until late evening, when all but the pieces of fat are removed.

A bell is now rung to announce to the community that the spirits are eating, and to summon them to greet their chief and wish him good "Adae morn." When all have assembled in the main courtyard, the chief stool attendant pours rum upon all the stools, then distributes it to all present. The drums beat and the

minstrels chant the traditions of the tribe, and the brave deeds of its departed rulers. The talking drums again extol the chief:

We salute you as chief,
 We salute you as chief;
 Who is a chief?
 Who is a chief?
 He is a chief who is worthy to be called master;
 We extol you,
 Man among men,
 Hero, royal of royals.¹¹⁵

The drums will call the chief the powerful one, the valiant one, the benefactor and mother of the tribe, the defender of his people. He himself may not deserve these appellations, but his ancestors did, and it is as their representative that he is thus addressed and extolled. He is praised as chief because as such he is the embodiment of the highest values of the tribe, "the one who sits upon the stool of the ancestors." It is the ancestors who are recalled at Adaye; it is they whom the tribe seeks to propitiate in order that their blessings will prosper the tribe.¹¹⁶

Preserving Tribal History

Even with some knowledge of the important role of ancestor veneration in Akan life, one might wonder at the incredible amount of care lavished upon the contents of the stool-house in these ritual ceremonies every 23 days, and the position of power enjoyed by the chief and his royal stoolkeepers. The answer is quite simple, for

¹¹⁵Busia, p. 203

¹¹⁶Busia, p. 203.

through the preservation of the stools and the kuduo, the history of the tribe is permanently and accurately recorded.

During his enstoolment ceremonies, each new chief is presented with a brass kuduo decorated with his stool symbol, and containing one small piece of gold. The small pot is then placed in the stoolhouse next to the stool of the last chief, where it remains until the ninth Akwasidae of the following year, when it is removed and returned to the chief as he renews his oath of office. Another piece of gold of the same size is then placed in the kukuo, and it is returned to the stoolhouse until the following year, when the same ceremony is re-enacted. Upon the death of the chief, the stool and the kuduo are placed in the stoolhouse in proper sequence, and his attributes and deeds added to the repertoire of the drummers and minstrels. Reigns of the queenmothers are recorded by the same method, except that silver takes the place of gold, and instead of the brass Kuduo, a pottery vessel, fired black and glazed and decorated with the queenmother's symbols, is used.

Using records thus preserved, Meyerowitz has been able to trace the history of the Bono tribes of the Akan nation back to its foundation in 1295. She has compiled a complete list of the chiefs and queenmothers of Bono, their names, dates and lengths of reign, and has supplied a detailed account of the important events that occurred during that time from the songs of the minstrels and the talking drums. Her information is confirmed by similar data obtained

from the Ashante tribes, who subdued the Bono in 1742, a year that is fixed by European records.¹¹⁷

In this unique way is the history of a pre-literate tribe recorded for posterity. The importance of this body of knowledge has elevated it and those to whom the preservation of the information has been entrusted to a prominent place in the religious life of the tribe. The source of the religious power of the chief and the stoolkeepers is thus seen to be similar to that of the Peki fetish priest who plants and keeps watch over the fetish yam. In both cases, these are the keepers and teachers of bodies of knowledge that are important to the well-being of the tribe.

ODWIRA

The ninth and final Adae which falls in September each year marks the beginning of the weeklong festival known as Odwira, and coincides with the introduction of the new yam in the Akan states. This has caused some disagreement among scholars as to whether the primary significance of the festival is in the celebration of the harvest or in the veneration of the ancestors.

In the earliest published account of the celebration as it occurred in Ashanti in 1817, Bowdich refers to it as "the Yam Custom," due to the prohibition of the eating of new yams by the people until

¹¹⁷Eva L. R. Meyerowitz, Akan Traditions of Origin (London: Faber and Faber, 1950), pp. 29-33.

after the offering of the crop to the ancestral stools.¹¹⁸ Corsey, among contemporary scholars, seems to agree with this emphasis;¹¹⁹ however, Rattray, in his accounts of the festivals held during the 1920s, suggests that the term "Yam Festival" is a misnomer;

as it is essentially a rite in connexion with the dead...Its proper title is Odwira, concerning the derivation of which there is no possible doubt. Dwira means 'to purify,' or 'to cleanse,' and Odwira means simply 'purification' or 'cleansing.'¹²⁰

Aduamah points out that in some clans the festival is referred to by the old men as dzawuwu (purification), while the younger generation refer to it as tedudu (yam eating). The word dzawuwu itself is much older than tedudu, further indicating that the emphasis on the harvest aspects of the ceremonies are of recent origin.¹²¹ Support for this view is found in Meyerowitz's information from the Omanhene (chief) of Akwamu and his elders that at some time prior to 1896, the tribal ancestors, following a period of incessant wars, "amalgamated the rites of all their elaborate state festivals into one annual festival, to which they gave the name

¹¹⁸T. E. Bodwich, Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee, (London: J. Murray, 1819), quoted by Rattray, in Religion and Art, pp.122-27.

¹¹⁹Corsey, "New Yam Festivals," p. 18; and "The Cultivation and Use," p. 50.

