Dancing for the State: A Critical Examination of State-Owned Dance Troupes in Ghana

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Abstract

In this paper, we examine the relationship between dance and nationalism, tracing the history of state-owned dance troupes globally and their role in promoting nationalistic agendas. Through a literature review on cultural nationalism and a case study of Ghana's dance troupes, we reveal how states have usurped cultural practices to create a unified national identity. Our findings also highlight the tensions between the various ethnic groups in Ghana who strive to gatekeep their dance performances to entrench their unique identities, the non-meticulous new wave of private dance troupes who dare not to conform to most traditional dance performance practices, and the nation-state at the helm of affairs with a nationalistic agenda that does not support individual ethnic narratives. This demonstrates how dance can be both a powerful tool for cultural expression and a site of political contestation. Using the qualitative mode of inquiry, we employed ethnography as the study design. The study's objectives were achieved through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observation, and field notes. This research contributes to our understanding of the complex dynamics between culture, politics, and identity, by shedding light on how states shape and utilize cultural practices to serve their interests.

1. Introduction

Like other forms of cultural expression, dance can serve as a tool to assess the ideologies of the society it inhabits. While dance does not typically reflect the holistic nature of a society, it can arguably reveal the conservative or liberal politics and social or individualistic characteristics of a people. To some extent, these qualities of dance provide a generalised perspective on what philosophies may underpin a society's culture, as with Ghana's philosophy of "Unity in Diversity". Thus, a society's dance projects its peculiarities reveals its functionality in maintaining the continuity of cultural practices or beliefs, and serves as a platform for interaction with newer dance forms. Dance has also been used politically as a tool to foster patriotism in nation-states as in the case of Ghana and other countries that have multi-ethnic citizens as their population (Coe, 2005; Schauert, 2015)

In the formation of nation-states, dance has proven to be one of the many tools used to reimagine and project a national identity. Cultural nationalistic approaches in countries like Ghana, Tanzania, Turkey, and Greece, intending to create a national culture from various customs, led to the formation of state-owned troupes (Askew, 2002). Although the histories and formations of state ensembles vary from country to country, they all share the common goal of curating ethnic music and dances into a single repertoire for national purposes.

In this study, we trace the history of dance troupes used by nation-states globally for nationalistic agendas. We review the literature on cultural nationalism, which is a romantic concept of using ethnic elements of a nation to champion patriotism and a unified front. Furthermore, we trace the formation of privatized dance troupes in Ghana to the 1960s, looking at how culture, more narrowly the performing arts, was used as tools by the state for its nationalist agendas and how private entities modeled the state-owned troupe.

2. Cultural Nationalism, Christian Mission Societies, and Education

The idea of state-owned traditional music and dance troupes is not an African invention (Carl, 2011; Schramm, 2000; Wilborg, 2000). This phenomenon is a romantic concept with forerunners like the Soviet Union, former socialist states, and other East bloc states that have had national symphony orchestras and national ballets that represented the entirety of their countries (Coe, 2005; Schauert, 2015). This points to the fact that countries like Guinea, Tanzania, and Ghana, among others, borrowed the idea of using cultural elements in the spirit of nationalism to represent their multi-ethnic nations. Localizing and indigenizing national ballets and orchestras abroad successfully served nationalist purposes in Africa.

Many missionaries and scholars who have researched cultural nationalistic practices in Africa, particularly in dance, have centred their works on education, rituals, and the use of dance in promoting patriotism amongst citizens. Cati Coe examines the concept of cultural nationalism about education and religion in Ghana, tracing its history from the 19th century through independence and the various governments that have guided the country's affairs. She also examines Ghana's cultural policy in the early stages of independence (Coe, 2005) to elucidate the projection of culture and the gradual adoption of a "Ghanaian culture."

