4. IS THERE A COMMON GHANAIAN CULTURE? EXPLORING THE HISTORICAL PROCESSES OF CULTURAL FUSION

4.1 Introduction

It is commonly assumed that cultural totalities exist as part of objective social reality. This assumption is exemplified in descriptive ethnonyms and phrases that are often employed, such as 'Nigerian culture,' 'Ghanaian culture,' or even 'African culture.'[1] This is not just an invention by scholars but also an assumption shared by both the elite and ordinary citizens. Such claims to a unified single national 'cultural identity' are invoked for important purposes such as the pursuit of national integration or the projection of a distinctive national identity to secure the loyalty of citizens.[2] Culture discourse has become an important way of expressing the uniqueness of one's identity as identity borne and shared with others bound together[3] by common historical, geographical and ethnic ties. In a world of intense competition that often requires plausible sources of justification and validation for effective negotiations in staking claims at the various levels of national and international encounters, this can be a treasured resource.

African nations have a rather pressing need imposed by several factors, including the colonial experience, to find creative ways to nurture and sustain a sense of collective cultural identity critical for the building and maintenance of a united country. At independence, a sharp awareness of this need led the early political leaders of the continent to engage in the construction of symbols and 'rituals' around ideological formulations. Such formulations assumed the existence of qualities or properties of essential 'Ghanaianness,' 'Nigerianness' or even 'Africanness,' on the basis of which political leaders and thinkers sought to recreate a new national and trans-national consciousness and loyalty. These were meant to supersede the previously differentiated ethnic-based identities and loyalties.[4] To be able to talk about a common Ghanaian culture is to establish legitimate grounds for stability and the holding together of Ghana as a nation-state. This concern is reflected in the conviction underlying the passage of PNDC Law 238 of 1990 which established the National Commission on Culture (NCC). This Law seeks to promote the evolution of an integrated 'National Culture' and create a 'distinct Ghanaian personality to be reflected in African and world affairs.'

4.2 Culture Areas

Constructing broad cultures or civilizations has not been just a project of political utility. The world of scholarship has also, sometimes, found the need to engage in such broad constructions as a framework for analysis. One of the best known but controversial examples is Huntington's delineation of broad 'civilizations' of the world that constitute fault lines that ought to be closely monitored with perpetual alertness, since the mildest tremor occurring around them could cause

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[1] W. K. Awedoba, *Culture and Development in Africa: With Special Reference to Ghana* (Legon: Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, 2002) 38.

[2] A. Adu Boahen, *Clio and Nation-Building in Africa* (Ghana Universities Press, 1975) 10.

[3] van Binsbergen, 'Cultures Do not Exist,' 39 – 42.

[4] David Apter, 'Political Religion in the New Nations,' Clifford Geertz, (ed.) *Old Societies and New States: The Quest for Modernity in Asia and Africa* (New York: Free Press, 1963) 80.

costly damage to international peace and security.[5] While Huntington's thesis has evoked much criticism,[6] probably due to its related doomsday predictions, the classification of the world or peoples into broad 'culture areas' or 'civilizations' has not been unknown in scholarship. With respect to Africa, Herskovits and Maquet have attempted to delineate different civilizations or culture areas. Herskovits, in 1962, identified different 'culture areas' that made it possible to 'see the similarities and differences between African cultures in continental perspective.'[7] His classification is principally geographical. On the other hand, ten years later in 1972, Maquet based his classification of 'civilizations' on historical factors.[8] However, both of them seem to have ignored the fluid and overlapping character of the blocs in their classifications.

Made up of small autonomous ethnic states forcibly put together as one country, with boundaries reflecting European economic and prestige interests rather than local interests, modern Ghana shares the anxieties of other former colonial African countries about integration and stability.[9] Such anxieties, produced by the tension caused by a multiple-layered sense of identity, with each layer demanding primary loyalty, lead to inner conflicts that often afflict the consciousness of citizens and pose tremendous challenges to the growing new nations. When such conflicts occasionally burst onto the surface of the supposedly political calm waters, they provide another pretext for invoking 'culture' as the basis of a sub-national identity with corresponding sub-cultures, claiming a basic ethnic uniqueness against all others. In this case, people, may talk, for example, about 'Akan culture,' 'Ga culture,' or 'Ewe culture;' or even as it has happened in recent times during elections, 'Muslim north' and 'Christian south.'[10]

Yet, since Ghana's political independence from the British, it has held together as one country. In spite of its ethnic heterogeneity it is taken for granted that the country has a common culture. The aim of this chapter is to explore what it means to talk about 'a common Ghanaian culture.' Attempts are made not only to identify the major features of this culture but also to trace its roots and historical development. This will enable us to situate properly in context the inculturation model employed in this work.

4.3 Peoples of Ghana

The ethnic and linguistic heterogeneity [11] of Ghana is one of the most prominent features of its social structure.[12] It may be difficult to state in exact terms the number of indigenous ethnic

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[5] Samuel P. Huntington, 'The Clash of Civilizations?' *Foreign Affairs*, 72/3 (Summer, 1993) 5-14.

[6] The thesis has been widely criticised by scholars both Western and non-Western. See for example, Amartya Sen, 'What Clash of Civilizations? Why Religious Identity isn't Destiny.' *Slate Magazine*, (file://C:\Amartya.htm) posted March 29, 2006, 3-9.

[7] M. J. Herskovits, *The Human Factor in Changing Africa* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962) 56.

[8] J. Maquet, *Civilizations of Black Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972)141.

[9] A. Adu Boahen, *Clio and Nation-Building in Africa,* p. 8; Basil Davidson, *The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State* ((Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2005) 197-242.

[10] This way of drawing difference has also been used to explain civil wars in the Ivory Coast, the Sudan and other places. Lazare M. Poamé, 'Rebellion and Religion in Côte d'Ivoire: The Necessary Change of Paradigm' in *Conflict: What has Religion got to Do with it*? (Accra: Woeli Publishing Services & Goethe Institut, 2004) 219; Davidson, *The Black Man's Burden*, 319.

[11] Awedoba suggests that there may be between forty-five and fifty languages spoken in Ghana. See Awedoba, *Culture and Development,* 40 & 54.

[12] Assimeng, *Social Structure*, 37.

groups in the country.[13] However, recent classifications divide the people into eight major ethnic groupings plus other smaller tribes.[14] The eight are the Akan, the Ewe, the Ga-Adangme, the Guan, the Gurma, the Grusi, the Mande-Busanga and the Mole-Dagbani. Each of these major groups has several sub-groups, marked by sub-linguistic differences. While the traditional settlements of the Akan, Ewe, and Ga-Adangme groups are found mainly in the middle and southern parts of the country, the Guans are found scattered across the country. The Mole-Dagbani, the Gurma and the Grusi and mande-Busanga groups are found mainly in the northern part.

