

# ***The bureaucratic making of national culture in North-Western Ghana***

KONSTANZE N'GUESSAN\*

*Department of Anthropology and African Studies, Johannes Gutenberg  
University Mainz, Forum Universitatis 6, 55099 Mainz, Germany*

Email: [nguessan@uni-mainz.de](mailto:nguessan@uni-mainz.de)

In this article I explore the making of national culture through bureaucratic routines in the Centre for National Culture in Wa, North-Western Ghana. I focus on an aspect of bureaucracy that is usually left aside: the productivity and creativity of bureaucratic routines. State, nation and culture are not fixed entities, but have to be constantly produced through processes of negotiation and meaning-making and through the continual reproduction of their boundaries and the categories that determine what is to be promoted or preserved. Bureaucratic routines and administrative processes are analysed as practices objectifying and nationalising culture and naturalising the boundaries and categories created through the cultural officers' practices.

‘THIS IS OUR CULTURE!’

On 18 October 2006 the conveners of the different subcommittees met in the conference room of the Centre for National Culture in Wa to prepare the National Festival of Arts and Culture (NAFAC), that was to be held in the Upper West Region of Ghana in November. The chair of the meeting was Regional Director for National Culture, Mark Dagbee. Vivid discussions emerged around the question of what conditions the invited cultural groups for the proposed durbar of chiefs<sup>1</sup> of the

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opening day should meet. Naa<sup>2</sup> L. M. Tungbani, Dagbee's vice, suggested not allowing any groups to dance in front of the president (who was expected for the opening of the festival) 'who will disgrace us by being barefooted'. 'But this is how they do it, this is our culture!' countered Dagbee. Some of the women present bemoaned that 'the Ashanti wouldn't allow their girls to be dancing barefooted'. Others again refuted this argument by demanding: 'You should not let this feminist thing enter the culture! You are breaking the culture!' (Field notes, 18 October 2006).

'This is our culture!' has become a criterion of sorts determining the choices state cultural institutions and festival organisers make in selecting the aspects of 'our culture' that are to be preserved, performed or promoted. The discussions in the committee meeting highlight the fault lines along which state cultural institutions legitimate their mission to preserve, promote or fight against certain cultural practices and traditions. Whether girls are to dance barefooted on national cultural festivals; if the straw works of a certain weaver are to be shown and sold at a cultural bazaar; which xylophonist from which village is to represent his district or his region at regional and national xylophone competitions; whether it is 'culture' or 'a barbarous tradition' to circumcise a girl – all these are examples of what is labelled 'our culture' by state cultural institutions. Stuck onto practices, objects, values and performances this label integrates them into the administrative apparatus of preserving and promoting. What actually is 'our culture' has to be constantly negotiated. By negotiation I mean both 'talking' and 'doing' – precisely: bureaucratic routines of simplification, objectification, categorisation and boundary-making which create and shape 'national culture'.

Ghana's cultural policy celebrates 'unity in diversity' – a theme that is plainly represented in the organisation of the above-mentioned NAFAC. According to this policy national culture consists of the colourful and harmonious interaction of different 'local cultures'. These local cultures are marked by cultural officers along Ghana's politico-administrative borders. National culture thus consists of what Ghana's ten regions provide, which again consists of what these regions' districts have to offer. State cultural institutions in Ghana are organised in that way. Each region has a so-called Centre for National Culture, headed by a regional director of culture who coordinates the work of the district cultural officers. The culture borders of the cultural officers do not match ethnic, religious or traditional<sup>3</sup> boundaries (for example those of chiefdoms or earth shrine areas) – and they collide with the latter's

ascribed natural legitimacy in all culture matters. When asked who the legitimate custodians of culture were, the majority of my Ghanaian interlocutors replied 'the chiefs' – even in areas where chieftaincy as a traditional political institution had been introduced by the British. The cultural officers lack the legitimacy as traditional custodians of culture and do not offer a service that is demanded by citizens (such as the police or teachers). They therefore have to base their authority on their grip on administrative procedures and the keeping of what Max Weber calls the 'office secret' ('*Amtsgeheimnis*') (Weber 1956: 129). This article explores how 'local culture', located in the village, becomes nationalised through the bureaucratic and administrative processes of state cultural institutions.

Following some theoretical reflections on 'culture', nation and the state, I will discuss the locating of culture in the village through the hierarchical organisation of state cultural institutions and the guiding principles underlying state cultural work. I then elaborate the work of the cultural officers at the district level and highlight how concepts such as 'rough culture', 'traditional culture' or 'cultural performance' are made through the cultural officers' practices. An analysis of practices of archiving and preservation will highlight how these contribute to the making of culture a substantive entity. The last section looks in detail at the making of standardised cultural categories through writing and administrative rituals.

#### THE NATION, CULTURE AND THE STATE

The concept of culture that underlies my argument regards culture not as a discrete, fixed entity, but as a constant process of meaning-making. It thus follows constructivist perspectives on culture and history which emphasise the competitiveness of the making of national culture through processes of selection, revision and invention. National culture is one of the central vehicles that marks the nation as a natural political and moral category and national identity as a natural feeling. State institutions as well as the bureaucratisation of authority are important factors naturalising the nation through culture. Löfgren (1989) and Handler (1985, 1987) argue that it is the 'content' of national culture that is debated, not the actual existence of a thing such as national culture. Nationalism 'proves' the existence of the nation via culture that can be exhibited to the nation's members and foreigners in museums (Handler 1987: 8). But not only the public display of national culture can be analysed in this manner – administrative patterning and the

bureaucratisation of culture contribute equally to the nationalisation of culture and the naturalisation of the nation.