In the 19th century, Christian missionaries that came to the Gold Coast imported a romantic-nationalist concept of Ghanaians as equivalent to the "traditional" people of Europe. European scholars at the time had romanticised the traditional people as those with a certain kind of heritage with which the bourgeoises in society had lost touch. This prompted the study of grammar and folklore. The unified spirit of African ethnicities was evident in their language. To pave the way for nationhood and the spread of Christianity, the Basel missionaries studied the languages of the ethnicities to help them convince the people to abandon their customs. They denounced the people's traditions and way of life as immoral and fraudulent. They suggested that Africans should sever ties with their families and communities to undergo conversion. The newly converted could only join the newly formed Christian community through this route. This created a wide gap between African-converted Christians and their indigenous lives (Coe, 2005; Turino, 2000).

African Christians had come to develop a new project of self as a modern person, with the belief that their indigenous ways of life were segmented and, as such, could be singularly evaluated (Askew 2002). For this modern person, not being attached to traditions and customs allowed them to objectively study, assess, and document those customs. The project of the missionaries created the impression that modernity entailed rejecting and distancing one's self from their traditions. According to Abrahams (1993), natives and peasants were judged to be closer to nature. This very racist and classist view further entrenched the romanticization of the peasants as guardians of cultural norms. The civilisations of these "peasants" were later curated as artefacts and used to project the past glory of the nation. This contributed to the idea that there exist entities like high and low cultures and basic and complex cultures, depending on how "modern" one is.

Some romantic nationalists in academia theorised that to revive the nation-state, it was incumbent to revive past customs and languages. Zipes (1987) alludes to the fact that "there was the need to organise, purify (as it was regarded as low and filthy), and produce the same "peasant" customs for consumption by the bourgeoisie.

In Africa and specifically in Ghana, expanding mass education was tantamount to expanding the state, not only to contribute to the well-being of society but also to enforce the legitimacy of the state to amass powers that topple those of traditional rulers (Coe, 2005). The power of the state and the recognition of it by its citizens allows it to rule them by usurping knowledge and standardising the powers vested in the local institutions. Thus, through schools, for example, interaction with the populace allows the state to use textbooks and curriculums to shape its populace. The state also provides education, sponsored cultural programmes, and other related events. Nationalists who needed an outlet to make their ideas about culture known did that by reforming academic curricula. Catie Coe highlights the Norwegian folklorist Ole Vig's dire need to transform the elementary schools for children in lower classes into a folk school that used the Norwegian peasant dialect called "Landsmål". This was achieved by campaigning for textbooks that included mythologies, selected kinds of literature, and proverbs. Thus, "schools deliberately attempted to standardise and objectify vernacular knowledge, codifying traditions in classroom lessons into facts that take the form of lists and definitions" (p. 6).

The state's interest in the promotion of culture led to a standardisation of the concept, where certain parts of the mundane cultural life in Ghana and other countries were approved as culture. The continuous social practices became porous as what was deemed cultural was scooped out and given new representations. The romantic intersection of culture and nationalism then, in defining what was essential for Ghana, justified the state's support for the expansion and appropriation of what the state regarded as culture from the various ethnic groups.

This was done through state bureaucracies and other government institutions that were closely knit to academia, under the headship and supervision of seasoned scholars.

After independence, Dr Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana, having borrowed this romantic concept from the East and the West, went on to spearhead the project of the "African Personality." The state, under his regime, drew on practices that were a part of the everyday life of the Ghanaian citizens to appropriate that expressive power for national unity (Coe, 2005, p. 54).

Nkrumah realised that his chance to promote homogeneity after gaining independence would be validated if he applied the cultural nationalist framework to the newly formed country. This was achieved by adopting and converting aspects of the cultural symbols and meanings of the various ethnic groups in Ghana into easily understood state symbols (Guss, 2000, p. 13). Nkrumah, together with Efua Sutherland and along the line, Mawere Opoku of the University of Ghana, adopted the performing arts and public display to legitimise its political power over the nation. The phrase "drumming and dancing" connotes "culture" in Ghana due to the standardisation and sponsorship of education by the state (Coe, 2005). Kruger (1992) makes an interesting observation between Ghana and the United States, France, and England, where in national theatre traditions, the state institutions become the performers, leaving the citizens to assume the audience role. In Ghana, however, and again through schools, the government's nationalistic agenda ropes students in into becoming performers during national events. Kavanagh (1995) states that this has gone a long way towards giving pupils and students the chance to make sense of their world. The Ghana Dance Ensemble, which Dr. Kwame Nkrumah established, is one of the nationalist tools used to propagate the political agenda of using a troupe to showcase the nation.