The Akan group which is the largest, constituting 49.1% of the total population is divisible into two main linguistic groups, Twi and Mfantse. The various Ewe sub-groups are also marked by local variations in terms of language and aspects of political and social life; yet there is considerable cultural uniformity to distinguish them together as one group. They form 12.7% of the population of Ghana. The Ga-Adangme group which constitute 8.0% of the population is not completely homogenous. It appears that the Ga people are a mix of migrant and autochthonous groups. The Adangme and the Ga are closely related and they constitute a distinct linguistic group.[15]

The Guan group which forms 4.4% of the population have been absorbed, in some cases, into Akan linguistic groups, but they retain aspects of their culture, especially the patrilineal inheritance system. In other cases, they retain their language as minority groups in small traditional states in southern Ghana, with the Cherepong, Larteh and Anum together constituting the largest group. The Gonja and other Guan groups in the northern part of the country, retain their distinctive languages and culture, though there is evidence of strong Akan influence. Figures for the rest are as follows: the Mole-Dagbani 16.5%, the Grusi 2.8% the Gurma 3.9%, the Mande-Busanga 1.1%, and all other tribes 1.5%. Each of these is also marked by linguistic and sub-cultural distinctions, but cultural commonalities among them are quite strong.

4.4 A Common Ghanaian Culture?

According to the philosopher, Kwame Gyekye, the word 'culture' as it has evolved, 'has come to refer to patterns of thought and ways of acting and behaving that have been created, fostered, and nurtured by a people over time and by which their lives are guided and, perhaps, conditioned.'[16] Such 'patterns of thought and ways of acting and behaving' are evident in belief and value-systems, and in the structure and operation of political, legal, and social institutions. They are also expressed in the arts and sciences. By 'Ghanaian culture' is meant 'the shared patterns of thought and ways of acting and behaving that have been created, fostered, and nurtured' by the people of the modern nation-state of Ghana, and which guide the lives of individuals, groups, and institutions there.

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[13] Awedoba, *Culture and Development*, 40.

[14] Ghana Statistical Service, *2000 Population and Housing Census: Summary of Final Report* (March, 2000).

[15] Awedoba, *Culture and Development*, 58.

[16]Kwame Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience,* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) 107.

Scholars have made attempts to outline in broad terms the features of a common Ghanaian culture.[17] 'Ghanaian culture' in the context of the present work does not imply a fossilised or static, self-contained, uniform culture, and isolated from the rest of the world. Cultural self-sufficiency, even of European societies, is no longer a plausible claim to make. The long and sustained cultural interaction among the peoples of the world through immigration, trade, wars and political expansionism has ensured that cultures are regarded as eclectic and dynamic. The modern phenomenon of globalization may, in a sense, be seen as a cultural coming together of the whole world.[18]

The varieties of traditional cultures in Ghana representing the various ethnic groups differ in some respects. However, 'there are deep underlying affinities running through these cultures which justify speaking of a Ghanaian traditional culture.'[19] The various ethnic societies that together constitute modern Ghana had various forms of interaction among themselves and with other West African peoples before the encounter with the Arabs and Europeans. They have also been exposed to other outside contacts and influences since the colonial times. The roots of a common Ghanaian culture, therefore, go very deep into history and connect with several other cultures – European, Arab and other African. These roots draw on ideas, values and practices made common to the whole world by the various forms of global interaction in contemporary times. In that sense, what we have called a common Ghanaian culture must be understood as a phenomenon that is still evolving.

A common culture must not be understood in terms of total uniformity. The long period in which various ethnic cultures have existed side by side with each other, coupled with a growing consciousness of a national identity, has necessarily led to diffusion and convergence. If Ghana has been able to hold together for more than fifty years as a united country, it is because 'all the subcultures within it embrace, to some extent, an overarching culture of shared values, collective symbols, norms, rules, attitudes and behaviour patterns… .'[20] Any discussion of a common Ghanaian culture must therefore, include an analysis of the dynamic relationship between the traditional and contemporary elements within it. It must also involve an effort not to ignore elements that have been applicable only at certain stages but have eventually receded into oblivion or have reverted to their status as elements restricted to particular ethnic groups.

In 1962, Kofi Antubam, a leading Ghanaian artist, provided a list of features of a 'Ghanaian common culture.'[21] Though his list is quite long, for the sake of comprehensive analysis it is appropriate to reproduce it in some detail. They include the idea of the existence of one Great God as an integral member of society; belief in life after death as a vital source of hope; the belief in the perpetual existence of life, in which there is a cycle of pregnancy, life, death and a period of waiting in a universal pool of spiritual existence with a subsequent state of reincarnation, by which it is possible to change one's lot for better or for worse; the belief in the sanctity of man as opposed to woman in society; the belief in the idea that man is born free from sin and the idea that he remains so until he is involved in some polluting circumstance in life, as

[17] N. K. Dzobo & S. Amegashie-Viglo, *The Triple Heritage of Contemporary Africa* (Accra: Studio 7 KAT, 2004) 5.

[18] Frederic Jameson, 'Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue' in Frederic Jameson and Masao Miyoshi (eds.) *The Cultures of Globalization* (Durham and London: Duke University press, 1998) 54 – 77;   van Binsbergen, 'Cultures Do Not Exist,' 45.

[19] Kwasi Wiredu, *Philosophy and African Culture,* (Cambridge University Press, 1980) 6&7.

[20] G. P. Hagan, 'Cultural Pluralism, Religion and Educational Philosophy' Paradigm' in *Conflict: What has Religion got to do with it*? (Accra: Woeli Publishing Services & Goethe Institute, 2004) 229.

[21] Kofi Antubam, *Ghana's Heritage of Culture* (Kochler & Amelang Leipzig, 1963) 27 – 29.

opposed to the Jewish and Christian idea of man born with original sin which he is said to have inherited from his ancestors Adam and Eve; and the idea of the beauty of thought, speech, action and appearance as a basic and necessary prerequisite for appointment to the high office of state.

Also included in the list are the ability to produce a child as a necessary factor for the continuance of marriage; the importance of marriage as a criterion for social status; the peculiar conception that it is improper and obscene to say thanks soon after one has been offered food by a neighbour; the idea of the left hand being symbolically female and obscene and the right being male and socially proper; the conception of society in terms of seven clans; the principle of age as a vital criterion of wisdom; and spontaneity in self-expression. Some other items on Antubam's list are the system of social discipline and inheritance; the custom of counting from one to ten without stopping at five; and the tendency to stress in all forms of art the quality of significance as a criterion of beauty.

While Antubam's list captures many aspects of Ghana's common culture, it also contains several items that are exaggerations or no longer pertain. It is also obvious that in many cases he has generalised Akan cultural elements as representative of a universal Ghanaian culture. Akan cultural elements may dominate what may be regarded as a common 'Ghanaian culture' due to the size and distribution of the Akan ethnic group,[22] which enable interactions between them and almost every other group in the country. This has led to a situation of mutual influences that have produced a fusion of cultural ideas and practices. The story of Adam and Eve of the Judeo-Christian tradition has virtually, become incorporated into popular Ghanaian culture. However some of the items are too restrictedly Akan to be delineated as elements of a common culture for the whole country. Both Mends[23] and Wiredu[24] have rightly criticised Antubam on this account.