What is integrated into the canon of national culture, national heritage and national history is determined by processes of selection, categorisation, standardisation and objectification (Handler 1988: 16; Löfgren 1989: 12). State cultural officers are central actors in this production of a 'correct, authorized and timeless version of folk life' (Löfgren 1989: 12). As interesting as the question of what actually is nationalised, is the question what is not: what is factored out, ignored, fought against or does not fit the patterns of objectification and standardisation. The question of what is part of 'our culture' and what is not partly hides discourses of belonging and discourses on modernity, development and globalisation. Discussions over the administration of cultural artefacts for example mirror local conflicts over political boundary-making processes in the districts. Ethnographic exhibitions (that are part and parcel of cultural festivals in Ghana) reflect how state cultural institutions handle representations of the past and cultural heritage. The discussions around so-called 'bad cultural practices' such as female circumcision or tribal marks are another popular example of these processes of culture making, as they highlight both the role of local administrative and political practices and of global discourses on culture and development.<sup>4</sup>

Cati Coe convincingly argues in her study on state cultural work in schools, that the processes of selection transform culture into a condensed object of discourse, something one can participate in or withdraw from, something like 'drumming and dancing' (see Coe 2005: 53–4). According to Coe this condensation is best suited to the state's effort of making culture a vehicle of national identification. Interestingly, the cultural officers make use of the very same strategies of coping with this as the teachers do: they codify culture into facts taking the form of lists and definitions (see Coe 2005: 6).

Whilst the classrooms' conception of culture as 'drumming and dancing' as described by Coe differs from the cultural officers' definition of culture as 'the way of life of a people', both contribute in the end to the perception of culture as something substantive 'bounded, continuous, and precisely distinguishable from other analogous entities' (Handler 1988: 15). This abstraction of culture from daily ongoing social practice leads to the emergence of new experts on culture: such as cultural officers and teachers (see Coe 2005: 7). The cultural officers draw their legitimacy as culture experts from their professional knowledge on culture and tradition (e.g. as former dancers, musicians,

artists) and from their status as state officials. The civil servants, who are the power holders in a bureaucratic system, legitimise their power through their expert knowledge ('Fachwissen' in Weber's terms) but also through their inside knowledge ('Dienstwissen') of administrative procedures. Where the broad definition of culture as 'the way of life of a people' prevented them from presenting themselves as experts, they mobilised their administrative inside knowledge. Both expert knowledge and inside knowledge were activated by the cultural officers to make the preservation and promotion of (national) culture a manageable task – a process that transformed culture into something substantive and by that nationalised culture in the first place.

#### THE LOCATION OF CULTURE

State cultural institutions in Ghana are hierarchically organised in a pyramidal structure. On top is the Ministry for Chieftaincy and Culture that took over the political and programming tasks from the National Commission on Culture (NCC). The latter continues to exist, but has sacrificed its policy-making status. In the words of the Minister of State for Chieftaincy and Culture Sampson K. Boafo, the NCC is subordinated to the Ministry as the Ministry's 'culture policy think tank'.<sup>5</sup> The implementation of projects and policies is done at the regional and district level. This corresponds with the self-perception of cultural officers in the Upper West Region, as indicated by the words of Regional Director Mark Dagbee who sees his centre at the crossroads between policy-making and implementation:

The regional cultural centres [are in] charge of the diversified cultural nature of each region ... [they] assist in formulating policy and recommending for implementation. ... We were part of the monitoring process and evaluation. We assisted further decentralisation to the districts which are on the ground. We formulate policies here, pass them on, and full implementation is done at the district. Then we do the evaluation together. We call the district officer, he presents his report. After that we advise ... what should have been done, that has not been done. Also at that evaluation stage we tell them what our next direction is and the way we expect them to implement the next policy. Then as they go back they do it. Then once in a while we move to the ground, like this weekend I'll be moving to the ground to Lawra.<sup>6</sup> I'll be there for two, three days to find out what is happening. Still, the officer will have to come and report in written or verbal. (Dagbee 2006 int.)

The Centre for National Culture in Wa is one of ten regional centres coordinating the administration of culture in the districts.

Approximately twenty-six people are employed. Among them only a few are employed as cultural officers; others do accounting, secretarial work and technical work. Eleven weavers and four smock<sup>7</sup> designers constitute the production section of the Centre for National Culture. Dagbee's explanations clearly show the degree to which state cultural work in Ghana is subject to bureaucratisation and administration. The self-perception as a coordinating institution and the 'moving to the ground' metaphor already imply the place where culture is usually located by cultural officers: the district level, and there especially the remote areas and the villages.

This has been acknowledged by other studies on Ghanaian culture politics. Carola Lentz's study on local cultural festivals in Upper West Ghana portrays the organisers of these festivals (local chiefs and youth associations) who regard the main goal of these festivals as one of bringing culture back to the educated migrants and young people who might forget about their culture or reject it as backward. The festivals are not addressing 'those in the villages [because they] are already living with the culture, unconsciously, so they are not the people we should be preaching to about culture' (Chairman of the Nandom Youth Association cited in Lentz 2001: 65). Katharina Schramm observed during her research on the Ghana Dance Ensemble that the Ensemble of Legon University, whose main goal is the preservation of traditional dances, regularly made field trips – thereby using the village as guarantor of their dances' authenticity (see Schramm 2000: 43). Culture is located in the village and the villager is marked as the 'unconscious' bearer of culture, who has to be given assistance in developing culture for the nation's needs. The latter becomes clear if one looks at how the district cultural officers describe their daily work as coordinating, organising, evaluating and mediating between culture in the village and state cultural work.

As district cultural officer you are the main contact man between the public, especially the village, and the regional director. You get close to them and work with them, give them your technical assistance ... the village people really appreciate your meeting them and contacting them to throw light on the cultural activities. (Na-Ile 2006 int.)

The quotation also highlights the self-perception of the district cultural officer as an expert who gives 'technical assistance'. This assistance can take the form of both concrete teaching of stage behaviour and the administration of certain cultural groups or cultural artefacts in the district officers' culture docket; the higher the position of the cultural officer, the more technical his work.