3. A Historical Look at State-Owned Troupes in Ghana

"Culture encompasses all aspects of society that enable the community to struggle against its environment while balancing humanitarian and social needs. … Culture is the sole foundation of all community activities. According to this philosophy, cultural matters concern all parties and government sectors. Every sector of the Party of Government involves culture in the fulfilment of its day-to-day responsibilities" (Tanzanian National Cultural Policy Guidelines, 1998). The history of Ghana's cultural nationalistic journey begins with the establishment of the National Dance Company (formerly the Ghana Dance Ensemble).

3.1. The National Dance Company of Ghana

The history of the National Dance Company of Ghana has been elaborately researched by scholars including Adinku (2000, 1994), Coe (2005), Fabien (1996), Friedler (1997), Schauert (2015), Schramm (2000), and the University of Ghana, Institute of African Studies, together with the Arts Council Ghana (1969). These publications gave insights from different perspectives, which involved education, management, and patriotism, amongst others, into the formation and establishment of the Ghana Dance Ensemble, now the National Dance Company of Ghana. Sources include first-hand interviews and secondary data in the form of published articles and books. Ethnographer Krista N. Fabien gives an edgy account of the formation of the state-owned troupe from his first-hand interviews with William O. Adinku, Albert M. Opoku, and J. H. Kwabena Nketia (Fabien, 2000).

The justification for not looking at the history of the Ghana Dance Ensemble and rather the National Dance Company of Ghana is that the focus here is concerned with the state-owned troupe. Thus, the label "Ghana Dance Ensemble" today is not one under the state. To look at the history of the Ghana Dance Ensemble will be to look at how the resident dance troupe of the University of Ghana, and not of the state, came to be.

Ghana's independence in 1957, which was led by Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of the then newly formed nation, led to a serious issue of how to unify the nation under a single centralised government. Before our unified Ghana today, ethnicity was still strong with traditional rulers and their policies. This called for the need to use tact in unifying the new nation.

Having had the opportunity to travel and study abroad, Nkrumah was well aware of not just the power of the arts as a tool for unification but also of how this "tool" had been used by former socialist states and the Soviet Union as a representation of who they were and in diplomatic engagements (Coe, 2005).

Nkrumah held the view that the total emancipation of Ghana from its colonialists, in particular, was closely tied to adopting and implementing this concept. It is worth reiterating that after Ghana attained independence in 1957, focusing on collective and harmonious citizenry behaviour was an optimum priority for the ruling

Convention Peoples Party (CPP) at that time (Nii-Yartey, 2016, p. 6). It is for this reason that during the early beginnings of Ghana's self-rule, dance became one of the major unifying elements that instilled a sense of nationalism and patriotism amongst the majority of the populace. In effect, dance became a potent mouthpiece for the less educated, since they identified themselves with dramatic performances and also participated in them.

According to Fabian (1996), in an interview with Professor Nketia on the establishment of the then Ghana Dance Ensemble, Nketia lamented that "African nations cannot afford to lose their cultural identity, for it is this that will enable them to contribute to the enrichment of other world cultures." Thus, Nketia believed in the safeguarding of African traditional art forms to bring about a kind of uniqueness that sets Africans apart while still adding to the diversity of existing world cultures. Even the concept of globalisation, according to Arjun Appadurai, seeks not to end up as a story of homogenization (1996, p. 11). African countries, thus, will not become mere extensions of their colonial masters but will own their own identities.

Nkrumah understood that a strong sense of community promoted through the use of indigenous art forms was needed. The backgrounds of the various ethnic groups he was to govern, put together into a sort of homogenised system, could work towards attaining a united front for the new nation. In 1959, he formed the Arts Council of the newly founded Ghana to:

> …Foster, improve, and preserve the traditional arts and culture of Ghana and examine the practical ways and means to encourage a National Theatre Movement that at once reflects the traditional heritage of this country and yet develops it into a living force, firmly rooted in and acclaimed by the modern Ghanaian today" (Arts Council mandate, as cited by Nketia 1977, p. 19).