 Mends proposes a shorter list, which he describes as 'some basic elements in the culture of Ghana,' and which is less controversial than Antubam's list. His list of six elements includes two elements on Antubam's list. His list is as follows: the importance that is attached to group life; the importance of kinship as represented in the institutional form of the extended family system irrespective of the differences of descent systems; chiefship and its symbolic significance; the pervasiveness and stress on ceremony and ritual in many aspects of social life; the idea of beauty of speech, thought, action and appearance as a prerequisite for appointment to high office; the tendency to stress, in all forms of art, the quality of significance as a criterion of beauty and virtue.[25]

Whiles Mends' list takes account of significant features of a common Ghanaian culture, he does not seem interested in issues of the 'inside,' out of which flow the external and expressive aspects of culture. He largely avoids issues of metaphysics and religion; and though his second item includes the 'stress on ceremony and ritual in many aspects of social life,' he does not elaborate on issues of belief and worldview. The worldview of a people and the beliefs

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[22] Assimeng (*Social Structure*, 37) estimates the Akan population to be around 50% of the total Ghanaian population; S. J. Salm & T. Falola (Culture *and Customs of Ghana*, 6) put the estimate at about 48%; latest official statistics, the 2000 Population and Housing Census Report puts it at 49.1%. Their language is the most widely spoken in Ghana (Awedoba, *Culture and Development*, 63).
[23] E. H. Mends, 'Some Basic Elements in the Culture of Ghana' *Universitas* 7/1, (1978) 41-42.
[24] Wiredu, *Philosophy and African Culture*, 8 – 9.
[25] Quoted by Wiredu, *Philosophy and African Culture,* 9 & 10.

associated with it, often constitute an important part of the wellsprings of their cultural expressions. One would, therefore, expect that in the discussion of culture the issues of worldview and beliefs would, at least, find mention. However, almost all the elements on his list are discernible features of the evolving common culture of Ghana.

Wiredu offers another list.[26] Some of his elements are elaborations of aspects that Antubam and Mends have already mentioned. He includes in his list the following elements: kindness to strangers; reverence for ancestors and other departed relatives who are believed to be able to affect the living; the belief in the existence and influence of lesser gods as agents of the one Supreme God; belief in witchcraft and a variety of spirits, fetishes and powers, both good and bad; the belief that human beings are born into the world with an unalterable destiny bestowed in advance by God; and the tendency to stress, not just in forms of art but in sundry other practices, the quality of significance. Other items are, the institution of polygamy and the high esteem for large families; the emphasis on the beauty and correctness of speech as a condition not only for high office of state but also for general social respectability; the influence of myths, totemism and taboos in thought and action; the attachment of a religious significance to the office of a chief, with reverence for and complete obedience to his authority, except where that is undermined by his own wickedness or malpractice; the high premium placed on consensus in group endeavour and a great capacity for reconciliation after even the bitterest conflict or dissension; and the education of children through informal day-to-day upbringing rather than through formal institutions.

Wiredu's synthesis is fairly representative of the features of an evolving universal Ghanaian culture, partly, because he built on the lists supplied by scholars who worked on the subject before him. Many items in this list feature often in individual and group behaviour. Some of the clearly positive ones also feature in collective self-representations of citizens at the popular level. For example, when Ghanaians want to express their sense of belonging to the nation and their sense of being different from nationals of neighbouring and other nations, they point to the claimed national virtue of 'kindness to strangers,' which is expressed in the popular phrase, Ghanaian hospitality.[27] They also see themselves as peace-loving and God-fearing. It seems that some West African neighbours also identify this with *Ghanaianness*, not always in positive terms, though. Towards the beginning of the restoration of democracy in Nigeria, when it appeared General Abacha wanted to manipulate the transitional process in order to transform himself into a civilian president as his friend Rawlings had done in Ghana, the renowned Nigerian writer, Wole Soyinka is reported to have issued the warning: 'Abacha, Nigeria is not Ghana,' appearing to be drawing attention to the fact that the Nigerian spirit is not as pacific as the Ghanaian. This is in keeping with what Wiredu describes as 'great capacity for reconciliation even after the bitterest conflict or dissension.' This indeed has virtually been raised to the level of a national characteristic and is captured in the expression, *Fa ma Nyame* (Give it to God), which is sometimes condemned as negative by social commentators.[28] Another example of contemporary significance is the stress on beauty as a condition for high office. It appears that

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[26] Wiredu, *Philosophy and African Culture*, 11.

[27] A. K. Awedoba, *Culture and Development,'* 43.

[28] A newspaper editorial commended a Ghanaian Supreme Court judge, Prof. Justice Date-Bah, for admonishing Ghanaians to abandon the '*Fama Nyame* mentality' and rather insist on their rights whenever those rights are infringed upon. (See 'Business as Usual won't Help' *Daily Graphic* [editorial], February 28, 2008).

the beauty or handsomeness of candidates remains a major criterion for the choice of political leaders in Ghana.[29]

However, several of these cultural characteristics mentioned above may be found mainly in rural Ghanaian communities as residuals of abandoned traditional moral ideals of a bygone era. At best they retain only a weak hold on small sections of the citizenry. For example, polygamy and large families are gradually becoming a thing of the past among many of the younger generation of citizens. Most educated people below the age of fifty would neither be involved in polygamous marriages nor go for large families. 'School' or formal education as a means of training children is more and more becoming the norm; in some cases, it combines with the informal day-to-day method of training children. New challenges that have come with economic and social changes since the middle of the 1980s have further weakened traditional structures related to the family system that provided the framework for the informal training of children. Actually, the traditional occupations and gender roles that so many aspects of traditional informal training of children were directed toward are themselves changing and new ways of educating children are being sought.

Nevertheless, most of these are still observable characteristics of Ghanaian culture. elements listed by Wiredu such as reverence for ancestors and other departed relatives who are believed to be able to affect the living; the belief in the existence of lesser deities as agents of the one supreme God; the belief in witchcraft and variety of spirits, fetishes and powers, both good and bad; and the belief that human beings are born into the world with an unalterable destiny bestowed in advance by God that are related to traditional metaphysics and religion, have become the wellsprings that irrigate a contemporary popular culture which is largely underpinned by the traditional understanding of the world as full of spirits and as essentially sacred.[30] It is within this basic worldview that many Ghanaians live their lives and relate to other aspects of the environment. The continuing central place of religious belief in public behaviour in Ghana is partly due to what Assimeng has described as 'the resilience of traditional conceptions of well-being.'[31] At the base of this is the belief that evil deeds of individuals and societies attract negative spiritual influences that ultimately affect the general well-being of individuals and the country. This kind of value orientation informs the thinking and behaviour of most Ghanaians as they engage daily in various activities – economic, political, and social.[32]

There is virtually nothing more to add to the above lists except four features, which, arguably, are important as part of the evolving Ghanaian culture, especially at the popular level. They include an optimistic attitude to life, expressed in the phrase, 'âbâyâ yie' (it shall be well); greeting a group of people by hand-shake is done anti-clockwise (originally a practice in southern Ghana communities, it is gradually extending to the north through the various forms of

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[29] Towards the primaries of the National Patriotic Party (NPP) in 2007, the Senior Minister, Mr J. H. Mensah provoked a debate in the media when he asserted that running for political office was not a 'beauty contest'(See *The Chronicle*, Monday January 8, 2007) to which the Minister of Tourism, Mr. J. Obetsebi Lamptey, retorted: 'appearance matters.' (See *The Chronicle*, Tuesday January 9, 2007).

[30] Max Assimeng, Social *structure of Ghana: A study in Persistence and Change* (Accra: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1999) 43.

[31] Max Assimeng, *Salvation, Social Crisis and the Human Condition* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1995) 33.

[32] Maxwell Owusu, 'The Akan of Ghana' in Richard V. Weekes (ed.) *Muslim Peoples: A World Ethnographic Survey* (London: Greenroad Press, 1978) 16.

contacts);[33] an attitude of unquestioning acquiescence to authority, expressed in the oft repeated phrase: 'order from above;'[34] and ready deference to people of influence.