Most cultural officers distinguish between fieldwork and office work. The latter usually consists of meetings with the staff, the establishment and maintenance of lists of cultural artefacts or dance groups in the district and correspondence with superiors, subordinates, chiefs or local politicians and the culture producers in the field. The fieldwork refers to the work with the villagers. Superior officials frequently pay unannounced visits to the district offices and to the villages as a means of control. This indicates how space is appropriated by state officials and how this serves to maintain the organisational hierarchy (see Ferguson & Gupta 2002: 985). Higher officials have the means (e.g. all-terrain vehicles) to enter the space of their subordinates without having to ask for permission and make use of this privilege, while the district cultural officers come to the regional centre only when officially invited or summoned by the Regional Director for meetings, advice or feed-back. 'Culture does not walk into the offices' (as hinted by Mark Dagbee who lamented the laziness of the district cultural officers), but has to be searched for by cultural officers. It is the cultural officers who enter the space of the culture producers with their motorbikes and it is the cultural officers who first open interaction by paying a visit to a group of weavers in a certain village, by the appraisal of their products and eventually by their admittance into their docketts and the invitation to cultural festivals, ethnographic exhibitions or culture bazaars. Richard Na-Ile's formulation of 'throwing light' onto people's culture explains the cultural officer's self-perception as adventurous explorer (not that different from a classical ethnologist) who consequently has to deal with problems of field entry, acceptance and the trust of the 'natives'.

During the preparation of the NAFAC the district cultural officers were asked to meet in the Centre for National Culture in Wa to discuss in what way each of the districts was going to participate in the festivities. During such a meeting the following discussion between Regional Director, Mark Dagbee, and District Cultural Officer, Peter Dery, ensued after Dery's claim that there was no 'traditional herbal medicine' in his district.

Dagbee: Are you saying there is no herbal medicine in Wa West? Are you saying your people are so civilised to go to see the hospital with every sickness? You have not seen them because you sit in your office! I will lock up your office so that you have to go to the grounds!

Dery: My people[s] there are complicated – especially the Lobi – they won't come out.

Dagbee: You have to build trust with them. If you come there on your motorbike telling them you want to have their xylophone for exhibition

they will believe you are on a spy mission. You have to go and interact with them.

Dery: But they are still stubborn. As for the xylophone they won't sell it, they only change it for cows! (Meeting of the district cultural officers in Wa, 20 October 2006)

What is striking in Dery's diction is the use of both expressions of inclusion and exclusion. It is '*my* people', but '*they* won't come out [...] *they* are stubborn [...] *they* won't sell it, *they* only change it for cows'. The district cultural officers regularly rotate from district to district within the region. The rotation system results in the perception of the cultural officers as 'foreigners' in their area of responsibility. Before they can fulfil their culture-preserving mission, they have to gain the trust of the local culture-producing population which is characterised as backward and 'stubborn'. Dery's problems with the 'Lobi' can be explained by popular ethnic stereotypes of the 'primitive Lobi', dating back to the time of colonialism.<sup>8</sup> Dery uses the term 'Lobi' to explain and excuse his failure: he is not to blame, but the stubborn 'Lobi' who refuse his well-meaning assistance. As other district cultural officers also complained of their people's misbehaviour and mistrust, there is always a 'Lobi' (which can be seen as a label or tag which is stuck onto the Other) in any part of Ghana.

An aspect of the cultural officer's daily work at the field level that is connected with the location of culture in the most remote areas is the differentiation of 'indigenous' and 'settlers' or 'strangers'. In the selection the cultural officers made, the boundaries of their administrative area of responsibility collided with 'ethnic boundaries' and with the boundaries of the paramountcies of the chiefs.<sup>9</sup> Still, in their daily work the cultural officers did not question these boundaries and thus focused on their districts' 'indigenous' or 'first-comers', while all others, who were believed to have migrated from elsewhere, had to be represented by their district of origin: 'I have to first get in touch with the indigenous ones . . . You know if you leave them behind, they will say you are playing politics, so because they are my people I only show their culture' (Na-Ile 2006 int.).

The district cultural officer from Wa Municipal, Richard Na-Ile, a Dagao from Lawra, responded with these words to Dagbee's objection to his promotion of a *bawaa* group for NAFAC. As the *bawaa* is considered as typical for the Dagara, originating from the Lawra and Nandom area and settling in the villages around Wa, Na-Ile's choice confronted him with accusations of playing the tribal card and favouring his own people. To avoid such criticism the cultural officers were urged to 'first get in



touch with the indigenous ones'. However this is slippery ground as the classification of 'indigenous' or 'settlers' is highly contested and often activated politically. Above all the distinction of 'indigenous' and 'settlers' results in the exclusion of the itinerant Fulani from the cultural officers' culture preservation and promotion programme, as they cannot be assigned to any district as 'indigenous'.<sup>10</sup> Thus their culture is not represented as part of national culture during cultural festivals such as NAFAC or other state-organised culture displays. No cultural officer declared the preservation and promotion of Fulani culture his objective. Whilst Dagara settlers are perceived as 'strangers', Fulani are considered 'aliens' (see Tonah 2002: 7) – this might legitimate why their culture is not part of national culture, but the actual exclusion resulted from the administrative practices and routines of the cultural officers.