Nkrumah, after establishing the Arts Council in 1959, realised that the next phase was to start putting structures in place to cater to the teaching and application of traditional dances to champion the cause of artistic development. J. H. Kwabena Nketia and Albert M. Opoku were appointed to find the best ways to execute the plan.

Nketia and Opoku, in response to the task given to them, set out to establish a national dance troupe in association with a school. This was to encourage Ghanaians from different cultural backgrounds who knew drumming and dancing to unite as an ensemble. This troupe was envisioned to perform at state functions, which were to cater to a cosmopolitan mix of audiences.

Collaboration between the Institute of Art and Culture, which represented the government, and the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, birthed what Opoku and Nketia called the "creative experiment." Both scholars determinedly held that if a national dance troupe was to be established, then it must, at all costs, have strong ties with an academic establishment to pave the way for research into traditional arts. Formal education was necessary, they felt, to train Ghanaians to become "professionals" who performed not only the dances of their nativity but also of other ethnic groups. They envisioned an African institution where Ghanaians could benefit from opportunities in dance education that rivalled schools abroad and safeguarded the dance traditions of Ghana (Fabien, 1996). It becomes necessary, then, to agree with Schramm (2000) that the establishment of national culture in Ghana has arguably been determined by local as well as global considerations. To establish a national culture will mean to have a globally standardised form of whatever is being established to receive necessary international recognition.

The name "Ghana Dance Ensemble" was deliberated and agreed on to champion the goal of establishing a state ensemble. To acquire the first members of the Ghana Dance Ensemble, announcements were made in the local papers. To make the team, one had to be between the ages of 18 and 25. Among the requirements were a good basic education, skill or talent in dancing or drumming, and the discipline to undergo intensive training for two years in dance technique and theatre studies. Joining the Ghana Dance Ensemble after successful completion was the reward if the candidates pulled through. Nketia and Opoku selected a total of thirteen young men and women to train for the state's ensemble after the auditions were conducted for those who responded to the advertisement.

The troupe's members, as part of their training, were required to travel to various ethnic regions throughout the country to learn dances and drumming in a traditional court setting. Going to the source was very necessary because it is commonly inferred that dances from their places of origin are authentic. As if to say that dances performed in their places of origin today have been performed the exact way since their conception. Attention is not given to the ever-changing leadership structures in performance groups or troupes, who, in performing their duties, consciously or unconsciously, add a touch of their personality as a form of signatory to what they

oversee. The students, who were being groomed for the Ghana Dance Ensemble, thus went to the towns bearing in mind that they were learning the undiluted forms of the dancing and drumming of the people. Mawere Opoku who was the first artistic director, after the students came back from their exploration, re-choreographed the dances to suit the stage.

The students began performing as the nation's dance company in Ghana within their two-year training programme with the School of Music and Drama, which was attached to the Institute of African Studies. Nkrumah, appreciating the new cultural development and seeing its importance in politics, invited the troupe to perform for official parties, political rallies, and diplomatic engagements. "The most sensible thing that happened was when politicians saw the power of dance," recounted Professor Opoku. The first students who had enrolled finished their certificate course in October 1964. The National Dance Company of Ghana was officially formed and given the name Ghana Dance Ensemble.

The Ghana Dance Ensemble in 1966 had become famous with its newly graduated members, who had the title "ambassadors of culture." The troupe, as part of their training, had established a repertoire of multi-ethnic traditional dances that was founded on the practical research they had conducted in their native towns.

> Opoku's reason for choreographing the researched dances was to put them in the context of the proscenium stage. He was later appointed the artistic director of the company (Fabien, 1996).

The well-established Ghana Dance Ensemble began to tour countries with their repertory of multi-ethnic dances, staging and showcasing Ghana in Europe as well as in Moscow, Leningrad, and at the 1968 Olympic Games. Dance was used as a political tool to reinforce the identity of the Ghanaian and Nkrumah's concept of African personality consciousness (Schauert, 2015). The state troupe was moved from the School of Music and Drama to be directly under the Institute of African Studies (Coe, 2005, pp. 64–65), until it broke away from the University of Ghana to its current home inside the building of the National Theatre of Ghana, Accra, as the National Dance Company of Ghana.

