

## Development and Diaspora: Ghana and its Migrants

Nieswand, Boris

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Zur Verfügung gestellt in Kooperation mit / provided in cooperation with:

SSG Sozialwissenschaften, USB Köln

### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Nieswand, B. (2009). Development and Diaspora: Ghana and its Migrants. *Sociologus : Zeitschrift für empirische Ethnosoziologie und Ethnopsychologie*, 59(1), 17-31. <https://doi.org/10.3790/soc.59.1.17>

### Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer Deposit-Lizenz (Keine Weiterverbreitung - keine Bearbeitung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Gewährt wird ein nicht exklusives, nicht übertragbares, persönliches und beschränktes Recht auf Nutzung dieses Dokuments. Dieses Dokument ist ausschließlich für den persönlichen, nicht-kommerziellen Gebrauch bestimmt. Auf sämtlichen Kopien dieses Dokuments müssen alle Urheberrechtshinweise und sonstigen Hinweise auf gesetzlichen Schutz beibehalten werden. Sie dürfen dieses Dokument nicht in irgendeiner Weise abändern, noch dürfen Sie dieses Dokument für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, aufführen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Mit der Verwendung dieses Dokuments erkennen Sie die Nutzungsbedingungen an.

### Terms of use:

This document is made available under Deposit Licence (No Redistribution - no modifications). We grant a non-exclusive, non-transferable, individual and limited right to using this document. This document is solely intended for your personal, non-commercial use. All of the copies of this documents must retain all copyright information and other information regarding legal protection. You are not allowed to alter this document in any way, to copy it for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the document in public, to perform, distribute or otherwise use the document in public.

By using this particular document, you accept the above-stated conditions of use.

## Development and Diaspora: Ghana and its Migrants

By Boris Nieswand

This article argues that the recent discourse on diaspora and development, which suggests that migration has positive effects on the development of the sending countries, has created a framework for Ghanaian migrant associations and individuals in the receiving countries to act as representatives of the Ghanaian “diaspora”. State-oriented discourses of development have become of great importance for Ghanaian migrant associations to legitimate themselves in relation to social actors in Ghana and to promote transnational politics of belonging. The symbolical power of the discourse of development and diaspora helps to reconfigure older discourses of belonging and citizenship and to adapt them to the conditions of transnational mass migration.

The data on which this article is based derives from different sources. Much of it was collected during 13 months of ethnographic fieldwork, which I did between May 2001 and December 2003 in Germany, in particular in Berlin, and Ghana, above all in the Brong Ahafo Region.<sup>1</sup> In this work I completed qualitative interviews with Ghanaian migrants, representatives of migrant associations, with family members of migrants and representatives of institutions in Ghana. In the course of my fieldwork I encountered seven cases in which migrant associations engaged in transnational development activities. I did participant observation on two fundraising events in Germany, three meetings of Ghanaian authorities with Ghanaian migrants in Berlin, attended the regular meetings of a migrant association in Berlin in 2002, visited two schools in Kumasi and Cape Coast that had received assistance from Ghanaian migrants in 2001, met with a representative of the district administration of Dormaa Ahenkro in 2003, attended the ceremonial return of the Dormaaahene, the traditional head of the Dormaa District, from a fundraising tour to North America in 2003 and visited the Ghana@50-celebrations in Berlin in 2007. This data

---

<sup>1</sup> After 2003 I continued my field research sporadically and interviewed some Ghanaian migrants and attended “diaspora” events.

was complemented by the analysis of seven videos and DVDs on ‘diaspora events’, such as celebrations, a meeting with a Ghanaian politician and fundraising activities, as well as by the analysis of newspaper articles which I collected during my fieldwork in Ghana 2001 and 2003 and found in the internet. As a result of my research design, Ghanaians in Germany in general, and Berlin in particular, serve as dominant empirical example when it comes to qualitative descriptions.<sup>2</sup>