¹²⁰Rattray, Religion and Art," p. 127.

¹²¹Aduamah, p. 31.

Odwira."¹²² This would certainly serve to explain why ceremonies calling forth such extremely opposite emotions--the ebullience of the harvest and the solemnity of the funeral--would be performed on the same occasion.

Concepts Expressed in the Ceremonies

The cycle of rites observed during Odwira portray all the elements of Akan religious faith: the Supreme Being, the lesser gods, the rivers and the ancestors are all propitiated. The offerings of food and drink to the ancestors show how human they are in the conception of the Akan, as do the simplicity and directness of the prayers addressed to them. The prayers reflect the dominant interests of the tribe: the need for food, drink, prosperity and increase to sustain the life and continuity of the tribe. The Akan preoccupation is with this life and not the next, and there is little emphasis on identification with the Supreme Being or the gods. The Akan are primarily concerned with being, not becoming: the ancestors and the gods are expected to see that the crops grow, that children are born, that members of the tribe prosper and succeed in their trading ventures or wars; that proper behavior is rewarded and offences punished. If harmony is achieved between the living, the

¹²²Eva L. R. Meyerowitz, The Sacred State of the Akan (London: Faber & Faber, 1949), p. 171.

gods and the ancestors, the "sleep of the ancestors" is thus assured for all.¹²³

ODWIRA IN AKUAPEM

In the Akuapem traditional area, preparation for Odwira begins on the eighth Awukudae, or Wednesday Adae, when a ban is placed on all noisemaking, singing, drumming and dancing.¹²⁴ Those who die during this time (Adaebutuw, or "turning over" of the adae) are buried quietly and quickly, in contrast to the lengthy and elaborate funerals which are held at other times of the year. The stringency with which this ban is enforced can be seen in the following announcement which appeared in a prominent box on the first page of the The Sporting News, a weekly newspaper published in Accra, July 16-22, 1974:

Funeral Called Off

The final funeral obsequies for the late Madam Yaa Buroni, mother of Mr. Oheneba Charles, Editor of the "Sporting News" scheduled to take place on July 27 has been postponed indefinitely.

A family spokesman said the funeral has had to be postponed because it coincides with the "Adaebutuw" Festival of the people of the Akin Abuakwa Traditional area.

He said that the public will be informed of a new date to be fixed soon.

¹²³Busia, pp. 204-207

¹²⁴Opoku, Festivals of Ghana, p. 14.

The Monday before Odwira the whole community engages in much the same activities as they do to prepare for Aday, but additionally, special care is taken in weeding and clearing the footpath to the royal mausoleum at Amamprobi. On Tuesday, the ban on the eating of the new yam is lifted in special ceremonies that are climaxed in a parade of the tubers through the streets of the town. While the fetish priests are thus engaged in the introduction of the new yam to the community, the chief sexton, or Adumhene, accompanied by the state executioners,¹²⁵ proceeds to the royal mausoleum with sheep and rum to invoke the Odwira spirit. At dusk, he returns to the palace from this mystical errand to report the result to the Omanhene, who awaits him sitting in state, clad in mourning cloth. As a token of the blessings and consent of the spirits for the celebration, the Adumhene rubs a special preparation on the foreheads and chests of the Omanhene, the Queen Mother, and the Elders. The ban on drumming is now removed, and the state drummers will play far into the night, until the gathering disperses to prepare for the third day's celebration.

¹²⁵The role of the state executioners is required by law to be strictly symbolic in present-day celebrations. However, as recently as 1927, Rattray reported that human sacrifices, generally of captives or criminals already sentenced to death, were made to appease the spirits during Odwira; and in 1974, Ghanaian friends reported to the researcher that the practice although much curtailed, still persists in isolated areas. Additional information is included in the description of Odwira ceremonies in Akwamu, which follows.

A State in Mourning

Wednesday is a day of general mourning in the community. From the Paramount Chief to the ordinary citizen, everyone adheres to a strict fast and mourns for the dead, especially those who have died during the past year. The funerals of those who died during Adaebutuw are now observed, so that on every corner one encounters men and women in the sepia-colored attire and red turbans that signify funeral dress. There is a lot of drinking and drumming, as the living seek to appease the spirits of their dead.

A Festive Turn

Thursday the festival takes on an entirely different mood. This is a day of feasting for both the living and the dead. Shortly before noon, the stools are fed their ritual meal, then for the rest of the day food and drink are provided in every house for all comers. Citizen and stranger alike are free to go to the palace to take part in the festivities there. Soon after nightfall, however, the ceremonies take on a more somber turn, as Odwira (santification), the ritual from which the festival takes its name, is performed. A gong-gong is sounded to warn people to stay indoors; then,

there is a great hush, broken later by the muffled sounds of the staccato notes of the aburukuwa drums, which are accompanied by weird songs and whistling. This is the procession of the dead--the Indian file procession of the sacred stools of the state being borne to the stream for their yearly ceremonial cleansing. None may meet this procession, for only those who are privileged by birth and office may cast eyes upon these shrines in which it has

pleased the ancestral spirits to continue to make their abode. The end of the ceremony is proclaimed by the firing of volleys of musketry.¹²⁶

The Odwira Durbar

The climax of the festival occurs on Friday, when the Omanhene holds a great durbar at which sub-chiefs and subjects come to pay homage to him and to hear him in turn pledge his continued devotion to all that his exalted office stands for. The procession through the town, the feasting, the dancing and drumming do not differ greatly except in detail from the spectacle of the Ga Homowo durbar; however, the similarity between the two events is deeper than outward appearances. The Homowo and Odwira durbars are probably the most significant part of the festivals for the contemporary life of the tribes. The ancestors have been fed and cared for, and their bonds with the living renewed; now will the living renew their bonds with each other, Chief and commoner alike.