Over the years, the troupe has functioned as a state-owned dance troupe under the Ministry of Culture and Education, which is now the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and Creative Arts. It is still being used to stage or showcase Ghana at home and in the international arena.

Schauert (2007) argued that by employing experts from several ethnic groups within Ghana to teach and perform a glut of dances, the Ghana Dance Ensemble's directors attempted to display the diversity of the nation. Hence, rather than using the political and demographically dominant culture of the Akan to represent the nation as one might expect, given that it is a common practice in national dance companies like the Umoja Dance Company of South Africa (Shay, 2002), the directors sought to focus on the "whole" in compliance with the directives and vision of Kwame Nkrumah. The troupe, in its glorious years and up until now, has attempted to give equal weight to the various ethnic groups within Ghana.

The culture of the National Dance Company has, over the years, evolved. Our interaction with the National Dance Company during 2013 and 2014 gave insights into their repertoire involving other creative artworks such as *Solma* and *Palinke*. These dance pieces, with their percussions and songs, were not indigenous to Ghana. The culture of performance in the National Dance Company has thus, over the years, taken a more contemporary approach to stage Ghana with dance pieces like *Bukom* and *Asipim,* which were choreographed by the late Professor Nii Yartey.

During the study, we also realised that the state ensemble's clientele was not limited to only the state institutions. Individuals were free to book the National Dance Company for their private events. Management positions also included the artistic director, the technical director, the costume officer, the technician, and the master drummer.

3.2 Centers for National Culture

The Centres for National Culture are regional establishments, in line with the Cultural Policy of Ghana, to be operated as a tool for the National Commission on Culture in the administrative functions of the nation. The National Commission on Culture (NCC) is an institution established in 1990 by PNDC Law 238. The constitution of Ghana identifies culture as a tool for national development. The cultural policy was endorsed to give dictates on the aims set by the nation, particularly on how cultural undertakings must be dispensed in Ghana.

Directly, the policy sets out to enhance the cultural life of Ghanaians by backing the nation's human development and material advancement. This is done through preservation, conservation, promotion of heritage in Ghana, and the use of modern traditional arts and crafts to generate ideas that create wealth (The Cultural Policy of Ghana, 2004).

The Cultural Policy of Ghana (2004, p. 21) pronounces that "the state shall support efforts of relevant institutions, associations, and individuals to undertake research, documentation, development, and promotion of traditional and contemporary dance forms." The policy, from this standpoint, demands the state "ensure the growth and development of cultural institutions as a means of making them relevant to human development, democratic governance, and national integration."

Institutions like the National Dance Company of Ghana, the Abibigromma Theatre Company (National Theatre) and all Centres for National Culture (CNC), in respect of this pronouncement, owe it a responsibility to Ghanaians to not just entertain but to educate and inform them through their best artistic creations that border on various fields of study, including politics.

The CNCs are the main agencies authorised to coordinate with all NGOs, traditional councils in the various regions, the Ghana Education Service, individuals, and any other clubs, associations, and stakeholders to work towards implementing the cultural policy. The idea was also for the administrative wing of the centres at the district levels to work closely with the assemblies in carrying out culture-related programs. The aspect of education also played a key role in the establishment of the CNCs to involve themselves in educational and academic programmes rolled out by the assemblies or the Ministry of Education.

The CNCs in Ghana are currently under the National Commission on Culture, which is one of the Departments of the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture. Originally, the CNCs were established in the former 10 regions of Ghana. Popular amongst them is one of Sub-Saharan Africa's first cultural centres, the Centre for National Culture (*Dwabrem*) Kumasi, formerly known as the Kumasi Centre for National Culture, which was built in 1952. The Volta Regional Centre for National Culture also used to be the Arts Council of Ghana. It was established in 1958, shortly after Ghana gained independence. In 1961, Kwame Nkrumah started an Institute of Arts and Culture in Tamale. This institute's name was then changed to the Arts Council of Ghana in 1973, and it was again named the Centre for National Culture after the enactment of PNDC Law 238 of 1990. Some segments of the edifices when they were established included a museum, an art gallery, halls and changing rooms for performances and workshops, and conference rooms for public lectures and other events. In the case of the CNC Kumasi and Accra, there is an open-air courtyard where performances are also staged. The Cape Coast Centre for National Culture was also set up to champion various artistic disciplines in the visual, literary, and performing arts through outreach programmes, seminars, workshops, and research with relevant stakeholders.