#### THE CULTURAL OFFICER AS CHOREOGRAPHER

There is another interesting remark that can be distilled out of the conversation between Dagbee and Dery. Whilst they locate culture 'on the grounds' in the most remote villages and amongst the most remote people, unpolluted by the impact of civilisation and globalisation, they also make clear that this culture cannot stand for itself, but needs the shaping and choreographing of an expert: the cultural officer. The xylophone itself is nothing but 'rough culture'. To become a piece of national culture, it has to be first discovered by a cultural officer, classified, described and presented in an accepted format of culture-presentation, such as an exhibition or a cultural festival. 'We want ... to fine-finish them, we don't want the rough ones', explained Naa L. M. Tungbani, Deputy Director of the Centre for National Culture in Wa with respect to the work of the cultural officers in the field: 'You are not there to load things over him, you are there to help him, to fine-tune ... so that he can ... develop himself' (Tungbani 2006 int.). This assistance distinguishes 'the local way of doing it' from a cultural performance, as shown during the NAFAC: 'If they are dancing in a circle like that without any choreography ... that is the local way of doing it ... something like a mock dance. So we have to give them the technical assistance and advice' (Na-Ile 2006 int.).

The cultural officers thus create (through words and through actions) a dichotomy between local and choreographed that legitimates their intervention as culture experts to shape 'rough culture' in a way that it

becomes a marketable culture product suiting the national standard of cultural artefacts or expression.

We don't come to teach them their own dance. We go to see their dances and try to shape them up, like you have to choreograph them, the stage-movement, space and all sorts of things ... so that maybe if it's in a circle form, you know how to choreograph them so that the public will see them very well. (Na-Ile 2006 int.)

As a result it is those groups that implement the cultural officer's guidance that get access to state funds for culture promotion and that win state-organised competitions. The culture, searched for and found by cultural officers in the villages, is created in a certain way by the officers' own choreographing practices. Rarely did cultural performances or artefacts violate those unwritten standards of national culture. There was only one performance during the NAFAC that caused heated debates and controversy: the Sisala hunters' *bayela* performance that was announced by the master of ceremonies as 'ritual', usually kept secret from public viewing. It featured a group of traditional Sisala hunters that killed a dog (skilfully addressing the camera of Ghana Television) and bit pieces of raw meat off its neck. Whether this was 'pure culture' or simply 'barbaric' and not suitable to promote the beauty of Ghanaian culture was subject to a great deal of discussion. In a way the *bayela* performance represented the effort of Upper West to represent itself not as the most marginalised and backward region of the country, but to turn this perception upside down by emphasising the authenticity and pureness of the region's cultural products, as compared with more developed regions in the country with better cultural and touristic infrastructure.<sup>11</sup> Mark Dagbee had urged his district officers to concentrate on spectacular and different modes of cultural display: 'We are far beyond what you people see as cultural display, where you just go to some village and ask some people to dance'. As an example he brought up a 'juju man' from Volta Region at the NAFAC 2002 in Sekondi Takoradi 'who boiled stones and served us with yam'. He pushed his officers to find something similarly unseen and new, because 'if we don't do it, then Volta Region will surely come and do it. As for them, they are not ashamed'. Nonetheless the controversies around the Sisala hunters made cultural officer Balloh, who had promoted and supervised their performance, wonder whether 'for future I will see how I can stop them from eating raw animals ... because many people were saying it is too barbaric ... so I can see how I can modify it ...' (Balloh 2006 int.).

The Ghanaian cultural policy demands the presentation of the nation's culture during events like the NAFAC, but the format of a 'cultural festival' at the same time restricts the modes of presentation and the criteria for what is part of the national culture canon. In this respect the choreographing of dances, the aestheticisation of rituals like the *bayela* performance and their transformation as 'cultural performance' in the first place makes it possible to showcase certain elements of culture and tradition in the cultural festival setting. The possibility of cultural marketing is tightly interwoven with the illusion of 'the traditional one' in the village. Only the ambivalent village concept, at the same time backward and pristine and idyllic, makes the orchestration of national culture labelled authentic possible. In a way the cultural officers not only produce a shaped and polished version of culture, but also produce its counterpart: 'the traditional one' which serves as the object of the culture preservation programmes of state cultural institutions.

#### THE CULTURAL OFFICER AS MASTER OF RECORDS

Many cultural officers described their daily work as consisting of the production of lists and records, meeting minutes, quarterly action plans and reports, evaluation reports of past programmes and other kind of written material. The concentration on text production as a main field of activity for cultural officers can be interpreted as the exercise of control over the rough culture as located in the village. The same people that are experienced as 'stubborn Lobi' in concrete interaction are turned by the reports into authentic and unadulterated xylophone players who have to be preserved and promoted as asked for by the objectives of the cultural policy.

Each cultural group and each artefact is classified by the cultural officer in tables and records; their quality and special features, their taking part and winning prizes or eventual misbehaviour during performances or exhibitions and the contact dates of the producer or group leader. These records are part of the ideal of bureaucratic rationality based on the recording of administrative acts, decisions and rules in written documents (Weber 1956: 126). If a new officer is transferred to the district he can thus rely on a stable ensemble of trustworthy groups. But the records are also a means for the cultural officers to demonstrate superiority. The cultural groups do not know the kind of information the officer keeps in his records. The following sequence might give an impression of the kind of information that is

noted down by the cultural officers during such events. It is taken from an evaluation report on the participation of Sisala district at the NAFAC 1989 in Bolgatanga:

The Ping bine/bawaa group was called upon to perform. However much could not be felt in their performance, as a result of people in non-uniformed costumes intruding to participate in anxiety. A good example was when one intruder was entangled flat to the ground by his own pantalon, with his hat flying over head, this of course changed the mood of the crowd admixed with laughter. I realised that most of the camera lenses were [on] him until their turn of performance came to a stop.

The report of the group's failure is commented with a handwritten remark, that the responsible district cultural officer was to talk to the group leader to prevent embarrassing incidents like this in future. As opposed to the Ping *bine/bawaa* group the Sakai Gogoyilla Cultural Group was lauded by the cultural officer in the very same report and the success of this group was immediately made an incident of pride for the whole region. This explains why a group's misbehaviour or the ignorance of the cultural officer's cultural competence leads to conflicts and bad sentiments. 'Because we know all the groups, so it should be the cultural officer to promote them and to send them to the programmes', bewailed Anastasia Dakura of the attitude of the organisers of 'farmers day' who had booked one of the districts' cultural groups without informing her or her office.