### I. The Migration of Ghanaians

At the time of independence large numbers of labour migrants from different parts of West Africa as well as rural-urban migrants from the poor north and east of the country went in the search for labour to the cities, cocoa plantations and mines in the south of Ghana (Caldwell 1967; Rouch 1956). In the mid-1960s it was estimated that between 10 and 15 percent of the Ghanaian population had been born outside the country (Peil 1974:369). In the course of Ghana’s post-independence crisis the direction of migration was gradually reversed.<sup>3</sup> During the 1970s, many Ghanaian migrants went to other African countries, in particular Nigeria and Côte d’Ivoire, in search of work. An estimated one million Ghanaians worked in Nigeria in the early 1980s. As a political reaction to Nigeria’s economic crisis and internal political tensions, hundreds of thousands of Ghanaians were expelled in 1983 and 1985 (Adepoju 1986). In 1983 an estimated 700,000 returnees met Ghana at the nadir of its recent history. It was suffering under political instability and economic chaos, which was aggravated by a drought and disastrous bush fires destroying food and cash crop plantations all over the country. Many returning migrant workers – and others who could afford it – left the country during this period (Van Hear 1998: 204). Since there were no regional alternatives that could provide sufficient material and political security at this time, many travelled to Western Europe and North America, although this often meant a devaluation of the migrants’ cultural and social capital, such as language skills, school and university degrees and work experience. In the following decades, Ghanaians were dispersed over the high and medium-income countries of the globe, from Australia and South Africa to the

---

<sup>2</sup> Comparisons with other cases would be important but would require more extensive and comparative research.

<sup>3</sup> Internal rural-urban migration continued for a longer period than international migration to Ghana but was also reversed in the early 1980s. According to the 1984 census, the share of urban-rural migration was higher than the share of rural-urban migration (Twum-Baah, Nabila and Aryee 1995: 160).

USA and Canada, from Sweden and Israel to South Korea and Japan. Estimates assume that between 5 and 20 percent of the Ghanaian population lives outside their country of birth, which amounts to a number of between one and four million persons (Peil 1995: 365; International Monetary Fund 2005: 7). In Western Europe, Great Britain, Germany, the Netherlands and Italy are the countries with the largest official Ghanaian populations, ranging from between 20,000 and 55,000 (Bump 2006).<sup>4</sup> Outside of Europe, Canada and the USA are the most important destinations for transcontinental Ghanaian migrants. In 2000, more than 30,000 Ghanaians officially resided in Canada (Owusu 2003: 440) and more than 65,000 in the USA (Bump 2006).

The great majority of the more than 20,000 documented Ghanaian migrants in Germany came after the end of official foreign labour recruitment in 1973. Until 1993, asylum seeking was a major route for Ghanaians and other migrants for attaining a temporally limited legal status in Germany that was often transformed into a more permanent legal status by other means. Between 1977 and 1993 the official numbers of Ghanaians in Germany grew from 3,275 to 25,952.<sup>5</sup> In the 1980s and the early 1990s between 1,700 and almost 7,000 Ghanaians applied annually for asylum in Germany. Since 1993, at which point the German asylum was changed, it has become practically impossible for Ghanaians to obtain political asylum in Germany and the decision-making process has been substantially accelerated. Partly as a result of German anti-migration policies, partly as a reaction to Germany's economic problems after reunification and, related to this, the relocation of migrants within Europe (Lindley and Van Hear 2007), partly as an outcome of the gradual shift from documented asylum seekers to undocumented migrants and partly as a result of naturalisation, the official numbers of Ghanaians in Germany declined from more than 25,000 in 1992 to 20,600 in 2006.<sup>6</sup>

## II. Ghana and its Migrants

During the Rawlings period<sup>7</sup> the relationship between the Ghanaian state and the transcontinental migrants in Western Europe was tense.

---

<sup>4</sup> Because of different counting modi, different naturalisation practices, citizenship laws and different proportions of undocumented migrants, national statistics are difficult to compare. In this sense these numbers should only be considered rough indicators for relations of population sizes.

<sup>5</sup> Source: Statistisches Bundesamt, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Source: Statistisches Bundesamt, 2008.

Many Ghanaians claimed political asylum in the receiving countries, which made them suspicious for the Ghanaian government, which suspected them of being supporters of the opposition and accused them of deserting the country in difficult times. In the late Rawlings' period the general assessment of migration changed. Although "brain drain" was and still is raised as an issue in the context of the emigration of physicians and nurses, it was highlighted increasingly that migrants' remittances and their loyalty to the Ghanaian nation-state are a resource for the development of the country. This tendency became more dominant and explicit when the NPP government led by President J.A. Kufuor took power in 2001 (Owusu 2003: 406). It introduced double citizenship in order to give Ghanaians the possibility to acquire the citizenship of the receiving country without losing their Ghanaian one. In 2001 a "homecoming summit" was organised in which the President and several ministers of state participated. In this context it was discussed how 'the diaspora' could contribute to the development of the country. As a result, the Non-Resident Ghanaian Secretariat was established in 2003, which was to co-ordinate "diaspora" activities. Another step aiming at the promotion of migrants' inclusion was the so-called Representation of the People Amendment Act, which was passed by the Ghanaian parliament in February 2006 and grants Ghanaian citizens who live outside the country the right to vote. In the same year Obetsebi-Lamprey became the first Ghanaian Minister of Tourism and Diasporian Relations.