4.5 Roots of a Common Ghanaian Culture

It has become almost conventional to interpret the history of the emergence of Ghana as a nation-state in terms of artificiality, disregarding the natural affinities that exist between the different ethnic groups in terms of culture.[35] Smock and Smock observe that several historians and commentators have simply assumed that Ghana, like most modern African countries, began its evolution into a nation-state with the onset of colonialism.[36] The implication of such an approach to the issue of the emergence of Ghana as a socio-political unit is that it comes to be regarded as a conglomeration of disparate tribal units, with no natural connections with one another, either in terms of history or culture.

However, apart from its external borders and state structures that may be said to have been artificially created, cultural bonds between the various ethnic groups are to a large extent natural. While the colonial experience was significant in many respects to the welding together of the peoples of Ghana as a geo-political entity, it should be seen as only one of the several important stages in a natural process of evolution which it disturbed in some way. Colonialism bequeathed its structures of modern nationhood to the independent nation-state; but the sense of belonging together as one people started to evolve long before the first European arrived. Colonialism actually interfered with what was a fairly natural process of evolution and distorted what would have been the physical borders and naturally-evolved political systems of the nation-states that eventually emerged.[37] In a series of lectures at the University of Ghana in 1995, the British historian Ivor Wilks raised serious questions about the tendency on the part of some historians to trace the beginning of a history that binds together the peoples of Ghana to the colonial era.[38] What we have called a common Ghanaian culture has its roots in the various stages of a historical process during which a sense of bonding as a people who belong together emerged progressively, in spite of the bitter inter-ethnic state rivalries marked by wars, burdensome payment of tributes by the vanquished and slave raids. In this section, an attempt is made to trace this process, which in a sense is still ongoing.

4.5.1 Migrations

Historians speak about extensive cultural interaction among the peoples of West Africa that must have occurred as early as the period between 500 C.E. and 1000 C.E.[39] These interactions

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[33] Awedoba, *Culture and Development*, 42.

[34] Assimeng, *Social Structure,* 115.

[35] David R. Smock and Audrey C. Smock, *The Politics of Pluralism: A Comparative Study of Lebanon and Ghana* (New York /Oxford/ Amsterdam: Elsevier Scientific Publishing Co., 1975) 15-18.

[36] According to Ivor Wilks, the earliest British writers of Gold Coast history sought to justify colonialism by crediting the process with the creation of the country(See Ivor Wilks, *One Nation, Many Histories: Ghana Past and Present*(Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1996) 5 – 8.

[37] Basil Davidson, *The Blackman's Burden*, 60 – 73.

[38]Wilks, *One Nation, Many Histories*, 4 – 7.

[39] A. Adu Boahen, 'Ghana Before the coming of Europeans,' in Ghana *Social Science Journal*, 4/2, (November 1977) 98; K. B. Dickson, *Historical Geography of Ghana*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969) 37.

involved migrations of peoples from one part of the sub-continent to another. The forebears of many of the ethnic groups in contemporary Ghana were part of this development. According to scholars, the peopling of the land was marked by continuous movements of groups in different directions.[40] Consensus among scholars on the nature of these migrations and their exact trails is difficult to reach.[41] But there is almost complete unanimity that such movements did take place.[42] Studies of oral traditions of origins have enabled scholars to build reasonably plausible theories of migrations and resettlements. The Guans were the first group of immigrants who are said to have migrated from the Mossi region of what is now Burkina Faso. The Akan, Ga-Adangme and the Ewes who were to follow the Guans about three hundred years later have traditions that corroborate the claim that the Guans were the earliest to have settled in Ghana from outside. Their states, often small in size, are scattered over a wide area along the river Volta on the Akuapem mountains and toward the coast in the modern-day Central region. The Akan, the Ewe and the Ga-Adangme, who spread into the middle and the southern areas of the country absorbed some of the Guans and, in some cases, caused them to spread further in the land, establishing smaller independent states.[43]

The Kokombas and the Tallensi, like the Guans, are believed to have been already settled in the northern parts of Ghana before the arrival of the more powerful and politically-centralised groups such as the Gonja, Nanumba, Mamprusi, and the Dagomba. The latter conquered the former and imposed their rule on them.[44] The Akan, made up of two main groups, the Mfantse and the Twi are said to have made their earliest home at Takyiman and spread from there. The Ewe are said to have moved from Oyo in western Nigeria[45] into the south-western regions of modern Togo and the south-eastern areas of Ghana.[46] The Ga-Adangme trace their origins to Yorubaland in Nigeria.[47] The migrants did not all move in one sweep. They moved in batches and by the end of the year 1200 C.E. major movements had ended, and though some further migrants did move in later, they were small groups of invaders that were absorbed by the existing communities.[48]

The beginning of the evolution of a common Ghanaian culture must be located in this period. It has been suggested that the fusion of autochthonous societies that were mostly stateless with immigrant peoples who already had centralised political systems led to some important social

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[40] P. Ryan, 'Is it Possible to Construct a Unified History of Religion in West Africa?' *Universitas*, 8 99.

[41] Scholars who have contributed to the debate include J. B. Danquah, 'Obligation in Akan Society' *West African Affairs*, No. 8, 1951; W. E. F. Ward, *A History Of Ghana*, (London: Allen &Unwin,1967, 4th edition); A. A. Boahen, 'Ghana before the Coming of the Europeans,' 93 – 106; and J. K. Fynn, *The People of Ghana,* (Accra: Information Services Department, 1974).

[42] Ivor Wilks, 'The Northern Factor in Ashanti History' (Legon, 1961) 13; Kwasi Boaten, 'Trade Routes in Asante before the Colonial Period' in *Ghana Social Science Journal*, 2/2, (1973) 114; Jack Goody, *The Gonja: A Locally Autonomous Kingdom* (Institute of Africa Studies, Legon, 1964) 6&7.

[43]Salm & Falola, *Culture and Customs,* 4-8.

[44] Goody, *Gonja,* 6&7.

[45] G. K. Nukunya, *Kinship & Marriage among the Anlo Ewe* (London /New Brunswick NJ: The Athlone Press, 1969) 1.

[46] Ted Nelson-Adjakpey, 'Penance and Expiatory Sacrifice Among the Ghanaian-Ewe and their Relevance to the Christian Religion (Doctoral Diss., Rome, 1982) 11.

[47]Salm & Falola, *Culture and Custom,* 7&8.