The aims and objectives of the CNCs in Ghana include giving traditional cultural experiences to the greatest possible number of people; bringing people into direct contact with their cultural heritage as well as with contemporary cultural expression, especially in the arts; and bringing artists together for collaborations to share, create, and re-enact indigenous art forms in the spirit of preservation. As state-owned ensembles and as professionals, the scheme of service (2011) allows the CNCs to employ dancers and drummers. The document spells out the responsibilities of such employees under the "Cultural Assistant Grade 3—Grade 1" provision.

Today Ghana boasts 16 CNCs across the nation with several district offices under the regional directorates of the Centres that oversee their activities. This is as a result of the 6 new regions created by the government after a referendum held on 27 December 2018. The district offices under the regional directorates are tasked with the mandate to promote peculiar district cultural programs, tourist sites and art forms, to be fed into the national agenda for further international promotion and projection by the state's Ministry in charge of Tourism, Arts and Culture. The aim here is for the state to continue the nationalization of new traditional music and dances emerging in our current era, and keep track of dances that used to be, to serve touristic and other cultural sustainability purposes.

4. Towards the Establishment of Privatized Dance Troupes in Ghana: Challenges of the Ghana Dance Ensemble in Perspective

Since its establishment, the Ghana Dance Ensemble (GDE), under the School of Music, Dance, and Drama, has flourished and carried out its duties in promoting Ghanaian indigenous dances, aiding the institute in research and staging Ghana both nationally and internationally. The role of the GDE as the professional national dance

company of Ghana (now the NDC) was widely recognised until 1994. Mr. Mohammed Ben Abdallah, who had risen to become the Minister of Education and Culture, tried to get the ensemble to leave its home, which was the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana. The troupe was to move to the newly built National Theatre, which had replaced the drama studio Efua T. Sutherland had built. The politics that had played out during the movement of the drama studio from its original place (the grounds of the National Theatre currently) to the University of Ghana unravelled again in a bid to move the GDE to the same edifice. The National Theatre building had already caused bitterness to set in between the government and some seasoned theatre practitioners.

Professor M. Opoku, in an interview with Fabien, made bitter remarks about Mr. Abdallah, stating that Mr. Abdallah only wanted "to draw the spotlight onto himself and his country's dance" (Fabien, 1996, p. 16). Opoku and Nketia firmly objected to the relocation of the ensemble because, to them, it defeated one of the main objectives of the troupe, which was for it to be linked to research and therefore to an academic institution.

Better financial terms and other settlement packages were put forward in a bid to entice the members of the then-state troupe (GDE and Abibigromma) to agree to move to the newly built National Theatre, which was seen as a state symbol and a home befitting professionals of their calibre. Opoku and Nketia had become very bitter at the move made by Abdallah and the late Professor Nii Yartey. Fabien cites Opoku's clear words, "You don't sell things you believe in that cheaply. Not when you're doing dance." (p. 16). Professor Francis Nii Yartey, who was the artistic director of the then-Ghana Dance Ensemble, is said to have agreed with Abdallah's proposal, helping Abdallah lure its members away.

Finally, the government, with Mr Abdallah as its face in cultural matters, decided to withdraw its support from the Ghana Dance Ensemble if the university insisted on not letting the new plan rollout. The choice was left to the members and their directors to make their decisions. With the new terms and conditions proposed, most of the members decided to leave the resident home of the ensemble with their director, Francis Nii Yartey.

Abdallah, being the mouthpiece of the government in the situation, managed to channel all government funding for the resident troupe to the National Theatre, crippling the troupe that decided to stay behind. The university intervened with loans they had taken to keep the resident troupe on their feet. Hardship had set up the resident troupe of the Ghana Dance Ensemble. This hardship forced some of its members to find other means of survival, which included seeking greener pastures abroad and privatising models of the Ghana Dance Ensemble to make ends meet.