By employing the concept of diaspora and creating state institutions for migrant inclusion, Ghana has adapted its discourse of national belonging to the conditions of mass migration. This process included an adjustment of the political definitions of citizenship. The state's interest in the migrants is related directly to a sharp increase in remittances, as has been documented in the last decade.

This paradigm shift in the assessment of migrants and their transnational relationships do not only affect institutions in Ghana but increasingly also in the receiving countries. The 'new diaspora policy' creates opportunities for Ghanaians abroad to represent themselves as a group that acts as a benevolent patron for their compatriots in Ghana.

---

<sup>7</sup> J.J. Rawlings was the leader of two coups d'état in 1979 and 1981. From 1981 until January 2001 he was in power in different functions, including that of a democratically elected President. In 2001, when Rawlings was compelled to step down from his office by the constitution, the National Patriotic Party (NPP) led by John Agyekum Kufuor, which had won the election in 2000, took over power. This was the first transition from one democratically elected government to another in the history of Ghana.

In the case of Berlin, already in the late 1980s an association of Ghanaian migrants existed, which was called Ghana Union and was basically a self-help organisation of Ghanaian migrants, often asylum seekers. In fact, a main function of the Ghana Union was eventually to mediate between migrants and the German administration in cases of death, deportation and arrest. This function was important because the relationship between the migrants and the Ghanaian embassy was difficult during this period when many claimed to be politically persecuted by the Ghanaian government. A founding member of the Ghana Union described the circumstances of the founding of the Ghana Union like this:

“We had to get ourselves organised. (...) We had to form a group of union. They were without any support, any protection; and because they were asylum seekers they were reluctant to go to their embassies. They had the feeling or they were told that if (...) you are an asylum seeker you have said something wrong about your government so you can't come to your embassy (...) and the embassy did also not come to them.”<sup>8</sup>

In the mid-1990s, when a large number of asylum seekers had attained a relatively secure legal status in Berlin and the relations to the embassy had improved, the Ghana Union terminated its activities. The ostensible reasons for the dissolution of the association were internal conflicts and management problems but it seems that it stopped its activities also because it had lost much of its functional importance.<sup>9</sup>

In 2002 a new voluntary association of Ghanaians in Berlin was founded, which was called the Ghana Community. At that time the relationship of the Ghanaian embassy to the migrants had changed profoundly. A member of the newly found Ghana Community summarised his experiences like this: “for more than 20 years the Ghanaian communities abroad were ignored, but now they [the political actors in Ghana, B.N.] see that they can help the country.”<sup>10</sup>

The representatives of the embassy sent to Germany after 2000 carried out an active diaspora policy and promoted the foundation of local “diaspora” associations as well as of a national umbrella organisation. A representative of the embassy who came in 2002 to Berlin explained to me in an unrecorded interview that he had personally talked to some migrants in Berlin and elsewhere to encourage them to relaunch a Ghanaian association in Berlin. Moreover, he and the ambassador were

---

<sup>8</sup> Interview transcript, 11. 04. 02, Berlin.

<sup>9</sup> Non-recorded interview with the former general secretary of the Ghana Union, 16. 06. 02, Berlin.

<sup>10</sup> Interview protocol, “Oswald Owusu”, 18. 06. 02, Berlin. All names except those of prominent public authorities have been changed.

convinced that associations of Ghanaian migrants should exist in every large German city.

“We are still working on that the people need representatives in every German city in order to work on their behalf.”<sup>11</sup>

In the case of Berlin, they contacted migrants who had been involved in the Ghana Union and discussed with them the necessity of a representation of Ghanaians in the city. These migrants mobilised their networks and motivated a small group of individuals to get involved in the foundation of a formal association based on German law.<sup>12</sup> Since they were not elected by the Ghanaian population in Berlin and could only rely on their personal networks as channels of communication, one of their biggest difficulties is the relative indifference of a large part of the Ghanaian population to many of their activities.<sup>13</sup>

After a period of disparate activities with changing audiences, the main function of the Ghana Community became to organise “diaspora” events in the name of the Ghanaian population in Berlin. One of the founding members highlighted the transnational dimension in the foundation process of the Ghana Community “The people in Ghana should know that although we are out of the country, we still can do something.”<sup>14</sup>

The transnational orientation of the Ghana Community became relevant in the cases of President Kufuor’s visit to Germany in June 2002, a discussion with the Ghanaian Minister for Economic Planning and Regional Integration, Dr. Kwesi Nduom in Berlin in August 2002, a meeting with the Senior Minister John Henry Mensah in 2006 and the celebration of 50 years of Ghanaian independence in 2007 (cf. Nieswand 2008).