[48]Boahen, 'Ghana Before the coming of Europeans,' 99.

changes in that period.[49]   Borrowing of cultural ideas and practices between the various peoples, who encountered each other in the movements and resettlements that occurred, must have been accompanied by a gradual integration of the various groups. Agriculture became an important occupation of the settled communities, and chieftaincy with its sacral associations must have begun to take shape and spread during the stage of migration.[50]

It was not only migrations that led to the fusion of peoples, ideas and cultural elements, but also trade and other forms of culture contact among the peoples of Ghana and between them and their neighbours.[51] Such free movements of peoples and contacts must have led to the diffusion of cultural ideas and practices, not only among the peoples of Ghana but of the sub-region as a whole:

> Uninhibited circulation of men makes for exchange of goods and, more important, diffusion of ideas, and this may explain the remarkable similarities that exist among certain Neolithic artefacts in West Africa.[52]

At this early stage, most of the groups were involved in the process of ethnic-state formation and so, probably, had not developed set cultural forms that could be uniquely associated with any of them. The processes of state formation which involved fusion of originally different groups and the building of cultural identity consciousness had just begun. Ethnic cultures of Ghana may, therefore, be said to be generally hybrid in their origin. Ryan proffers a wise counsel on developments at this stage:

> It would probably be inaccurate to call these east-west migrants the Ewe or the Adangme or the Ga peoples, but the present-day people called by those ethnic names may well be the descendants of the intermarriages of those migrants and aboriginal populations, or earlier migrants among whom they settled. Likewise, it would probably be rash to call those earliest Akan migrants Asante or Mfantse or Akyim, and so forth. It is probably more accurate to say that the present-day peoples called by those names are the descendants of Akan migrants and other non-Akan populations, nowadays wholly or partially absorbed into the immigrant culture system.[53]

4.5.2 The Rise and Expansion of Kingdoms

The period of migrations was followed by the rise, expansion and fall of kingdoms. The most remarkable of them was the Asante Kingdom which built an empire, the boundaries of which coincided approximately with the borders of modern Ghana. According to Adu Boahen, by the end of the seventeenth century states had been established in both the northern and the southern parts of the country.[54] The states of Mamprusi, Dagomba, Nanumba, Wa and Gonja had already been established in the north; while in the south the Akan states of the Akwamu, Denkyira, Mfantse, Asante and the rest had formed. To the east of the Akans were states established by the Ga-Adangme and the Ewe. The principal centres of the Ga states included Tema, Nungua, Teshie,

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[49] Dickson, *Historical Geography*, 39.
[50] Dickson, *Historical Geography*, 39.
[51] Dickson, *Historical Geography,* 37.
[52] Dickson, *Historical Geography*, 38.
[53] Ryan, 'Is it possible to Construct,' 99.
[54] A. Adu Boahen, *Ghana: Evolution and Change in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1975), 10.

Labadi, and Ga-Mashi. The Adangmes had states such as Ladoku, Manya-Krobo and Yilo-Krobo. The Ewe states included the Anlo, Togo, Peki, Kpando, Ho and Adaklu.

A striking feature about the groups that peopled the country, which is now Ghana, was the affinity among large clusters of them with respect to ancestry, language, and other cultural features. For example, based on oral traditions and linguistic and ethnographic evidence, it is concluded that the founders of the northern states   of Mamprusi, Dagomba, Nanumba and Wa share a common ancestry.[55] All the Akan peoples belong to a single stock and the Ga–Adangme and the Ewe have common roots. All the Guan groups belong together as an autochthonous stock. Such feelings of natural bonds, which were nurtured by oral traditions of the peoples and confirmed by affinities between various elements of their cultures, must have served as important sources of feeling together at a very early stage of the country's evolution.

In addition to such traditions of historical and ethnic affinity among large clusters of groups of peoples, there came inter-ethnic wars of expansion as well as diplomatic strategies, which created forms of alliances between states. This must have resulted in further borrowing of cultural elements, expanding the feeling of bonding among the different peoples. For example, several Akan states gained ascendancy over other Akan and non-Akan states at different stages and created empires. The Denkyira had gained dominion over most of the Akan states in the area of the modern Ashanti Region by the middle of the seventeenth century. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Akwamu had emerged as the dominant power in the south-eastern part of Ghana. By the end of the seventeenth century the Asante had become the most powerful state in Ghana. According to Boahen, by 1800 almost all the states in the north, including the Gonja and the Dagomba, plus states such as the Nzema, Aowin and Wassa to the west, and the Ga and some principal Ewe states to the east, had been incorporated into the Asante Empire.[56] Apart from the Mfantse states that had formed a confederacy, all the states to the south had been incorporated into the Asante Empire by 1800.

The expansion of the Asante Empire led to the diffusion of Akan cultural influence among the other peoples; and though, in most cases, it produced resentment and bitterness on the part of the conquered peoples against the Asante, it also led to formal alliances between states. In the attempt to maintain control over, and ensure the loyalty of conquered peoples, the Asante sent resident commissioners supported by army detachments to the territories. There were such commissioners and detachments in Elmina, Cape Coast, and Abura Dunkwa in 1861.[57] Commissioners were also stationed in the Ashanti territories east of the Volta.[58] From the commissioners and their garrisons some of the non-Akan speaking peoples learnt to speak the Akan language. An African agent of the Basel Mission, Rev. David Asante, reported in 1884, for example, that many of the peoples in towns in Ewe territory   such as Dadiase, Adjuti and Litime could understand and speak *Twi* quite

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[55]Boahen, *Ghana: Evolution*, 9.

[56] Boahen, *Ghana: Evolution*, 15.

[57] Boahen, *Ghana: Evolution,* 24.

[58] Marion Johnson, 'Ashanti East of the Volta,' *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, 8, (1965) 34 -35.

well.[59] Yendi and Salaga also had resident Asante officials. It is said that 'Asante officials, weavers and traders' occupied about a quarter of the town of Salaga.[60]

Ivor Wilks reports about Namasa, whose chief was honoured for their support in the war Asante fought against Gyaman around 1732 with titles and gifts of Akan chieftaincy paraphernalia including a palanquin, state chairs, umbrella horn and drum. The chiefs of Banda, Bamboi, and Yeji also received such honours.[61] The kingdom of Dagomba was honoured in its relationship with Asante with the right to use the 'prestigious praise name of the Asante themselves: *Asante Kotoko, Anwaa Kotoko* (Asante Porcupines, Dagomba Porcupines).'[62] This is corroborated by Ferguson who in 1894 reported that 'The king of Kumasi distributed honours and court decorations to the various kings of his kingdom.'[63] Such practices encouraged the spread of elements of Akan chieftaincy culture. A very clear evidence of these developments is the spread of Akan drum and horn culture far beyond Akan territory: the language of the drum, and to a great extent also the horn, is always Akan.[64] Writing about the Asante influence on other ethnic groups, Ferguson explained,

> For full 300[65] years persons were collected from all parts of its dominions who, having been instructed in… customs and manners practised at Kumasi …were distributed as residents, royal executioners, tax collectors and other official agents in every part of the dominion. Its merchants met the caravans from the north at Salaga. Thus its language became widely diffused and with Hausa and Mossi became the language of commerce.[66]

But the spread of cultural influence at the height of   Asante power was not a one-way affair. The Asante themselves received many non-Akan influences through the interaction with people in their tributary states. The practice, for example, of the wearing of the traditional northern smock (*fugu*) covered with small leather packets containing texts from the Qur'an by Akan paramount chiefs on some special occasions, and on almost all occasions by their war chiefs, is widespread. The leather packets sewn on the *fugu* were produced by Muslim *malams* and were believed to give protection to their wearers in war. The *fugu* has also become an important feature of the chieftaincy institution among almost all ethnic groups, including those in southern Ghana.

4.5.3 Trade

Trade, another source of cultural encounter, was one of the most important vehicles through which the foundations were laid for the bonding and common culture development of the peoples who are now known as Ghanaians. In the period before the arrival of Europeans, trade was both internal

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[59] Rev. David Asante, 'A New Route to the Niger' Travels of Asante and Opoku, 1877,' *Geog. Gesllschaft zu Bern, 1880, Beilag VI*; Rev. David Asante, 'Diary, 1884', edited by Rev. Christaller, 'Journey to Salaga and Obooso,' *Geog. Gesllschaft zu Bern, Mitteilungen, 1886.* Cited by Marion Johnson, 'Ashanti East of the Volta,' 34 & 35.