Throughout the long history of their tribe, the Akan people have acquired a tremendous fortune in the gold that was once one of the country's richest and most abundant resources. Bowdich's early account describes the royal stool, "thickly cased in gold," gold pipes, swords, bowls, muskets, and even musical instruments. Ornaments for the umbrellas, and those on linguists' and chiefs' staffs,

¹²⁶Opoku, Festivals of Ghana, p. 16.

as well as their crowns and the beads and bracelets of the women, are all cast of the precious metal.¹²⁷ Although many of these objects were subsequently seized by the British and are now on display in the British museum,¹²⁸ a large portion have remained with the Akans in the possession of the royal family to the present day, and are prominently displayed during the Odwira durbar, making the procession and subsequent ceremonies a truly spectacular sight. Not only the royal family is adorned in its finest array, but all festival-goers are dressed in their best traditional clothing. The men have forsaken their dark suits and white shirts with button-down collars for their toga-type, handwoven Kentes; the women have put away their western-style wigs to have their hair intricately plaited with beads and gold threads by traditional hairdressers, and have wrapped themselves in the gayest traditional cloth.

Symbolic Significance of Pageantry

This extravagant display of artifacts and dress is not simply in the spirit of merrymaking or the proud exhibition of ownership; it is, more importantly, a symbolic expression of pride in the historical greatness of the tribe. The gold ornaments and artifacts themselves belong to the whole tribe--

¹²⁷Quoted in Rattray, Religion and Art, pp. 124-125.

¹²⁸Sarpong, pp. 129-31.

the chiefs and royal family are merely their custodians--and they are valued not for the wealth they represent, but for the past and future greatness they symbolize.¹²⁹ They are brought forth during the Odwira durbar to celebrate a common heritage and to invoke feelings of pride and solidarity among the present tribesmen.

In such an atmosphere of unity does the Omanhene take his place at the durbar to receive the homage of his chiefs and people. All the while the drumming and dancing and marching of courtiers and gunners of the state continue with unabated frenzy. The abrafo--the state executioners and minstrels come to lavish praises upon the Omanhene, the "Benevolent One that dislodges the amulet by way of his shoulder."¹³⁰

The Omanhene then offers several cases of rum and other spirits to all the participants in return for their homage. He pledges his loyalty to the tribe and to the Head of State and

¹²⁹The British colonialists were unable to comprehend the symbolic and religious value of the artifacts, regarding them solely as objects of wealth, and their unrelenting efforts to confiscate them led to fierce battles that lasted for over 60 years. An excellent account of the struggle is found in Robert A. Lystad, The Ashanti, A Proud People (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968). Additionally, see Sarpong, pp. 129-131 for a discussion of the significance of the golden stool.

¹³⁰Opuku, Festivals of Ghana, p. 19.

to the Ghanaian government and nation. The durbar continues late into the night, as people make the most of this annual opportunity to celebrate their common past and their present fellowship.

ODWIRA IN AKWAMU

The function of ritual in preserving and transmitting the history of a tribe is nowhere better illustrated than in the celebration of Odwira among the Akan peoples in the traditional area of Akwamu. The significance of Odwira as an Akwamu harvest celebration that was evident as recently as 1950,¹³¹ is completely overshadowed in the current ceremonies by the ritual re-enactment of the military history of the tribe.

The Akwamu were among the original settlers who migrated from the Kong mountains of West Africa to the forest region of central Ghana, thus breaking away from the main stream of emigrants. They settled successively at Hemang, Abakrampa, Asamankese, Nyanawase, and finally crossed to their present home on the eastern bank of the Volta river, after their defeat by the united forces of the coastal tribes whom they had dominated for the best part of a century.

The valiant deeds of the Akwamu, who are said to have

¹³¹Meyerowitz, The Sacred State of the Akan, p. 173-175.

¹³²Opoku, Festivals of Ghana, p. 21.

fought as many as 16 major battles between 1553 and 1872, are legendary throughout West Africa. One of the prized possessions of the tribe is an ancient bunch of rusted keys which are a part of the ceremonial regalia of the Paramount Chief, for this is the prize they carried away after overcoming and occupying the Danish castle at Christiansborg (in present-day Accra) for 14 days in 1683. The keys are cherished as tangible evidence of their prowess.¹³³

Throughout their travels and settlements, the Akwamu never forgot their ancestral leaders and national gods who led them and brought them to their present home, as evidenced in their Odwira celebration. The significance of the festival is three-fold:

First, it is a period of remembrance: a time when the people are reminded of the warrior kings who helped to found their state. It is also a time when the chiefs and their people bring sacrifices to their gods as thanks for the mercies of the past, and ask for protection for the future. Above all, it is a time when people come together to renew their family and social ties. . . It is a political, religious and social festival.¹³⁴

Odwira begins with a day of national mourning and fast, which is initiated by the Chief and all the clan heads going first to their father's house and then to their mother's to

¹³³Albert Van Dantzig, and Barbara Priddy, A Short History of the Forts and Castles of Ghana (Accra: Liberty Press, 1971), p. 22.