They should have respected my office to know that this office is dealing with the cultural groups not that because they know them they can just go and ask them themselves. ... Those things should not happen again. ... because ... some of them ... they misbehave. Others who do not know will come and say that they saw this group behaving in this way in this place; meanwhile we didn't know that they went there. ... It is us who guide them to be disciplined ... how to act, how to behave, how to be fast ... And we collect the information in the files, so the next time I'm asked to send a group I'll not take that group. (Dakura 2006 int.)

Cultural officers not only teach their groups the proper way of dancing as 'ambassadors' of Ghanaian national culture, but they are also responsible for their groups' blameless moral behaviour. 'If they misbehave the people will be looking at them ... when you are sent to some place you are there to represent the district so you have to behave ... so we talk to them, we guide them ... we groom them' (Dakura 2006 int.). This discourse of misbehaviour goes along with the cultural officers' self-perception as moral guides and teachers. Because cultural officers tend to rotate a lot, it is not their personal experience that

assures their competence, but the records they keep. Just like a certificate of good conduct or personnel file misbehaviour, failure but also success is administratively kept for eternity.

Through the keeping of records, through the cultural officers' acting as responsible teachers and experts the culture that is administered is allocated to the boundaries of the cultural institutions. A dancing group that is accepted in the cultural officer's docket automatically becomes an example of this district's culture. The administrative demarcation of culture and the cultural officers' bureaucratic practices are thus tightly interwoven. Politico-administrative boundaries are equated with cultural boundaries that are hoped to bring about definite local identities; in other words: the politico-administrative boundaries are naturalised through bureaucratic practices, be it the correspondence between regional and district offices or the record-keeping of the district cultural officers concerning the cultural specificity of the district. Although it is unlikely that these boundaries are internalised by the local population, the epistemic power of bureaucratic routines and state-orchestrated representations may exert innovative power and indeed change ideas about culture (see Lentz 2001: 69).

#### THE MAKING OF CULTURE THROUGH PRACTICES OF PRESERVATION AND ARCHIVING

The district cultural officers act as mediators on two levels: between the raw and authentic culture and its choreographed version and between the village and the cultural centres as culture archives. The need for this preservation work is explained by cultural officers in popular tropes of globalisation and westernisation. Ghanaian culture, and accordingly the Ghanaian nation itself, is believed to be threatened by dissemination and dilution brought about by foreign cultural influences. Ghana's cultural policy creates a causal linkage between national culture and the nation itself, by designating as urgent and serious the task of cultural officers preventing 'the mindless sweeping away of our cultural heritage, a situation which can only result in social instability and cultural disorientation' (NCC 2004: 12). The discourse of preserving culture is affected by images of pollution, adulteration, dissemination and dilution of a formerly pure and unsoiled culture. If the authenticity and uniqueness of the national culture is threatened, the nation itself is in danger (see Handler 1987: 7). State cultural institutions in Ghana were consequently initiated mostly during the time of nation-building after independence (see UNESCO 1975: 9).<sup>12</sup> The NCC and the

regional Centres for National Culture regard the preservation of culture as one of their main objectives. The Centre for National Culture in Wa does that through the documentation of cultural activities in the region and through the revival of traditional craftsmanship in the centre's culture workshops.

Among the 'field' activities of the Centre for National Culture during my stay was the documentation of cultural events, such as the 'outdooing'<sup>13</sup> of the Ombo Naa. The presence of cultural officers and the video recording of the activities at these events were seen as indicators of the latter's cultural importance, as Director Marc Dagbee put it: 'The way I went there, they all knew I was there. They saw the documentation ... so they knew it was something worth preserving. The people will know that it is important.' The documentation is part of the effort of building a cultural archive, 'to make sure that we should keep the original, so people who get confused about it can come back'. 'We are serving as a cultural library', explained Dagbee. This is regarded as necessary, because culture is subject to change, making it important that an 'original' be preserved for future generations.

The documentation and preservation activities make use of different media. Cultural events such as the Ombo Naa's outdooing were documented with video-cameras and photographs and later stored in the centre's media archive, in case one day the chiefs of Upper West forget how to perform an outdooing and want to use the video material as a source of authenticity, able to preserve 'how they did it in the olden days'.<sup>14</sup> The camera thus serves as a positivistic medium.

Before the registrar can store a videotape in his archive many choices have already been made that influence the actual content of the tape and hence the image of culture preserved. First of all the cultural officer has to decide whether an event is of interest and is worth being preserved; second, he has to be invited to come and receive recording permission (something that is not that self-evident); and third, the camera itself mediates what is preserved and what is not. The cameraman divides the ceremony into scenes, selects some of them as important and part of the ritual and decides for a perspective (e.g. long shot or close-up). This process was subject to intense discussions between Dagbee and the cameraman during the recording of the Ombo Naa's outdooing. Dagbee accused the cameraman of not knowing what was important and of preserving the wrong aspects of culture, those that were purely 'merry-making' or not authentic. The selection of scenes and the cutting of the material, the sorting and

labelling in the centre's archive objectify culture through the technology of the medium and the archiving process.