Another step in the construction of a Ghanaian diaspora in Germany was the foundation of the Union of Ghanaian Organisations in Germany (UGAG) in 2003.<sup>15</sup> In 2005 the UGAG consisted of 15 local associations. Practically, it has co-ordinating functions, is involved in the celebration of Ghana-related events and supports the charity activities of its member organisations. The close relation between the embassy

---

<sup>11</sup> Interview protocol, “Victor Larteh”, 09. 08. 02, Berlin.

<sup>12</sup> Interview protocol, “Oswald Owusu”, 18. 6. 02, Berlin.

<sup>13</sup> I attended five regular meetings (in addition to special events) of the Ghana Community between April 2002 and May 2003. They were attended by in between 10 and 30 persons. Just for comparison, approximately 465 to 530 Ghanaian attended the regular Sunday services of the twelve Ghanaian-initiated churches, which I visited during my field work in Berlin.

<sup>14</sup> Field protocol, 24. 02. 06, Berlin.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.ugag.org/>.

and the UGAG is documented in the former's status as permanent member of the association's advisory board.

Meetings with Ghanaian state representatives and politicians are part of the larger process of the transnationalisation of the Ghanaian politics of inclusion. In this context the idea of citizenship became loosely coupled to the development discourse. Ghanaian citizens in the full sense are not any longer only those (of Ghanaian origin) who live in Ghana but increasingly also those outside Ghana who contribute to the development of the country. By showing efforts to develop the country, "Ghanaianess" and the citizenship rights which are connected to it become disconnected from residency. This became very obvious at the already cited meeting between the Ghanaian Minister of Economic Development and members of the Ghanaian diaspora:

"The minister was a dynamic and energetic man. He wore an elegant business suit and round metal rimmed, spoke English with a British accent and used a PowerPoint presentation to structure his free talk. In his introductory remarks he highlighted that he had discussed the preliminary regional development plan with Ghanaians in all regions of Ghana as well as with Ghanaians in South Africa, the United States, Great Britain and Germany in order "to brainstorm and to share ideas for the planning and development of Ghana." Only if all Ghanaians – those in the diaspora and those at home – show a joint effort would they be "successful in developing the country".<sup>16</sup>

It is remarkable that the issue of undocumented migrants and their civil rights is of little significance for the migrant organisations and their self-representation. There are multiple reasons for this silence. In Berlin, which is the case I know best, it is related to the fact that because of the economic difficulties the city experienced since reunification, undocumented migrants were a minority among Ghanaians in the city. Moreover, a significant class of relatively established migrants had emerged, who controlled the migrant associations and in some sense distinguished themselves from newcomers with an insecure legal status. What is more, the issue of undocumented migration generally is not very openly politicised in Germany and it would be difficult for representatives of a small minority group, such as Ghanaians, which faces racist stereotypes anyway, to proliferate themselves on this issue.

### III. Development Diasporas

In 2001, 24 representatives of African governments, among them the Ghanaian, met to discuss the potential impact of migrants' social and

---

<sup>16</sup> Field protocol, 13. 08. 02, Berlin.



economic remittances on development in Africa (Koser 2003b). This and other events put the recent discourse on migration and development on the agenda of several African governments and international African organisations, like the Organisation of African Unity and the African Development Bank (African Development Bank 2007).

The large majority of remittances in Ghana and elsewhere in Africa are individual transfers by which migrants support relatives, invest in housing or businesses and contribute to family rituals (Mazzucato, Kabki and Smith 2006; Mazzucato, Boom and Nsowah-Nuamah 2008; Van Hear 2002). Nevertheless, these contributions were not framed, at least by my informants, in the idiom of development but within other discourses, like kinship obligation or securing one's livelihood in old age (cf. Nieswand 2005).<sup>17</sup>

In contrast, Ghanaian migrant associations represent their collective remittances as contributions to the development of their country of origin. Recently, many different social units, mostly below the national level, including schools, churches, towns, ethnic groups and administrative regions, became objects of diasporic development practices.