¹³⁴Opoku, p. 22.

pour libation to the departed relatives. They then form a funeral procession and parade through the streets to the sacred place known as Akyeremade, where libation is poured upon the relics of the generals and chiefs killed in ancient battles. During the days that follow, Akwamu warriors will meet in full battle array to enact scenes from some of the historical battles in which these departed soldiers gained their fame. Before this occurs, however, a ritual purification of the chief and his subjects is carried out to ensure their worthiness to participate in the events, and to elicit the aid of the spirits for the new Adaye cycle about to begin.

The Purification

On Sunday morning, the state warriors meet to present arms to their captain. This martial parade is followed by a rally of the state executioners, who play an important role in the ceremonies to come. At the same time, the Akrahene--the chief of the soul-washers who are responsible for cleansing the soul of the chief--leads his assistants to the Volta and fills a covered brass pan with river water, which will be used by the Omanhene to cleanse his subjects. He carries it under the shelter of a state umbrella to the home of the Kyidomhene, Chief of the Rearguard.

The arrival of the water signals the crowd of celebrants

and spectators to the palace courtyard to await the Omanhene, who is now putting on his battle dress. All the while, the talking drums are sounding the praises of the present chief and the brave leaders of the past, whose names and deeds are thus recorded in the oral history of the tribe. A translation of a small portion of the roll-call follows:

Tweneboa Kodua, the flint that sparks off trouble,
 Divine Drummer,
 Drummer of the Mighty One
 Who hails from time immemorial. . .
 Tall Amoma the Drummer,
 Son of the Ansa Sasraku's sister,
 Mighty One, Condolences
 Mighty Aloto the Warlord,
 Ansa Sasraku Anobaa,
 Bestir yourself,
 He who is sought for an ally,
 Tall Peasa,
 King of the Akwamu Gyampontwea
 Aniapam. . .
 Odokurokosi who killed Antipei
 If you have saved me,
 Deliver my child too.
 It was you who by cunning,
 Killed Ahwewaben
 At Kwabea Nketea. . .135

As the final note dies away, the Omanhehe appears wearing "the cap of the devastator," a traditional battle head-dress made of leopard skin surmounted by the feathers of an eagle and two horns of a ram, with a crown of solid gold. His battle dress is studded with talismans, his shoulders smeared with red clay, and a bullet wallet is strapped across his left shoulder,

¹³⁵Opoku, Festivals of Ghana, p. 23.

from which also hang down six double-edged knives. Around his waist are the Christianborg keys.¹³⁶

The Kyidomhene steps forward with the basin of water, from which the Chief takes three handfuls into his mouth and spits them out. He then sprinkles some upon himself and the crowd, who bow and shout "Akosee," meaning "Blessing." He is then presented with water from the gods Mfodo and Mpem Kwadwo, which he uses in a similar manner. Then follow the waters of all the gods of war, and finally that of the god of "cataracts and falls that capsize the canoes."¹³⁷

Following the ceremony, the chief mounts his palanquin and is carried through town to the durbar grounds, amidst the deafening noise of drums, horns, musket firing, singing and shouting. The executioners, carrying their fetishes and moving in rhythm to the music, frequently become "possessed" as they sway to and fro along the course. This is taken as a beneficent sign that the gods look kindly upon the celebration, and have come to join in the festivities by taking over the bodies of their priests.

At the durbar grounds, the first of the historic battles

¹³⁶Opoku, Festivals of Ghana, p. 24.

¹³⁷Opoku, Festivals of Ghana, p. 25.

is enacted by the Asafo companies.¹³⁸ The following days will be filled with many such dramatizations. At the end of this first display, the Chief rises, and holding his war-sword, he renews his oath of office and pledges his service and protection to the state and all those who regard him as their leader:

I am the great grandson of Akoto;
 I am the great grandson of Ansa Sasraku;
 I am the great grandson of Akono.
 You have made me your chief.
 If the Akwamu State calls upon me
 By day or night and I do not respond,
 Or if in time of any national crisis
 I malingering and turn my back to the enemy,
 I violate the great oath.¹³⁹

¹³⁸Karikari Akyempo, in Aboakyer (Accra: Anowuo Educational Publications, 19?), pp. 16-18, explains that Asafao Companies, which were once found among all the Akan traditional areas, were originally organized as semi-military companies and executive bodies of the central authority of the state. They protected the stool (Chief) against enemies within and without the village, and served as auxiliaries through whom he exercised his functions. They also safeguarded the interests of the village against chiefs who might go beyond the limits of their powers. Akyempo notes that in former days, young men in the Asafo companies were trained for war with particular emphasis on the qualities of leadership. In peacetime the same companies were kept busy collecting taxes and performing communal labor. They also acted as a police force and were responsible for the maintenance of law and order. Early in the 20th century, the British outlawed the Asafo companies in many areas because they were regarded as troublemakers. Those companies still in existence today have greatly reduced powers, their function being for the most part ceremonial.