#### THE BUREAUCRATIC MAKING OF CULTURAL CATEGORIES

The precise means by which state cultural institutions preserve, develop and perform culture are themselves an impetus to transformation. This becomes quite evident when one considers the methods by which culture is administered – lists, tables, graphics and reports. These transform cultural knowledge, since there are aspects of this knowledge which simply cannot fit into the format of a graphic or a table, and so are left unrecorded. In the docketts of the Centre for National Culture there are numerous documents that are aimed at preserving information regarding cultural activities in the region in form of lists, tables and graphics, such as the forms for 'safeguarding of Ghana's intangible cultural heritage project – identification of pilot sites/artefacts/cultural practices worthy of protection'.<sup>15</sup>

These docketts in a way legitimise the cultural officer's culture-preserving mission. Standardised projects bearing nationalistic titles such as 'Safeguarding Ghana's Intangible Cultural Heritage Project' help the cultural officers to ask local politicians and traditional authorities for their support as it turns everyone declining assistance into someone refusing to do their bit in saving Ghana's endangered cultural heritage. Blank forms for the 'Safeguarding Ghana's Intangible Heritage Project' that have been designed by the NCC were distributed to the ten regional centres to be completed. The Centre for National Culture Wa has forwarded the forms to its district offices. The forms were filled partly by hand and partly by typewriter by the district cultural officer of Nadowli district. The different typefaces make it easy to distinguish form and filling. The categories had been proposed in an annexed letter by the NCC – a proposal the district cultural officer Nadowli realised by putting the categories in bold letters and inserting a colon to convey the organisational thread of the document. Working off the given categories the cultural officer presents three examples for 'cultural heritage sites' in his districts. Every example features every category – even if entries double or if the entry as with the category 'research' always reads 'not yet made'. Formatting and bullets make the Kukure Pond, the Ombo Wira and the Kala Shrine examples of the subset of 'cultural heritage sites' in Nadowli district. They all feature the same standardised characteristics. In addition the district cultural officer has to fill forms for 'festivals' and 'artefacts' which equally covered

exactly three examples. Three examples fill the space of the sheet – the sheet size thus determines the content. If there are more than three examples of cultural heritage sites in his district the cultural officer has to decide which three are most worthy of protection, most endangered or most worthy of promotion.<sup>16</sup> If there are fewer than three he possibly has to acquiesce to reproaches by his seniors for not having found the most endangered objects, as they might be hidden in remote villages. During a meeting with district cultural officer for Nadowli, John Mark Zieme, on 22 July 1997 the then Regional Director of Culture, Charles Dikpe called upon Zieme ‘to wake up and revive more festivals since the region has only a small number of festivals which he knows should be more than that’. He appealed to all cultural officers present ‘to go back to their various destinations and dig out into details the hidden festivals that were left behind by our great grandfathers’ (minutes of meeting in Nadowli District Correspondence File).

The categories thus produce standardised characteristics. A local cultural festival, that wants to be admitted to the national festival calendar (and thus be granted state sponsorship and promotion) has to fulfil an economic purpose, has to date back to pre-colonial times and has to be assigned to a clearly definable group of people, preferably matching with the boundaries of a chiefdom.<sup>17</sup>

The documents nevertheless are not to be mistaken as examples of a rampant bureaucracy and maladministration. Instead they point to a productive and creative aspect of bureaucratic practices, such as standardisations and objectifications. The cultural officer is not the helpless victim of a bureaucratic apparatus, but he purposefully uses bureaucratic procedures to transform the ‘untidy’ and chaotic local culture into a part of national culture. The cultural officer’s blanks thus give new meaning through documentation. Intangible culture is being made tangible through bureaucracy.

Let us take the example of the Kukure pond in Kaleo to grasp the issue of objectification. A document dating from 12 November 2002 identifies Kukure pond as a ‘pilot site’ deserving state promotion. It portrays the crocodiles living in that pond as a civilised tourist attraction ‘which are pacified by the authorities and comes [sic] out every Fridays when purifications are made’. The authorities, in this case the *tendanas* (earth-priests) of Kaleo, have ‘pacified’ the dangerous animals so that they are not going to harm potential tourists. That makes Kukure Pond economically viable not only as water reservoir but also as a potential tourist attraction. An earlier document presents the issue in a quite different way. In a letter dating from 16 April 2002



district cultural officer Nadowli, John Mark Ziema, proposed to Regional Director Mark Dagbee three tourist sites: the Palantine Ant Hill in Nanvili, Ombo Wira in Ombo and the Kukure Pond in Kaleo. The latter however still needs some polishing as it can serve as a tourist attraction only 'when we are able to calm crocodiles in the pond'.

The all-encompassing definition of culture that frames state cultural work and that includes not only arts and crafts, but even crocodiles, causes a fragmentation of bureaucratic action and demands new experts for each and every niche. Handler states that 'holistic theories of culture have gone hand in hand with a never-ending fragmentation of the bureaucratic structures designed to promote culture' (Handler 1987: 8). Another result is the increasing importance of administrative routines for the daily work of cultural officers that is also reflected in the cultural officers' self-perception as writing experts. If bureaucracy, according to Weber, is the power of knowledge which draws its legitimacy from the expert knowledge ('*Fachwissen*') of the bureaucrats (1956: 129), then the cultural officers have a problem of legitimisation to the extent that they cannot present themselves as experts for the totality of culture (dance and music, theatre, crafts, history, religion, sociology, traditional rituals and authority, crocodiles and hippos). Consequently they have to draw their legitimacy from the other type of knowledge that Weber calls inside knowledge ('*Dienstwissen*') (1956: 129). Inside knowledge covers the knowledge about administrative procedures and the formalised handling of objects and clients. The above cited documents can thus be read as a strategy to cover the broad area of responsibility.<sup>18</sup>

Lipsky describes this as something that is not only typical for bureaucrats but a common way of coping with tasks (see 1980: 83). Bureaucrats develop routines to organise the complexity of their work. Lipsky differentiates between two types of routines:

At the organizational level bureaucracies officially recognize simplifying cues, such as eligibility requirements, in order to regularize decision processes. However, bureaucrats also develop their own patterns of simplification when the official categories prove inadequate for expeditious work processing, or if they significantly contradict their preferences. (Lipsky 1980: 83)

The documents of the 'Safeguarding Ghana's Intangible Heritage Project' are thus a combination of both: partly they belong to the bureaucratic way of proceeding and are connected with the 'projectification' of work; partly they are the cultural officers' individual coping strategies. Still, the cultural officers are not simply victims of

bureaucratic structures; they actively participate in and shape the processes of standardisation and creation of routines.