[60] Johnson, 'Ashanti East of the Volta,' 39.

[61] Wilks, *One Nation,* 33.

[62] Wilks, *One Nation,* 34.

[63] G. E. Ferguson, Report, 1894, in Colonial Office, Africa (West), No. 506, 253.

[64] J H. Nketiah, 'Surrogate Languages of Africa,' *Current Trends in Linguistics* 7 (1971) 699 – 732.

[65] Kwame Arhin explains that 200 years (1700 -1873) is closer to the facts than 300 years. (See Kwame Arhin, (ed.), *The papers of George Ekem Ferguson: An Mfantse official of the Government of the Gold Coast, 1890 – 1897*(Leiden/Cambridge, African Studies Centre, 1974) 126.

[66] George Ekem Ferguson, Enclosure in Gold Coast confidential of 5th October, 1896 in PRO CO 96/277 cited by Arhin, *The papers of George Ekem Ferguson*, 126.

and external.[67] External trade by land was directed toward the states of the Northern Sudan such as Ghana and its successors; by sea, trade was directed towards the coastal areas of Dahomey, Nigeria, and Angola.[68] Important market centres emerged in the transitional zone between the forest and the savannah. Towns such as Atebubu, Yeji, Ejura and Salaga[69] became important centres where Akan traders from the forest areas in the south exchanged goods such as gold and kola for cloths and other manufactured goods from the Mande and Hausa traders.[70] This trade did not involve only the forest peoples and the foreigners - Mande and Hausa. The peoples of the coast and the middle belt as well as the people of the savannah regions were also connected in several ways to both the internal and external trade.

The Akans of the forest area got their supplies of fish and salt from the coast. In turn they supplied the coastal peoples with goods from the interior. The cultural impact of this trade on the Akans was tremendous. It opened up and maintained several footpaths that linked the various market centres. It appears by the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries that gold mining in the Akan forest areas was already attracting Dyula entrepreneurs and skilled labourers in significant numbers. These included merchants, blacksmiths and farmers.[71] Historians have noted how this intensive cultural interaction led to the direct borrowing of certain paraphernalia of chieftaincy, institutions, words and expressions from the Mande. It is suggested that state umbrellas, swords, palanquins and other regalia that have become important identifiable marks of chieftaincy have been borrowed from the imperial courts of Mali.[72] Words that have been borrowed from Mali by the Akan include *ôpônkô* (a horse), *yoma* (a camel), *ôkoroo* (a canoe), *kotoku* (a sack), *bôtô* (a pouch), all of which are associated with trade and transportation. Other borrowed words include *sâbâ* (amulet), *osanku* (a harp), *odonno* (a drum), *ôdonkô* (slave),[73] *Kramo* (a Muslim), *krataa* (paper), *samina* (soap), and *Gyata* (Lion).[74]

The coming of the Europeans to the coast created more opportunities for more people to be involved in trading. According to Daaku, the presence of European traders on the coast diversified the already existing patterns of trade. In addition to the old footpaths, the arrival of the European traders and the establishment of their trading houses along the coast brought into existence many new paths that connected towns and villages to the important coastal trading centres.[75] This facilitated easy mobility and led to the rise of new market centres on the coast, most of them, previously small fishing villages, becoming transformed into commercial towns. The European presence also widened participation in trading activities and created market for services and skills

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[67] Boahen, 'Ghana Before the coming of Europeans,' 99.

[68] Boahen, 'Ghana Before the coming of Europeans,' 104.

[69] Francis Agbodeka, *Ghana in the Twentieth Century* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1972) 15.

[70] Kwame Y. Daaku, ' Trade and Trading Patterns of the Akan in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries' in C. Meillassoux (ed.), *The Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets in West Africa*,(London: Oxford University Press *for* International African Institute, 1971) 169 & 170.

[71]Wilks, *One Nation, Many Histories*, 24.

[72] Ivor Wilks, 'Mande Loan Words in Akan' *Ghana Notes and Queries*, ix,(1966) 23, n.2.

[73] The Trans-Sahara slave trade preceded the more extensive and disruptive Trans-Atlantic one. It is reported that slaves were procured from the northern parts of the country and exported to lands beyond the Sahara. Most of the male slaves, captured in raids by the Dagomba among the Grunshi, the Kokomba and the Bassari were castrated and sold as eunuchs.(See Hans W. Debrunner, *A History of Christianity in Ghana* (Accra: Waterville Publishing House, 1967, 39; and also, E. F. Tamakloe, *A Brief History of the Dagomba People*, Accra, 1931, 76).

[74] Wilks, *One Nation, Many Histories*, 25.

[75] Daaku, 'Trade and Trading Patterns,' 169.

such as interpretation, bricklaying and masonry. The Europeans also cashed in on the existing trans-Atlantic trade between Ghana and peoples along the Coast of Dahomey and Nigeria. They employed Mfantse canoe-men to man their canoes from Elmina to areas such as Popo, Whydah, Badagry and Lagos.[76]

 The above developments resulted in a significant alteration of the social structure. It afforded the ordinary people the opportunity to create wealth as traders, skilled labourers or potters. Both in the interior forest areas and on the coast, trade created conditions for easy social mobility, and some individuals attained prominence as men and women of wealth and influence.[77] It also brought people of different ethnic groups together in the quasi-urban centres in both temporary and permanent ways, affording opportunities for the borrowing and fusion of cultural ideas[78] and the emergence of new cultural forms.

4.5.4 Religion

It seems that the most important roots of a common culture of the people of Ghana are connected with religion. In spite of significant changes that have occurred as a result of the influence of forces linked to modernity, 'Ghanaian culture' seems to be one that is characterised by a sense of transcendence. Assimeng lists elements of metaphysical nature that are common to Ghanaian communities and of which these communities hold 'clear understandings.'[79] These elements, which he notes, have been the subjects of several scholarly works,[80] are as follows:

 a) The belief in a Creator: his nature, attributes, and role in the affairs of mankind;
 b) The belief in spiritual intermediaries, each of which is associated with a specific department of activity for the well-being of mankind;
 c) The belief in the mediation of gods, of varying levels of greatness and power, in the affairs of mankind;
 d) The pervasive influence of magic, witchcraft and sorcery;
 e) The belief that there is a spiritual counterpart of everything, such as land, rivers, mountains, tees, forests, and of course, human beings;
 f) The belief that a thing can be itself and something else also, as evident in totems as objects of veneration and adoration;
 g) The assumption that a human being is both physical and spiritual;
 h) The role of ritual and of symbolism in thought, belief, and behaviour;
 i) The pervading influence of myths of origin, nature, destiny, *things* and *events*;
 j) The importance of propitiation calendars and ceremonies, with the fullest expression in the form of festivals;
 k)   The position of the dead:
        (i) categories of the dead

[76] Capt. J. Adams, *Remarks on the Country Extending from Cape Palmas to the River Congo Including Observations on the Manners and Customs of the Inhabitants* (London: 1823). Cited by Adu Boahen, , 'Ghana Before the coming of Europeans,' 104.

[77] Daaku, 'Trade and Trading Patterns,' 170, 179; Agbodeka, *Ghana in the Twentieth Century*, 17.