¹³⁹Opoku, Festivals of Ghana, p. 26.

The Oracle of Odwira

The chief then presents rum to his sub-chiefs and subjects, and the durbar merrymaking continues until just after nightfall when the gong-gong is sounded to warn people to disperse and stay indoors. Soon, the muffled notes of a small drum herald the approach of the "messengers of death," the state executioners, who are on their way to the sacred hills outside of town where the mortal remains of past rulers of the state are enshrined. Here they will perform certain secret rituals that will enable them to consult with the Odwira Oracle to determine the welfare of the state during the ensuing year.

Nature of the Rituals. In the past, these rituals consisted of the sacrifice of great numbers of criminals and prisoners of war, a practice that has been outlawed by the present government. However, the following story was related to the researcher by an acquaintance, a Ghanaian religious worker. Due to the sensitive nature of the material, the researcher chooses not to reveal her name: In September, 1973, the informer was traveling back to her home in Accra, after a visit to her village home in northern Ghana. Shortly after nightfall, a State Transport bus on which she was riding suffered a breakdown in the Akan traditional area near Keta. Some of the passengers ventured off the bus to walk around, but upon hearing the sound

of drumming nearby, they recognized that the Odwira festival was in progress, and immediately returned to the bus. Upon hearing this information, the passengers became extremely frightened, some to the point of hysteria. They were all strangers in the area, and as such were likely candidates for the executioner's axe. In the three hours required to repair the vehicle, the passengers huddled together and prayed profusely that their lives would be spared.¹⁴⁰

At this same time, the National Redemption Council issued a warning to all traditional chiefs that the government's ban on human sacrifices would be strictly invoked, and severe penalties inflicted for its violation.¹⁴¹

The Oracle Responds. During the time that the executioners are gone, the townspeople wait in hushed anxiety, for if the spirits have been properly appeased, they will make an audible response. Soon the shrill voice of the Chief Executioner pierces the stillness, calling upon the spirits of Odwira. As soon as his voice dies away, a distant voice shouts in response, upon which shouts of joy come spontaneously from every house. A gunshot sounds in the distance, then the stampede of feet through the town, as the executioners run to the palace to

¹⁴⁰Personal Communication, Accra, Oct. 2, 1973.

¹⁴¹The Ghanaian Times (Accra), October 6, 1973, p. 1.

relate the good news. People throng in the streets, assured of a happy year; for the spirits, by their clear response, have accepted the invitation of the living to join them in celebrating the remainder of the festival.¹⁴²

AKWAMBO

One of the most interesting examples of the dynamic nature of Ghanaian festivals is found in the celebration of Akwambo, or Path-Clearing by certain coastal groups of Akans, including the Fante, Gomua and Agona. These peoples are said to have emigrated from the north to the coastlands of Ghana several centuries ago in a long and arduous journey.¹⁴³ Wherever these migrants traveled, their first consideration was water; thus, most towns and settlements were built as near as possible to the banks of rivers or wells, and an important communal task was the clearing of paths to the source of the water supply. Akan Oral Tradition has recorded the following poem in testimony of the importance of the path-clearing:

The path has crossed the river
 The river has crossed the path
 Who is the elder?
 The path has crossed the river
 The river has crossed the path
 We made the path and found the river

¹⁴²Opoku, Festivals of Ghana, p. 27.

¹⁴³J. K. Fynn, Ghana Today, 4 (Accra: Ghana Information Services, 1974), pp. 7-9.

This river is from long ago
 Truly the river is from
 The Creator of the Universe.¹⁴⁴

Akwambo seems to have originated as ritual celebration in preparation for the annual festival of Afahye, the celebration of the new yam and remembrance of the dead. In the past, in addition to the footpaths leading to the common drinking places, those leading to the farms and other communal places were also cleared during Akwambo. For this reason attendance at the ceremonies was compulsory for all who benefitted directly or indirectly from the use of these common routes. Those who had traveled away from the community and were unable to return for Akwambo were required to send money to pay for the clearing of their portion of the paths. A fine was imposed on all who stayed away during the festival, except those prevented by illness, death in the family, or public or state duties; and their relations were made to pay the fine on their behalf.¹⁴⁵

In Ghana today, there are still a few areas where paths to water sources and between villages are still cleared annually during Akwambo. In most places, however, the development of motor roads has made path-clearing unnecessary, and although it is still known as Akwambo, the festival seems to be more of a

¹⁴⁴Opoku, Festivals of Ghana, p. 40.

¹⁴⁵Opoku, Festivals of Ghana, p. 40.

historical celebration to commemorate the founding of the community and to pay homage to the various tribal deities who inhabit the rivers and wells.