Categories of culture are not only created through practices of archiving but, as already indicated, through bureaucratic practices of writing. A main feature of bureaucratic rule is the documentation of communication. Notes, records, minutes, reports and letters which pass through the hands of clerks all create patterns of speech and action that have a great impact on the making of culture as something that is to be administered, preserved and promoted. Besides the writing process, other bureaucratic practices can also be analysed as productive and transformative practices. The committee sittings in preparation for the NAFAC for example can be analysed as administrative rituals. Goodsell defines explicit rites of administration as both part and parcel of rational bureaucratic actions and as being characterised by ritualistic features such as repetition, performativity, order-producing function, time-boundedness and periodicity (1989: 163–4). Administrative rituals framed staff meetings as well as the meetings of the diverse festival preparation committees: opening ceremonies such as prayers and address of welcome by the chair of the committee, the appointment of a keeper of minutes, the agreement on an agenda and the reading of minutes, the appointment of an anchorman, the proposition for closure of meeting and the seconding of that demand and finally the closing prayer. These meetings, like rituals, serve to maintain the organisational hierarchy. At the same time they also consolidate the culture categories after which they are organised. Besides organisational and technical committees such as the 'grounds subcommittee' (charged with the preparation of the durbar ground), the 'publicity subcommittee' or the 'security subcommittee', there were a number of committees that were charged with specific features of the culture of Upper West, such as the 'traditional herbal medicine subcommittee' and the 'xylophone subcommittee'. The latter was responsible for the organisation of the xylophone competition and was basically concerned with placing the xylophone, which was seen as 'the flagship of the festival', in as many programmes as possible. 'Xylophone cultures' in and outside Ghana were to be promoted, the trophy money for the winners of the competition was to be fixed and organised, the jury members were to be chosen and most importantly the participation conditions for the musicians and the criteria for the judges were to be fixed. One of the central preconditions for participation was that only groups from districts with an indigenous 'xylophone culture' were to be accepted. They had to be proposed by their district cultural officer who was thus

given the legitimacy to act as an expert in culture as well as the power to deny access to the competition. Whilst the competition claimed to represent the best of xylophone art of Ghana and its neighbouring countries, it confined at the same time, through bureaucratic practices, the actual outcome.

Culture is thus objectified through processes of classification and standardisation and through these it becomes a possible object of preservation, promotion or combat. The naming of typical features of a district's, region's or nation's culture can be traced back to administrative patterns of thought and practices. The cultural officers' jurisdiction along the lines of political administration helps to spatially locate both the state and local culture and to fix boundaries.

#### CONCLUSION

Bureaucracy is often misinterpreted as the restrictive, impersonal and uncreative reign of rules. It seems to be one of the phenomena that are actually only perceived in their monstrous excrescences, or in Herzfeld's words: 'if one could not grumble about "bureaucracy", bureaucracy itself could not ... exist' (1998: 3). My own interest in the administrative procedures in the Centre for National Culture grew from the impression during committee sittings in preparation of the NAFAC that what meant most to the cultural officers were frames and forms. After a while I realised that this was not due to the proverbial indifference of public servants, but that it fulfilled a purpose. The cultural officers' huge area of responsibility—following the definition of culture by the Ghana Cultural Policy as 'the way of life of a people'—made the cultural officers draw on bureaucratic routines in order to classify 'culture' in a manageable way. The cultural officers used bureaucratic routines to legitimate their culture preserving/promoting mission. An effect of this is, as I have shown in the present article, the actual making of culture. My paper has focused on an aspect of bureaucracy that is usually left aside: the productivity of bureaucratic routines. State, nation and culture are not fixed entities, but have to be constantly produced through processes of negotiation and meaning-making and through the continual reproduction of their boundaries and categories. 'This is our culture' emblematises the substantiation of culture that is necessary, if culture is to serve as a community-creating tool of nationalism. An ethnography of national culture therefore has to analyse those processes by which nation states create their national culture as a coherent unity (see Handler 1988). The bureaucratisation of culture

objectifies and nationalises culture through different processes and routines. As state cultural institutions in Ghana are organised along politico-administrative boundaries, culture is spatially localised and boundaries are naturalised and fixed. Each component of national culture has to have first been taken into account at the district and regional level. State cultural institutions thus create national culture, building on a principle of embeddedness. The relevance of those culture boundaries arises out of the constant reproduction and performance of these boundaries and categories through the cultural officers' routines. As the culture categories of the cultural officers are reproduced in project proposals, reports and cultural festivals they are indeed marked as natural. Some of the conflicts around the 'content' and the 'outlook' of culture, which have been highlighted in this paper, hint at competing imaginaries which continue to coexist—even if the former ones tend to become widely accepted simply because state resources and funds are distributed solely within the state's culture categories and boundaries.

## NOTES

1. The durbar of chiefs is a meeting of traditional authorities, who present themselves in their regalia to the people to demonstrate their power and demand loyalty. The durbar is a colonial invention of the British, who imported it from their Indian colony. In Ghana the durbar is a popular cultural performance, even in areas without a pre-colonial tradition of chieftaincy. Nowadays the durbar of chiefs is an integral part of almost all cultural festivals in Ghana (Lentz 2001: 48ff).

2. Naa is the chiefs' title among Dagara and Wala chiefs in Upper West Ghana. It can broadly be translated as 'rich, strong man' (see Lentz 2000: 146).