[78] Kwame Arhin, 'A Note on the Asante Akokofo: A Non-literate Sub-elite, 1900 – 1930' *Africa*, 56/1 (1986) 25 - 31.

[79] Assimeng, *Social Structure*, 42-43.

[80] He mentions Danquah, Sarpong, Fiawoo, Opoku among others as examples of scholars who have treated the subject in various works.(see *Social Structure*, 43).

        (ii) destination of the dead

        (iii) the religious, social and psychological functions of funerals;

        (iv) theories of reincarnation

l)   The continuing influence of *honhom fi* (evil forces), and the need to constantly ward them off from the affairs of human beings, with the help of divination mechanisms.

This list basically represents traditional religious elements. The various ethnic groups had their own religious beliefs and practices, which had underlying similarities that made possible the use of religious elements in trading and other areas of inter-cultural encounter.[81] Natural affinities between the traditional religions of the various groups also enabled inter-borrowing of religious ideas and practices. To a very large extent, such indigenous elements have persisted and continued into the modern era. Indigenous religion has also become the potent solvent that bleaches off the culturally inappropriate and undesirable blots of the more modern traditions of Islam and Western missionary Christianity, transforming them, on its soil, into veritable local varieties of those universal traditions.[82]

These elements have become the underpinning ideology of Ghanaian common culture, especially at the popular level. In that sense, the 'stem root' of Ghanaian common culture may be found in what Ali Mazrui in a BBC documentary on Africa described as 'a triple heritage.'[83] It was this condition that the first president of Ghana, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, so perceptively noted and proposed in his philosophy of 'Consciencism,' synthesising the three strands of Africa's cultural and historical experience: Indigenous religion, Islam and Western European Christianity to create a new African reality.[84]

Islam preceded Christianity in Ghana by several decades. It was present in the northern part of Ghana by the fourteenth century. It was commercial interests rather than commitment to proselytizing imperatives that first brought Muslims to Ghana. Gold, cola and slaves attracted caravans of Mande, Dyula and, later, Hausa Muslim traders to the Northern parts of Ghana, and by the eighteenth century their influence had become strongly felt in royal courts of kings across the upper half of what is now modern Ghana. Islam was more strongly established in some of the traditional states of northern Ghana, especially, Dagbon. By the latter part of the eighteenth century, that kingdom was already considered Muslim.[85] In Dagbon, Gonja, Mamprusi and Wa, Islamic festivals came to replace pre-Islamic traditional ones or, in some cases, the two came to be merged; and in matters of inheritance, marriage and divorce, Islamic laws rather than customary practices have come to be followed. It appears cultural elements that may be traced to agents of Islam include the use of Arabic names and circumcision. It was Islam that also first introduced the art of writing and formal education to Ghana. The skill of writing together with that of preparing and dispensing of magico-religious objects such as charms and amulets earned them great respect

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[81] Oath-taking in the name of deities and the 'drinking' of medicine were important means of transactions and treaties in both pre-colonial and colonial times in Ghana.

[82] Lamin Sanneh, 'The Domestication of Islam and Christianity in African Societies: A Methodological Exploration' *Journal of Religion in Africa*, XI/1(1980) 1- 12.

[83] He has since then expatiated on the concept in various publications. For example, one of his major works has the title, *The Africans: A Triple Heritage*, published in Boston/Toronto by Little Brown and Company in 1986.

[84] Kwame Nkrumah, *Consciencism*, (London: Heinemann, 1964) 67- 70.

[85] Ivor Wilks, 'A Note on the Early Spread of Islam in Dagomba' in *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, VIII, (1965) 87.

and honour in the royal courts and among the people in general.[86]   Asante kings, for example, welcomed Muslims and employed them in the courts as secretaries, chroniclers, and interpreters.

Islamic scholarship thrived in Salaga, in Gonja Kingdom, where an 'effective and prestigious' Islamic educational system was created.[87] The town was described in 1877 as a 'strongly Muslim town' in which 'almost every man can read and write Arabic.'[88] The large Muslim population and the vibrant Islamic scholarship attracted numerous scholars from Kano in Nigeria. Among such scholars was al-Hajj Umar al-Salagawi who visited the area in the nineteenth century. However, Muslim scholars in Gonja had been active and effective since eighteenth century, and scholars such as Alhajj Muhammad Mustafa, who made the pilgrimage to Mecca in 1733/34 and wrote the history of Gonja from 1710 -1752, had been associated with the town. Muslim scholars in Gonja also kept records of past kings and imams of Gonja. Fage argues that the impact of Islamic education was limited and not enduring, because it tended toward intellectual and scientific conservatism after the fourteenth century.[89]

On account of its strong links with trade, Islam's influence is strongest in urban and commercial towns. This is the case both in the northern and the southern parts of the country. In most cases, Muslims live in enclaves (*zongo*) and have not become integrated into the host ethnic communities; they have nonetheless, been agents of cultural change in Ghana. The *Zongo* provides the context for the integration of the people of many different tribes and ethnic backgrounds that make up that community; the unifying variable being their common allegiance to Islam. In contemporary times, *zongo* communities in the cities, often include significant numbers of non-Muslims. It also appears that the 'sojourner mentality' associated with itinerant traders did not encourage, initially, the construction of permanent accommodation facilities among the early Muslims in Ghana. This, in most cases, led to the *zongos* becoming slum areas when, instead of them becoming temporary quarters for traders and travellers, they eventually turned into permanent suburbs of the cities and commercial towns.

The Muslims settled among the local communities, not only trading with them, but inter-marrying with them and absorbing their culture. It seems the basic cultural outlook of the Muslims was not substantially different from that of the local people. So while they settled in the *zongos* in their own communities, the intensive and extensive nature of their interaction with local communities did not lead to any fundamental alterations in the existing social and political arrangements.[90] They have become an integral part of the communities, which they have affected and by which they have been affected.

Like Islam, Christianity arrived in Ghana in close alliance with commercial and other interests. European explorers and traders who came to Ghana were usually accompanied by chaplains, who understood their primary responsibility as ministering to the spiritual needs of their own

[86] N. Levtzion, 'Early 19th Century Arabic Manuscript from Kumasi' in *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, VIII, (1965) 101.

[87] Peter Clarke, *West Africa and Islam* (London: Edward Arnold, 1982)163.

[88] Ivor Wilks, 'The Transmission of Islamic Learning in Western Sudan' in J. Goody (ed.) *Literacy in Traditional Societies*(Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1968) 167.

[89] J. D. Fage, *Ghana*: *A Historical Interpretation* (The University of Wisconsin Press, 1959) 52.