Such is the case in Agona Nkum, where there is no path-clearing at all. On the evening before the main festival day, members of the Asafo companies, who were once the administrative body in charge of the clearing, meet in the center of town to present arms, and march through the streets to singing and drumming. On the following afternoon, all the townspeople join the Asafo for a festive march to the main well on the outskirts of the town. Here the fetish priestess pours libation and offers of thanksgiving to Oburata Kofi, the God of the well which, until the recent installation of pipelines, was the town's main source of supply. The people are particularly grateful to Oburata Kofi because he has never failed them by permitting the well to go dry. As a symbol of their gratitude, the youth and the Asafo act out the story of how their ancestors, who had first settled near Nyakrom, decided to look for a better home because their water supply so frequently dried up. Ata, one of the sons of their chief, discovered this pond which is now named after him.¹⁴⁶

At the conclusion of the ceremonies, the people turn back towards town, singing, dancing and drumming. The members of the

¹⁴⁶Opoku, Festivals of Ghana, pp. 41-42.

Asafo who have guns fire shots into the sky, while women and children and others who have none wave branches, twigs and leaves, to create a festive atmosphere. The parade goes through the principal streets and then to the durbar grounds to present arms to the chief and his elders, who present the whole group with bottles of drinks to thank them for their past contributions to the community and to wish them prosperity in the year ahead. Libation is poured to the gods to conclude the celebration.

The Tribal Business Meeting

Although the need for path-clearing has long since passed in Agona Nkum, Akwambo is still an important tribal event because of its historical significance, and its function in bringing people together to renew the bonds of kinship and and clanship. Its importance can be clearly illustrated in the fact that Akwambo is also the day designated annually to conduct tribal business.

Weeks in advance, announcements of the festival and the durbar at which "important matters affecting the town and the people will be discussed," appear in the regional Ghanaian newspapers. Citizens, "both at home and abroad," are exhorted to "Make it a point to be there. Don't be a drop out."¹⁴⁷ And they do come. Opoku describes the crowd as including "bank clerks,

¹⁴⁷The Daily Graphic (Accra), August 30, 1973, p. 9.

journalists, teachers and others who have come from the towns and cities to join their brothers and sisters in the festival.¹⁴⁸

The meeting takes place at the durbur grounds after the libation, with the youth as well as the chief and his elders and adult members of the community joining in the discussions. Matters discussed may involve clarifying difficult points of customary law, making new laws, or taking decisions about improving the town. In 1973, for example, Major A. H. Serlomey, Commissioner for Health, was an honored guest at the meeting to initiate a fund raising appeal for a new district hospital.¹⁴⁹

Thus, not only through celebration, but through a "town-meeting" type of work session, a certain homogeneity is restored to a people grown diverse as a result of development. In this sense, the tribe is literally "clearing the way" for the celebration of Afahye the following week.

¹⁴⁸Opoku, Festivals of Ghana, p. 41.

¹⁴⁹The Daily Graphic (Accra), August 30, 1973, p. 9.

Chapter 4

FESTIVALS IN A CHANGING WORLD

In the preceding pages, the author has attempted to describe a limited number of representative festivals--rites of intensification--in the light of their historical and contemporary significance in Ghanaian society. The festivals have been shown to fall into two general categories: Festivals of Harvest, during which people express their appreciation to the gods and ancestors for the bountiful harvest, and perform the necessary rituals to ensure the future well-being of the tribe; and Festivals of Remembrance, which recall the history of the tribe and commemorate the tribal ancestors.

There is, however, considerable overlapping between these two categories, with elements of remembrance occurring in harvest ceremonies, and vice-versa. This is particularly evident in the Odwira celebrations among several Akan groups, and has left scholars in disagreement as to whether the significance of the festival is primarily thanksgiving or commemoration. Although both the historical evidence of the origin of Odwira and the present-day emphasis on purification or "santification" that is found in the ceremonies seem to favor the latter point of view, it has not been the purpose of the

present thesis in mentioning the controversy to become involved in it; but merely to illustrate the dynamic nature of Odwira and to indicate alternative explanations for its significance in contemporary society.

There can be no question that the festivals play an important role in this society. The number alone of festival celebrations that occur annually in every traditional area of the country is itself indicative of their importance, as is the frequency of occurrence of certain celebrations such as Adae which are observed every twenty-three days. Additional evidence that festivals are an integral part of Ghanaian life is also found in the fact that all government agencies and privately owned companies are required by law to provide their employees with time off with full compensation to enable them to attend their tribal affairs.

What is not so clear to the outside observer--and, indeed, to many Ghanaians themselves--is the precise nature of this role that the festivals play. Opoku notes that the growth of the cities, the influence of western cultures, and the gradual modernization of tribal ways have effected changes in the festivals in both form and substance, such that Ghanaians now tend to emphasize more the purely social aspects of the events; for many participants, all that remain of the traditional practices are "the pageantry and the feasting."¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰Opoku, "Festivals Change," p. 23.

He cites Akwambo, the path-clearing festival, as one whose purpose has long been obsolete; or the Yam Festival in Aburi, where most participants have little to do with yam cultivation. Even the so-called Soobii (Thursday people) who now put in a five-day work week no longer arrive on Thursday to celebrate the Homowo festival.