Migrant associations fulfil an important function in the construction of diasporas. Because executives are often elected by a small number of active members, it is not democratic legitimation that allows them to speak for a whole group of migrants but rather self-appointment, the claim that is implied in the associations' name (e.g. Ghana Union) and the acknowledgement by authorities in the receiving country or the country of origin. Sending, for instance books, to a library in Ghana becomes, if it is done by a migrant association, a redistributive transaction of a more wealthy section ("the diaspora") to a less affluent section ("the people at home") of the *same* people. Complexities that

---

<sup>17</sup> The dominant discourse used to frame redistribution within the context of kinship relations is the discourse of delayed reciprocity and personal responsibility. For example: Kofi Boadum (interview transcript, 26. 06. 02, Berlin) spoke in the context of transfers between families members of "our responsibility (...) that we care for our family"; Peggy Antwi (interview transcript, Berlin, 02. 11. 02) stressed the cultural rootedness of kinship obligations: "as an African you have a responsibility to your family, no matter how big it is. It is a responsibility. This is the tradition, this is the culture." Afua Konadu (interview transcript, 11. 06. 05, Berlin) emphasised the position in the row of siblings as the reason why she regularly remitted money to her younger sisters: "I have to take the responsibilities at the house (...) I had to take care of (...) three sisters of mine"). On a more general level Ralph Boakye (interview transcript 02. 05. 02, Berlin) compared his responsibility for supporting his parents and his siblings to the formalised social security system of Western welfare states. None of the interviewees used a discourse of societal development when they referred to transfers within transnational families.

could challenge these idealised representations of migrants as a collective or the executives' legitimacy to speak for a larger group remain normally excluded. In a random sample of 53 cases of "philanthropic" activities, no reference could be found to undocumented migrants or a description of the legal and economic predicaments of many Ghanaian migrants in Europe.<sup>18</sup> At the same time the gesture of publicly donating money and goods implied a strong claim of affluence and altruism. Thirteen individuals and 40 migrant associations donated money and goods to institutions in Ghana. Of the 40 donations made by migrant associations, 13 were hometown and 11 were ethnic associations. In 5 cases they had a national and in 7 a regional focus.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, churches, school alumni organisations and NGOs became active as supporters of institutions in Ghana.

More than 40 percent of the target institutions were in the Ashanti Region where also the largest group of transcontinental Ghanaian migrants originates from. But other regions like Brong Ahafo Region (13.5%), Eastern Region (11.5%) and Central Region (9.6%) also were of relevance. Fewer activities targeted those regions where only few transcontinental migrants come from, in particular the Western Region (3.8%), the three northern regions (Northern Region, Upper East Region, Upper West Region) (5.8%) and the Volta Region (1.9%). 46 percent of the donating migrant associations and individuals were based in North America (USA, Canada) and 50 percent in Western Europe. In Europe those countries were most important in which most Ghanaian migrants live, namely Great Britain (18%), Germany (12%), Italy (8%) and the Netherlands (6%). The migrant associations normally claimed to represent a certain 'diasporic population' living in a certain geographical area in the receiving countries, which could be a city (e.g. Asante in Berlin), a region (e.g. Asante in the Ruhr area) or the country as a whole (e.g. migrants from the town of Bompata living in the USA). In some cases funds were also raised among migrants who lived in different nation-states, like in the case of the Council of Brong Ahafo Associations of North America (COBAANA), which included associations in Canada and the United States.

In 52 (86.7%) of 60<sup>20</sup> covered cases, migrants supported hospitals, schools or public infrastructure (e.g. electrification of a village, bulbs

---

<sup>18</sup> To broaden the empirical base, I complemented the seven cases, which I encountered during my fieldwork, with 46 unsystematically collected cases covered by Ghanaian media in between 2002 and 2008.

<sup>19</sup> These distinctions are analytical. Because geographical, social and administrative units overlap it often remains ambiguous whether a town, an ethnic group, a chieftaincy or an administrative district is considered the addressee of a transnational charity activity.

for street lights or books for a local library). The remaining eight cases targeted an environmental protection fund, the national football team or supported orphans, nursing mothers and victims of catastrophes.

The large majority of these diasporic charity activities focused on core activities of the state. Schools, hospitals and infrastructure are among the most important icons of statehood and public welfare in Ghana and represent uncontested goals of community development. Therefore, they also are of distinctive value for an upright display of altruism before a broader public. By supporting hospitals, schools and public infrastructure, migrants can represent themselves as collective actors who assume some of the responsibilities of the Ghanaian state.