> Carl (2011) highlights some of the issues in his publication, *The Representation and Performance of African Music in German Popular Culture* (pp. 14–18). He reveals that transnational relations set in the context of the arts became popular in the 1970s with artists from Ghana travelling to European countries with their "businesses" in dancing and drumming (p. 16).

The phenomenon of privately owned dance troupes, popularly referred to as amateur groups, had begun as modelled forms of the Ghana Dance Ensemble. Troupes like the *Ehimomo,* which belonged to Mustapha Tettey Addy and his nephew Aja Addy in Kokrobite, were formed. Carl makes mention of other entrepreneurs who gave drumming and dancing classes and other tour packages, like Emmanuel Gomado, owner of the *Odehe* Cultural Centre along the coast of Teshie, a suburb of Accra. Other cultural centres include the *Kasapa* Cultural Centre, west of Kokrobite, and the *Akuma Village,* located in the central part of Accra, with dance troupes attached to them (p. 17).

In Turkey, dance genres differed from town to town before the introduction of dance troupes. Dances were typically performed within their ethnic confines without being exposed to each other. Under the "People's Houses," a network of local associations in Turkey that supported cultural research by the people themselves was formed. Efforts were made to put the dances of the proximate towns together. The whole idea was to be able to form a local dance troupe with the capability to showcase the towns on a national platform (Öztürkmen, 2001, pp. 139–141).

The formation of dance troupes by the citizens was a great achievement. The dance troupes began to perform during national day celebrations and local festivals. Dance troupes from neighbouring towns visited each other, sharing in each other's cultures. They soon began to perform in other cities as well, especially in the 1940s. This characterised a very important shift in ethnic performances in Turkey. Shortly after, folk dance festivals and folk dance competitions sprang up strongly, helping to shape the narrative of what the "Turkish national dance" continuum was all about.

In Ghana, even though the Cultural Policy of Ghana (2004) encourages the formation of private dance troupes, these dance troupes are not mandated by law, except in cases of countries like Tanzania (Askew, 2002, pp. 184–195), to tie their aims and objectives into the politics of the state by force. This is because they are run as private businesses and so cannot be cajoled into doing the will of the state. Again, the state does not directly sponsor privately owned dance troupes in Ghana, and there is no dance industry where the grievances of traditional dancers are channeled. This has made it difficult to regulate the activities of private dance troupes regarding how they engage with the indigenous dances that they commodify. In a latent way, we can argue that for the state, this plays right into their plan since these business entities end up towing the line of ideologies that favour the nationalistic agenda.

On the part of the traditional communities where the dances they perform, emanate, it is clear that some tension has been present since they became popular (Otoo, 2020). There have been accusations from the cultural bearers that the private dance troupes lack originality and respect for their arts and culture which serves as the bedrock of their identity. Unclear distinctions in movement, musical patterns, and costuming by dance troupes in performances like *Kete* and *Adowa*, *Kpanlogo* and *Gome*, *Damba*, and *Takai,* amongst others, are not taken lightly by traditional groups. They lament that the newly emerged private troupes, because of their lack of regulation, only focus on the commodification of dances rather than the ethics of performance practices that accompany them.

There were times when as trained performers from academic institutions, we came face-to-face with members of other ethnic communities who reprimanded us, as they do other dance troupes, for underrepresenting their culture. If only cultural gatekeepers acknowledge that culture does not just prioritize the past, maybe such conversations can bring about more open dialogues on sustainability. The problem here is that the term 'culture' has become a contested and sensitive subject, bringing the lot to think of it as an all-encompassing tangible product that can be kept, or lost. For most people, culture keeps diminishing, and we need to save what is left of it. But it is also necessary to remember that the focus of dance troupes is not grounded in any particular ethnic group. Their model of performance is motivated by income. Issues of patriotism and their contribution to promoting Ghanaian identity are latent, however effective that may be (Otoo, 2020; Schauert, 2015).