Those who do, don't often stop at the outskirts of town to be met by their relatives, particularly in Accra; for the capital city is so large that one would have to walk, in some cases, eight miles to reach the outskirts.

The Christian Influence

Festivals also reflect the influence of Christianity.

Where Christians were once forbidden to participate in these pagan religious festivals honoring tribal gods, present-day celebrations frequently include catechetical sermons, or end with a Sunday service in a Christian church that is attended by both Christians and adherents of the traditional faiths.

Elements of Christianity are also evident in many of the traditional rites of passage, such as the out-dooring ceremonies for newborn infants, and puberty rites of adolescents, which are incorporated in the Christian ceremonies of Baptism and Confirmation. However, one is inclined to question whether Christianity is the influencer or the influenced. Sarpong suggests that the latter is probably the more accurate conclusion, arguing that Christianity has had to be clothed in "various cultural garments in different

social contexts," in order to have any meaningful impact on a society:

Therefore to imagine that a particular social pattern of behavior is "christian" and must be adopted along with Christianity, is, to me, the greatest mistake one can make...the African possesses an abundance of values which require only a little polishing up to be "christian."¹⁵¹

New Festival Sounds

Even the traditional drumming and dancing have not remained unaffected by modernity. Ballroom dances have become a regular feature of many festivals; and brass bands, with their quasi-military outfits and the snappy contemporary tunes draw some attention from the traditional ensembles during the durbars. At night, most of the young adults are drawn away from the durbar grounds to the local night clubs, where high-life groups take the stage to play the latest pop music for dancing.

While Opoku concludes that all of these influences have resulted in profound changes in the nature of the festivals, he does not feel that their importance in contemporary life is thereby lessened. The festivals still remain the threads of continuity that link the present to the past:

People now go to take part in these festivals because they want to return to their place of birth and meet their old friends and relatives again and join them in merrymaking.

¹⁵¹Sarpong, p. 64.

At a time when the need for money is forcing Ghanaians to leave their towns and villages to look for work elsewhere, the festivals offer the best opportunity to go back to our heritage, renew old ties and draw inspiration for the future.¹⁵²

The Tradition of Change and Socializing

In focusing on the more recent changes in the festivals which tend to place great emphasis on their socializing aspects, two important considerations are likely to be overlooked. First, as Henige has demonstrated in his study of Akan stool succession, tribal political culture in the pre-colonial period was by no means the rigid and unchanging structure that many historians have assumed it to be. It was instead a system that not only accommodated change, but one in which change was inherent in its very nature. The festival celebrations, as integral parts of the political system, are also dynamic and extemporaneous in nature, and have constantly changed (at least in the historical period we are able to account for) to accommodate different cultural values. Change is thus the expected, not the unusual component in Ghanaian festivals.

Second, it is important to recognize that the contemporary emphasis on the social aspects of the festival is not new, but has always been an important element in these events; indeed, one is tempted to say the most vital element. For it is through such

¹⁵²Opoku, Festivals of Ghana, p.6.

festive occasions--the so-called "rites of intensification"--that members of any society, by coming together to share food, drink and intense feelings of emotion, renew their bonds with their group, their leaders, and themselves. This is evident in the ceremonies of the Tallensi, where two rival groups of people separated by their traditions of origin, but sharing a common linguistic and cultural idiom, restore the equilibrium necessary for their survival through their festival celebrations. In this case, not only is the bond between the Namoos and the Tallis resuscitated in the ceremonies, with Chief and Tendaana each reimposing on the other those responsibilities which bind them to a common task; but by the same rites, the two leaders and their people each redefine the place of the other in a social system the essence of which is chieftaincy.¹⁵³ Likewise, these same bonds are reaffirmed in the ritual cleansing of the souls of the chief and his subjects during the Odwira; and in the durbar that follows when the chief renews his oath of office, receives gifts from his people, and in turn presents them with token gifts of drinks.

Bond Renewal in Transitional Society

If this renewal of social bonds was important in the relatively normative life of preliterate Ghanaians, it is even more important today given the transitional nature of their modern world.

¹⁵³ Fortes, pp. 603-604.

Prior to gaining their independence from Britain, the inhabitants of the present Republic of Ghana comprised relatively homogeneous groups of people. The various tribes were separated by linguistic and cultural differences, but within the tribes themselves were very much alike, the main differences in status and wealth being those that existed between the chief and his subjects.

Such is not the case in contemporary Ghanaian society, where the same influences that have effected changes in the festivals have resulted in enormous differences between tribal clansmen. Education, material possessions, and even the mere experience of urban versus rural living have caused a tremendous gap in the level of status between one tribesman and another. One might well ask just what has the Oxford-educated university professor in common with the bank clerk holding a secondary school diploma, or his illiterate brother who remains in the village to fish or till the land in the time-honored manner of his ancestors?

The answer is simply this: they share with each other a common heritage, the essence of which is the belief in the ancestors and the bonds of kinship which arise therefrom. When the city dweller dons traditional apparel and leaves his home to travel to the traditional area for a festival celebration, he is symbolically putting aside the differences in wealth and education that separate him from his tribal brothers, and is temporarily assuming a statusless position with the rest of the tribe. For at least the short

time period of the ritual, the tribe is once more a united, cohesive group, eating and drinking together, and paying homage to the ancestors and their living representative, the chief.