The state's claim of being responsible for 'developing the country' is in this context openly relativised by its representatives by recognising that the help of the diaspora is appreciated and needed.<sup>21</sup> This relativisation of power claims, which is often part of diasporic development activities, is remarkable if it is compared to the self-representations of the state after independence, when the emphasis was much more on being a strong actor capable of inducing and controlling societal development (cf. Nkrumah 1961).

#### IV. Diasporic Development Rituals

*Diasporic development rituals* are of great importance for evidencing the reality of "diasporas" and their relevance for the development of the country. Often they start with fund-raising events in the destination countries during which the migrants' responsibility for the "homeland" is stressed. They include requests for donations of goods (e.g. medical equipment or computers) or other forms of support directed to organisations in the destination country and culminate in a public ritual in which the money or the goods are handed over by representatives of migrant associations to representatives of the receiving institution in the country of origin. Frequently these latter events are attended by local authorities and are covered in the Ghanaian media. These performances resemble what Moore and Myerhoff called (1977: 44) "secular rituals"<sup>22</sup> because they translate central ideas and

---

<sup>20</sup> Since in six cases migrants contributed to more than one institution their number (60) is higher than the number of documented cases (53).

<sup>21</sup> See for instance: [www.modernghana.com/news/33574/1/ghanaian-in-germany-donates-ambulance.html](http://www.modernghana.com/news/33574/1/ghanaian-in-germany-donates-ambulance.html), (accessed 13. 04. 2003).

<sup>22</sup> The reference to the distinction between "secular" and "religious" rituals is a bit unfortunate. I prefer the more concrete term *transnational development ritual* instead of *secular ritual*.

ideologies implied in the discourse of diaspora and development into a set of formalised practices. Thereby, they legitimise and evidence the existence of diasporas at the same time: “diasporas” exist because their members express their solidarity by development rituals and development rituals take place because “diasporas” exist.

An article by the Ghana News Agency (GNA) on the donation of hospital equipment by a UK-based hometown association worked out the core element of the Ghanaian part of a transnational charity ritual almost paradigmatically:

“Apam, April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2006, GNA – Members of the United Kingdom (UK) branch of the Apam Improvement Association have donated medical supplies and equipment worth about 120 million cedis to the Apam Catholic Mission Hospital. Mr Kow Arthur, an executive member of the UK branch of the Association, who presented the items to the Hospital said the health of their relatives at home was their prime concern, hence their untiring efforts to mobilise resources to purchase materials to support the Hospital. (...) Mr J E Sey (...) appealed to other citizens both at home and abroad to contribute meaningfully to the development of the town. Dr Ebenezer Amekah, Medical Officer in charge and Rev. Sister Mary Magdalene Attah Mensah, Matron, both of the Hospital, jointly received the items and expressed gratitude to the Association for the gesture.”<sup>23</sup>

The core elements of the final act of the diasporic development rituals, which can be found with some variation in several descriptions of comparable events, are:<sup>24</sup> the ceremonial handing over of the donations; speeches of representatives of diaspora organisations and of local authorities; the public declaration that the migrants abroad feel responsible for their region or locality of origin because of primordial attachment; the expression of gratitude by representatives of the receiving institution; the confirmation that their activities contribute to the development of the region; and the coverage of the event in the local news. With some empirical variations, this list is a prototypical script for the performance of a successful transnational development ritual in Ghana. Nevertheless, despite the rhetoric of development, which migrants as well as the addressees of development activities use, it is sometimes unclear in how far activities framed as contributions to development can be considered as such in a practical sense. Although there are some incidences in which the efforts of migrants obviously

---

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.modernghana.com/news/98329/1/apam-citizens-in-uk-donate-medical-supplies.html>

<sup>24</sup> Newspaper articles are in this respect analytically interesting because the journalists condense the event to some of its core features. See for instance: <http://www.modernghana.com/news/98329/1/apam-citizens-in-uk-donate-medical-supplies.html> (accessed 12. 10. 2007).

failed to fulfil their goals (cf. Nieswand 2008), in most cases migrant associations donate goods that are of practical use for the receiving institutions. Nevertheless, compared to the limited volume of most donations the discourse on diaspora and development often appears “oversized”. Analytically it is difficult to evaluate the impact of the donation of a limited number of mattresses, beds or an ambulance to a hospital respectively some computers and books to a school on the development of a town, an ethnic group or even the country as a whole. This disparity between the rhetoric employed in the diaspora and development discourse and its practical impact highlights the relevance of the symbolic dimension of these activities.