3. In the following I shall use the term 'traditional' with all its difficulties to refer to chiefs and *tendanas* as those who are associated with non-governmental authority in the communities of Upper West. I am aware of the discussions whether chieftaincy in Upper West Ghana is a pre-colonial (traditional) or a colonial (and therefore 'non-traditional') form of rulership. Nevertheless I will not discuss these matters in the following and will use the term 'traditional authorities' for chiefs and *tendanas* in Upper West likewise.

4. The UNESCO Report 'Our creative diversity' (1995) published a 'code of global ethics' that should enable all countries to distinguish between cultures with 'tolerant values' and those with 'repulsive' values (UNESCO 1995: 54). In Ghana this distinction is even fixed as a political principle in the 1992 Republic Constitution, Article 39, Paragraph 2: 'The State shall ensure that appropriate customary and cultural values are adapted and developed as an integral part of the growing needs of the society as a whole; and in particular that traditional practices which are injurious to the health and well-being of the person are abolished' (The Republic of Ghana 1992: 35–6). The differentiation between good culture and bad culture dates back to first colonial encounters in the Northern Territories and the British politics of 'progressive traditionalism', that intended to 'develop the native on lines which will not westernize him' as long as these traditions and cultures to be promoted were not 'repugnant' to civilised standards (Lentz 2006: 143).

5. The restructuring of the culture sector was still under way during the time of my fieldwork in 2006. During that time conflicts appeared out of the confusion as to who, in the words of Suuribatarihim Soyiri (board member of the NCC), was the 'captain' steering the culture ship in Ghana: the chairman of the NCC, Prof. George P. Hagan, who had been acting as some sort of minister up to the creation of a full ministry, or the newly enthroned Minister for

Chieftaincy and Culture, Sampson K. Boafo. This leads a bureaucratic organisation to serious problems because a central constituent of bureaucratic rule lacks clarity: who is super-imposed, who is to take control and who is to report? The conflicts between Hagan and Boafo point to the necessity to look at state cultural work in a historical perspective – something I have omitted in this paper for the sake of coherence. Future research should pay attention to the way in which state conceptions of culture have changed throughout time, paying tribute to external influences (such as socialism during the Nkrumah era and the promotion of culture through the young pioneer movement, or through international organisations such as UNESCO). See N'Guessan (2009: 13–23) for a short history of state cultural work in Ghana and details on the conflict between Hagan and Boafo.

6. This interview with Mark Dagbee was conducted just before the celebration of Kobine, a local cultural festival in Lawra. Kobine is celebrated in October and is linked to the agrarian cycle. It has been organised by the chiefs, the youth associations and cultural officers annually since the 1970s (see Lentz 2001: 49).

7. The smock is the traditional dress for North Ghanaian men. It is made from handwoven strips which are sewn together to make a loose-fit top.

8. Probably the 'primitiveness' of the Lobi dates back to Wala-descriptions of their acephalous, not Muslim neighbours. Within a short time these ethnic stereotypes were taken up by the British and reproduced by colonial practices of naming and migration related to plantation work and service in the army (see Lentz 2006: 85ff.). Some people formerly counted as Lobi even turned themselves into Dagarti when given the possibility, such as the case of the recruit 'who left Lorha [Lawra] in the spring of this year as Mora Lobi' and came 'back with his discharge certificate as Mora Dagarti' (Lentz 2006: 85).

9. In Upper West Ghana, where chiefdoms have to a large extent been created as a result of negotiations between colonial masters and educated power-seeking individuals, misunderstandings resulting from the translation services of Muslims and the politicisation of pre-colonial strong men, ethnic boundaries do not match with the boundaries of chiefs' paramountcies.

10. The Fulani are furthermore depicted as 'foreigners' or 'Burkinabé' by many Ghanaians. Yaa Oppong and Steve Tonah point out that this has not changed even if most Fulani in Ghana nowadays are not itinerant (see Oppong 2002: 4, Tonah 2002: 7, 22–3).

11. For an in-depth analysis of the NAFAC 2006 in Wa as an event demanding national integration and recognition see N'Guessan (2008).

12. Kwame Nkrumah, first president of the independent Republic of Ghana, is usually seen as the architect of state-made national culture (see Crinson 2001: 230ff.; Hess 2001: 63ff.). The Nkrumah government founded a number of state cultural institutions: the National Museum (1957), the Arts Council of Ghana (1958), the Research Library on African Affairs (1961), the Institute of African Studies at the University of Legon (1963) and the affiliated School of Performing Arts with the Ghana Dance Ensemble (1967) and the National Theatre Company.

13. The outdooring is usually a naming ceremony held for newborn babies. In this case it refers to a part of the enthronement of a new chief.

14. During my time in the Centre for National Culture nobody ever came to demand information material in form of videos or photographs to get to know about culture – a fact that became especially clear the day I asked to watch videos of past National Festivals of Arts and Culture and a technical officer was busy for half a day in finding the videos, organising a video player and making it work.

15. The 2003 UNESCO convention on the 'Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage' aimed – among other objectives – at the listing of most endangered elements in need of urgent safeguarding (see <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=EN&pg=home>). Even if there is no causal linkage between the UNESCO convention and state cultural work in Ghana the similarity of terms proves the global flow of ideas in the culture preserving mission of institutionalised culture work.

16. Theoretically he could have made copies of the blank and fill more than one – in practice none of the cultural officers whose documents I found in the file did.

17. There is also a political aspect to the making of culture through standardised categories. If there is a 'do-it yourself kit' (Löfgren 1989: 8) of what a nation or an ethnic group has to 'possess' in order to be treated as a proper group, then the existence of distinct 'festivals' or 'dances' or 'rituals' of this group is certainly part of it. These categories can therefore be used to 'objectify ... everyday life as "culture" ... and use it as a resource in negotiations with government and international agencies' (Wright 1998: 14).

18. Göpfert (2013) has shown how gendarmes in Niger use their ability to write 'beautiful' *procès-verbaux* as a means of differentiating themselves from the police and the military and as a way of coping with their daily work.

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