Role Clarification

But if the festivals serve to equalize tribesmen through this ritual casting aside of status, the events function at the same time to clarify for them their place in a society that is undergoing drastic changes in the short span of their lifetime. Ghanaians in general seem confused as to their role in the newly-emerging social system, and their performance within its various spheres. For many of the older people, tribal standards remain the measure for all others; and where, due to the impact of change, things are not what they used to be, a nostalgic memory of the past continues to haunt the tribesmen. For many of the young, such as Duodo's Gab Boys, neither tribal standards nor modern have meaning. They are members of a status-less state, not only on ritual occasions, but in their everyday lives. By education and aspiration, they identify with urban culture; but lack of material wealth and the limited opportunities to obtain it tie them to the traditional, despite their lack of identification with its ultimate values and symbols.

The problem of role definition and identification is not confined to the individual members or groups that make up Ghanaian society, but is a reflection of the transitional state of the society

itself. In granting the Gold Coast colony its independence, the British super imposed upon the new nation a set of social and political standards that were patterned after the models of western democracy. Ghanaians have tried on this imported model and found it lacking; and set out to create a unique system of their own. This process is now going on, such that the present Ghanaian society might best be described as "emerging." Most Ghanaians seem to agree that they want modernization, if by modernization is meant the development of a society capable of high levels of production and consumption that will remove the material constraints which stand in the way of a better life.¹⁵⁴ But they refuse to be swallowed up in the anonymity that such modernization frequently imposes. They seek to preserve in this "emerging" society the most valuable aspects of the old way of life. The political and social structure that will ultimately emerge is not yet clear; what does seem clear is that the system will be neither a carbon copy of the West, nor a total return to the past, but a modification and synthesis of both that is derived from ongoing experience.

¹⁵⁴Philip D. Curtin, "Africa: Old and New," The World Book Year Book (Chicago: Field Enterprises Educational Corporation, 1973), pp. 122-123.

THE COMMUNICATION OF VALUES

One of the main functions of communication within a social system is to maintain the effective performance of the social roles inherent in it, thus assuring the full social participation of its members, and maintaining their identification with its ultimate values and symbols. This function is best carried out through channels in which close, primary interpersonal relationships are maintained; and through persons in positions of leadership who perform roles of elites within different spheres of the social system. Those who hold such positions both originate and transmit communications and manipulate symbols to the other members, especially those symbols which are related to the performance of social roles and behavior, and to identification with the ultimate values of the system.¹⁵⁵

In Ghanaian society, no less today than in the past, ritual and festive situations such as the festivals serve as the foci of these intensive communications of social value; for it is on such occasions that people, in spite of their differences in age, education, and aspirations, are united through the commonality of their past.

¹⁵⁵S. N. Eisenstadt, "Communication Processes Among Immigrants in Isreal," Communication and Culture, ed. Alfred G. Smith (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), pp. 586-587.

This commonality is frequently alluded to as "tribalism," and many of the newly-emerging African nations have sought to stifle it as an impediment to national unity. However, the Ghanaian government, recognizing that its culture is tribal in nature, pursues the opposite course. Tribal loyalties are accepted as a given fact: Ghanaians want to be identified with some group to whom they can entertain sentiments of loyalty, and to whom they can turn for solace in times of difficulty, anxiety and emergency. They know they can count on the fidelity of their tribesmen, who are morally obliged to come to their aid, and they feel a strong sense of unity with those with whom they have a common origin.

The present government seeks to foster these loyalties, and to transform them to the larger loyalties of nationhood. By the presence and participation of the Head of State or his representatives, tribal festivals are elevated to the national plane, and are utilized as vehicles to communicate the ultimate goals and symbols of the nation.

SUMMARY

Thus have the Ghanaian festivals evolved from the primary message carriers of an illiterate people, to symbols of unity and continuity in a changing culture. As such they have changed and effected change.

Hall has likened the confusion which results from changes in a society's formal structure to that which occurs when the prop is pulled out from a person who has been strongly supported by it all his life. Remove the prop, and you shake the foundations of life itself.¹⁵⁶ Progress has pulled the prop from many members of Ghanaian society. Scornful of traditional ways, yet disillusioned in their realization that the ways and values of outsiders will not fully serve them, they find perhaps in such rituals as the festivals the identity they seek. For the festivals present a truly comprehensive kaleidoscope of the nation's heritage of music, art, oral literature, and religious and moral values. They bind together the people of a community, and unite their yesterdays with their todays and tomorrows.

Perhaps the most significant thing that can be said to summarize the role of ritual in Ghanaian society--or in any society--has already been said by Hayakawa:

What is the good that is done us in ritual...?
It is the reaffirmation of social cohesion: the Christian feels closer to his fellow Christians, the Elk feels more united with his brother Elks, the American feels more American and the Frenchman more French as a result of these rituals. Societies are held together by such bonds of common reaction.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶Hall, p. 52. ¹⁵⁷Hayakawa, p. 83.

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