## V. Conclusion

At the core of this article was the symbolical power of the discourse of diaspora and development, which often exceeds its practical value. It was argued that the idea of diaspora, the practice of transnational development rituals and the imaginary of societal development evidence and reinforce each other mutually. The ceremonial contexts of collecting and donating resources provide migrants with social arenas in which they can represent themselves as resourceful and generous supporters of their “communities of origin” and can raise claims of belonging and citizenship rights. Thereby the development discourse and its communitarian subtext allows migrants to achieve recognition for their lives abroad and to remain socially included in two countries.

To distinguish between the ideologically loaded discourse of diaspora and the group of migrants to which it refers is crucial to perceive the tensions between the egalitarian and communitarian rhetoric and the way differences of power and status are marked and negotiated practically. On the one hand, this concerns the relationship between those who act as “the diaspora” and those who act as the “people at home.” On the other hand, it refers to internal differentiation among migrants. Since the redistribution of resources is at the centre of transnational development rituals, they emphasise the respectability, generosity and solidarity as the most salient features of the “diaspora”. But this also means that systematic silences are created about the predicaments of less privileged Ghanaians in Germany and elsewhere, like the significant group of undocumented migrants or migrants who cannot be generous for other reasons. This selectivity is constitutive to the imaginary of diaspora and its reference to development. Thereby claims of belonging and citizenship rights are raised from which those migrants in the centre of the discourse profit more than those who remain invisible at its margins.

## References

- Adepoju, Aderanti* (1986): Expulsion of Illegals from Nigeria. Round Two. In: *Migration World* 14, 5: 21 – 24.
- African Development Bank (2007): Remittances By Migrants. A Development Challenge. The Comoros, Mali, Morocco and Senegal: [http://www.afdb.org/pls/portal/docs/PAGE/ADB\\_ADMIN\\_PG/DOCUMENTS/NEWS/ENGLISH.PDF](http://www.afdb.org/pls/portal/docs/PAGE/ADB_ADMIN_PG/DOCUMENTS/NEWS/ENGLISH.PDF), (accessed, 01. 10. 2008).
- Bump, Micah* (2006): Ghana. Searching for Opportunities at Home and Abroad. Migration Information Source. Washington (D.C.): Migration Policy Institute: <http://www.migrationinformation.org/Profiles/display.cfm?ID=381>, (accessed, 1. 10. 2006).
- Caldwell, John C.* (1967): Migration and Urbanization, in: W. B. Birmingham, I. Neustadt and E. N. Omaboe (Eds.): *A Study of Contemporary Ghana*. Vol. 2. Some Aspects of Social Structure. London: George Allen and Unwin: 111 – 146.
- International Monetary Fund (2005): Ghana. Article IV Consultation. Third Review Under the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility, and Request for Waiver of Nonobservance of Performance Criteria and Extension of the Arrangement, IMF Country Report. No. 5/292. Washington (D.C.): International Monetary Fund.
- Kabki, Mirjam/Mazzucato, Valentina/Appiah, Ernest* (2004): “Wo benane a eye bebree.” The Economic Impact of Remittances of Netherlands-Based Ghanaian Migrants on Rural Ashanti. In: *Population, Space and Place* 10: 85 – 97.
- Koser, Khalid* (2003): New African Diasporas. An Introduction, in: K. Koser (Ed.): *New African Diasporas*. London: Routledge: 1 – 16.
- Lindley, Anna / Van Hear, Nicholas* (2007): *New Europeans on the Move. A Preliminary Review of the Onward Migration of Refugees Within the European Union*. COMPAS Working Paper No. 57. Oxford: Centre on Migration, Policy and Society, University of Oxford.
- Mazzucato, Valentina/Kabki, Mirjam/Smith, Lothar* (2006): Transnational Migration and the Economy of Funerals. Changing Practices in Ghana. In: *Development and Change* 37, 5: 1047 – 1072.
- Mazzucato, Valentina / van den Boom, Bart /Nsawah-Nuamah, N. N. N.* (2008): Remittances in Ghana. Origin, Destination and Issues of Measurement. In: *International Migration* 46, 1: 103 – 122.
- Moore, Sally Falk /Myerhoff, Barbara G.* (1977): Introduction. Secular Ritual. Forms and Meanings, in: S. F. Moore and B. G. Myerhoff (Eds.): *Secular Ritual*. Amsterdam: Van Gorcum: 3 – 24.
- Munzele Maimbo, Samuel/Ratha, Dilip* (Eds.) (2005): *Remittances. Development Impact and Future Prospects*. Washington: The World Bank.