In many instances in the field, it was clear that the dance troupes did not think of the indigenous societies as the standard. For them, the stage was different from the community arena. There was a separation of business-oriented and branded performances from performing purely for cultural pride and as a duty, as done in the communities where these dances have their roots. It was as if to say that, even though the state-owned ensembles performed for the state and as the communities would, it was still business in the end because money and other travel opportunities were at the heart of the goals and aspirations of the state performers (Schauert, 2015). Authenticity for them, went beyond patriotism. It involved "making new of the old";

the 'new' being whatever and however, they chose to dance, as against how the cultural bearers performed it. Yet they still believed that one of the aims of their practice was to promote authentic Ghanaian culture.

In *Uses of Folklore as Expressions of Identity*, Linda Dégh posits that making rigid peculiarities between folklore and fake lore is not beneficial in actual practice (1984 p. 188). Just like in Tanzania and Hungary, there is a need to reflect on what Ghanaian traditions today are and what showcasing Ghana means through the lenses of performers. There is also the need to know what their philosophical underpinnings are as far as their performances are concerned. While dance troupes are largely perceived to promote national culture and tourism (Anlimah, 2018; Boyer-Dry, 2008) there is a perception that has led many to believe that dance troupes have also done the most in distorting what the cultural or traditional dances are supposed to be (Ramírez, 1989, pp. 22–24; Cooley, 1999).

Ramirez (1989) discusses Williams Raymond's criticism of the perception of culture, agreeing with Williams that hegemony plays a huge role in how performance groups are perceived in their home country and then elsewhere. According to Williams, hegemony involves a complex practice where dominant groups force their values, beliefs, and interests upon the rest of society by creating, and controlling the various cultural institutions where members of society are socialised (1977, pp. 115–116). This practice provides grounds for the hegemonic order to pervade society such that it is perceived to be the correct way of doing things. However, in struggling for hegemony, the dominant and dominated groups appropriate each other's practices. In this instance, the hegemonic entities become the state and the private dance troupes who are seen internationally and at the forefront, as true representations of Ghanian cultural dances.

Ramirez posits that the complex hegemonic process works in many ways that encourage the notion that indigenous cultural values are not compatible with a progressive modern society (p. 16). This may entrench the

stereotypes of indigenous cultures being backward and, as such, justify the need for "new generation dance troupes" with the state as a full beneficiary of their engagements. Thus, once a performer is a citizen of Ghana, they cannot be accused of cultural appropriation or misrepresentation because as Ghanaians, we are allowed to identify with all dances as ours. The nationalistic frame allows an escape route for non-meticulous performers and non-conforming artists, to easily use any dance for any nationalistic project without consequences. Thus, there must be some decency and respect in politicizing aspects of cultures for state agendas because behind those dances are histories and identities that need sustenance.

The use of "sustenance" does not denote freezing culture or practising cultural gatekeeping. Sustainability, in our view, involves all the necessary additions and subtractions that are being made to any cultural form to keep its relevance in changing times. If adhered to, the tensions that exist between the ethnicities where the dances emanate from, and the dance troupes who have now become indirect agents of the state, pushing their nationalistic agenda will be geared towards some level of harmony. Today, the phenomenon of dance troupes has sprung up throughout Ghana. It has taken a huge step in not just the evolution and sustenance of traditional dances in Ghana, but also contributed significantly to nationalistic narratives of ensuring that the imagined homogenous notion of "a Ghana" with one story and one people is entrenched in the minds and hearts of the citizens.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study demonstrated how states have usurped aspects of culture with the help of Christian mission societies and academic institutions for nationalistic purposes. The aim has been to blur the borders that existed very definitively among the ethnic groups. The historical account of state-owned ensembles in Ghana focused on how Ghana went about its cultural nationalistic phase until private entities came to be stakeholders, commoditizing the modelled versions of the state's apparatus. Finally, there was a discussion on the challenges that arose in the Ghana Dance Ensemble, leading to its fragmentation and subsequently the privatisation of the dance troupes in Cape Coast. This study emphasises the need for a nuanced understanding of cultural nationalism and its impact on traditional cultural practices, as well as the importance of community-led cultural preservation and promotion initiatives that prioritise cultural integrity and authenticity over nationalistic and commercial interests.

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