- Nieswand, Boris* (2005): Die Stabilisierung transnationaler Felder. Grenzüberschreitende Beziehungen ghanaischer Migranten in Deutschland. In: Nord-Süd aktuell 19, 1: 45–56.
- (2008): Ghanaian Migrants in Germany and the Social Construction of Diaspora. In: African Diaspora 1, 1–2: 28–52.
- Nkrumah, Kwame* (1961): I Speak of Freedom. A Statement of African Ideology. New York: Praeger.
- Owusu, Thomas Y.* (2003): Transnationalism Among African Immigrants in North America. The Case of Ghanaians in Canada. In: Journal of International Migration and Integration 4, 3: 395–413.
- Peil, Margaret* (1995): Ghanaians Abroad. In: African Affairs 94, 376: 345–67.
- Peil, Margret* (1974): Ghana's Aliens. In: International Migration Review 8, 3: 367–381.
- Rouch, Jean* (1956): Migrations au Ghana (Gold Coast). Enquête 1953–1955. Paris: Société des Africanistes Musée de l'Homme.
- Van Hear, Nicholas* (1998): New Diasporas. The Mass Exodus, Dispersal and Regrouping of Migrant Communities. Routledge: London.
- (2002): Sustaining Societies Under Strain. Remittances as a Form of Transnational Exchange in Sri Lanka and Ghana, in: N. Al-Ali and K. Koser (Eds.): New Approaches to Migration? Transnational Communities and the Transformation of Home. London: Routledge: 202–223.

## Summary

The recent emphasis on the link between development and diasporic activities does not only reflect social changes, like the increase in migrant remittances, but also facilitates the building of institutions for the political and social inclusion of migrants in their country of origin. This article shows that the Ghanaian “diaspora” is not a social unit that predated the new discourse on transcontinental labour migration but rather emerged in its course. Institutional slots were created for Ghanaian migrant associations and individuals in the receiving countries to act as representatives of the Ghanaian “diaspora”. In this framework *transnational development rituals* have become an important means for legitimising migrant organisations and their claims to political participation in their country of origin. The postcolonial imaginary of development and its icons, in particular hospitals, schools and public infrastructure, provide a symbolical background against which migrants and state representatives re-negotiate questions of social status, citizenship and identity. The symbolical power of the discourse of development and diaspora helps to reconfigure older discourses of belonging and citizenship and to adapt them to the conditions of transnational mass migration.

### Zusammenfassung

Die aktuelle Diskussion über den Einfluss von Migranten auf die Entwicklung ihres Herkunftslandes reflektiert nicht nur veränderte gesellschaftlichen Realitäten, sondern schafft gleichzeitig auch Partizipationsmöglichkeiten, innerhalb derer die Inklusion von Migranten in ihr Herkunftsland erst hergestellt wird. Die "ghanaische Diaspora" ist, wie anhand des Falles von Ghanaern in Deutschland gezeigt wird, keine an sich existierende soziale Einheit, sondern formierte sich erst im Zuge der Neubewertung von transnationaler Migration aus Ghana. Diaspora-Politiken kreieren soziale Räume für Migrantenorganisationen und Individuen, innerhalb derer sie als legitime Repräsentanten der Migranten in den Zuwanderungsländern agieren können. *Kollektive Entwicklungsrituale* sind in diesem Kontext von besonderer Bedeutung. Sie legitimieren Migrantenorganisationen und deren Ansprüche auf politische und soziale Teilhabe im Herkunftsland. Der postkoloniale ghanaische Entwicklungsdiskurs und seine modernistischen Symbole, insbesondere Krankenhäuser, Schulen und öffentliche Infrastruktur, liefern einen symbolischen Hintergrund, der es Migranten in Ghana ermöglicht, sozialen Status, Bürgerrechte und Identitäten neu zu verhandeln. In diesem Sinne trägt die Debatte über den Zusammenhang von Entwicklung und Migration dazu bei, Zugehörigkeiten umzudefinieren und an die gesellschaftlichen Bedingungen von transnationaler Massenmigration anzupassen.

Boris Nieswand

Max-Planck-Institut zur Erforschung multireligiöser  
und multiethnischer Gesellschaften (MMG)

Abteilung für soziokulturelle Vielfalt

Hermann- Föge-Weg 11

37073 Göttingen

Germany

Tel.: +49 (0)551 4956-146

Fax: +49 (0)551 4956-170

E-mail: nieswand@mmg.mpg.de