[90]   Ali al- Khãtim, 'Islam in West Africa – Its Political and Cultural influence' *Bulletin on Islam and Christian Muslim Relations in Africa*, 3/4, (October, 1985) 13.

compatriots. This led to the rather limited impact of Christianity on the indigenous communities in the first three hundred years of its presence in the country. This was notwithstanding the fact that Prince Henry who initiated the voyages of exploration had as one of his objectives the evangelization of Africans. The Portuguese Roman Catholic chaplain, the earliest of the succeeding generations of European Christians to work in Ghana, arrived in the 15th century.[91] The Dutch, British, Danes, French, Swedes and others followed and engaged in keen competition for trading rights. These Europeans, a mix of explorers and traders, usually accompanied by chaplains, saw themselves as representatives of their respective countries and sometimes re-enacted the violent rivalries between their countries in Europe on African soil.[92]

In spite of the limitations of the early Christian presence in Ghana, it provided some of the early channels that served to generate and transmit cultural ideas across tribes and communities. These included the introduction of Western formal education, Christian preaching and attempts to make Ghanaians literate in their own mother-tongues. For example, attempts were made by the Portuguese in 1529 to establish a school in Elmina for the mulatto children. The Dutch made similar attempts in Moure in 1634 and at Elmina in 1641 for both mulatto and African children. In 1743 the school in the Elmina Castle, achieved an enrolment of forty-five. This number included four mulatto boys, seven mulatto girls and five African girls. By this date, Jacobus Capitein, an African trained in Holland, had reduced the Mfantse language to writing and had translated some important Christian documents. The Danes also established a school at the Christiansborg Castle in 1722 and sponsored two boys, Frederick Peterson Svane and Christian Protten to train in Denmark. On their return they worked as missionaries.

A high appreciation of the importance of education at this early stage led the African elite to take several initiatives of their own to secure the education of their children. For example, the Asantehene, Opoku Ware I, sent twelve boys and two girls to the Director-General of the Elmina Castle to be educated in Holland. The Dutch sent only one boy on and kept the rest in Elmina. It is also believed that in 1752, the English Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) established a school in Cape Coast at the request of a prominent Ghanaian merchant, Caboceer Cudjo. The society later sponsored three boys, including two sons of Cudjo, to train in England. The two sons did not survive to return. The third person Philip Quaque did survive, and became the first African to be ordained by the Church of England. On his return he reopened the Cape Coast castle school started earlier by one Thompson and trained several people, including Joseph Smith, who later came to head the school, and William de Graft whose request for Bibles brought the Methodist Missionaries to Ghana in 1835.

Thus, at the time the second phase of the Christian missionary enterprise in Ghana began, communities along the coast already had some familiarity with the Christian faith and a few literates of varying levels of competence existed. Some of these served as companions or interpreters to the missionaries of that era.[93] For example, the earliest Methodist missionary was

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[91] Ralph Wiltgen, *Gold Coast Mission History, 1471 – 1880*(Techny [Illinois]: Divine Word Publications, 1956) 1 – 25.
[92] K. Y. Daaku, 'European Traders and the Coastal States 1630 – 1720' *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, VIII (1965) 11 – 23.
[93] Debrunner, *A History of Christianity,* 99, mentions the mulatto trader H. Richter, who served as an interpreter to the Basel Missionaries on their arrival in the Gold Coast.

received by a group of African Christians in Cape Coast.[94] However, the second wave of Christian missionary activity gave impetus to the ongoing processes of change stimulated by the presence of Christianity that supplied some of the patterns of life-styles, ideas, idioms, and explanatory models that became important blocks in the building and spread of a trans-ethnic Ghanaian cultural identity-consciousness.

Islam and Christianity vary in respect of the nature of specific elements they contributed to Ghanaian cultural and religious ideas and practices and the extent of their influence. Nevertheless aspects of both that have some affinities with the fundamental religious values of Ghanaians have combined with traditional religious elements to form a religious synthesis that serves as an important ideological base of Ghanaian culture. Prominent among the synthesising elements are the tendency to explain events in the physical realm in terms of spiritual causation; conceptions of wellbeing or otherwise as dependent upon the mood of spirit powers in an invisible world; and the interconnectedness of individuals to the society in an ontological sense, so that evils of the society are believed to affect ultimately the physiological wellbeing of the individual. The long established prominence of traditional diviners and Muslim holy men, known as *malams,* as well as the widespread influence held by Pentecostal/charismatic prophets and prophetesses in both local and national life in contemporary Ghana can be most meaningfully explained against such background.

Thus, it is important that any analysis of Ghanaian political, economic and social practices does not overlook the religious dimension, which, in most cases, supplies the ideological foundation because of which all the others make sense to the majority of the people. In an article dealing with issues of religion and development, especially with reference to Africa, ter Haar and Ellis note the resilience of religion in societies such as those of Africa, and argue for religious resources and other factors of religious nature to be taken into account.[95] In the specific case of Ghana, the practical expression of the widely-noted proclivity of African societies toward inclusiveness with respect to religious matters is in itself a cultural characteristic experienced in most communities.

4.5.5 Colonialism

Processes of social and cultural change stimulated by European presence on the coast beginning from the fifteenth century gradually became intense, expanded in scope, and were long-sustained. The European powers soon got themselves involved in the politics of the ethnic states,[96] often taking sides in local hostilities and supplying arms, sometimes fighting alongside their local allies.[97] Rivalry was intense among the Europeans themselves and they involved the Africans in these feuds. With the departure of the Danes and the Dutch in 1850 and 1872 respectively, the British became the dominant power, gradually extending their influence to the interior and the northern states. The British government itself had decided in 1828 to withdraw from the country due to frustration over its failure to tame the Asante and establish peace between the Mfantse and the Asante. But a group of London merchants wanted to continue doing business and prevailed upon the government to extend limited support in the administration of the castles and the forts.

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[94] Debrunner, A *History of Christianity,* 96.

[95] Gerrie ter Haar and Stephen Ellis, 'The Role of religion in Development: Towards a New Relationship between the European Union and Africa' *The European Journal of Development Research*, 18/3, (September, 2006) 351 - 367.

[96] Daaku, 'The European Traders,' 11-23.

[97] Daaku, 'The European Traders,' 11-23

The government agreed to their request but directed that they should not interfere in the affairs of the local states.[98] However, some order and stability was needed for effective trade and other activities such as missionary work; and the President of the Council appointed to administer the forts and castles, George Maclean, virtually assumed the powers of a Governor. He turned out to be a skilful administrator with great talent in diplomacy,[99] and helped prepare the ground for the establishment of a formal British colonial administration.

The long period of contact with Europeans and its culmination in British colonisation had important implications for the evolution of Ghanaian culture. The enduring cultural influences of the various European nations are discernible in the identification of certain ethnic states, districts and towns with specific Europeans. For example, there are 'British Accra,' and 'Danish Accra;' and 'Dutch Komenda' and 'British Komenda.' An early twentieth century description of Kete Krachi talks about five sections of the town including 'German Krachi' and 'British Krachi.'[100] On the coast, the Africans tended to side with their particular group of Europeans when inter-European rivalries turned violent.[101] It appears that the use of one's father's name as surname emerged within this period and must have been connected with Christian baptism. Other influences of cultural significance are found in European words that have found their way into Ghanaian vernaculars, especially, Akan but also, Ga and Ewe. They include the following: *asopatere* (shoe, *asopatir*, Portuguese), *buuku* (book, English), *krataa*(paper, *charta*, Portuguese), *Fensre*(window, *fenestre*, French), *panoo*(bread, *panis*-Latin; *pain,* French), *saman*(summons, English), *lampuu/dampuu*(tax, *l'import*-French).[102]

The peace created by the British colonial authorities through the combined use of force and diplomacy enabled greater interaction among the peoples and led to the growth of a trans-ethnic national consciousness, especially among the elites. In an atmosphere of relative stability and peace, activities of cultural encounter including trade, and missionary activities such as the promotion of education and evangelisation, could be carried out without too many hindrances.

Cultural encounters engendered by forces associated with the colonial era brought indigenous social structures under severe strain and created the need for new mechanisms for adjustments. Anxieties caused by the belligerent tendencies of the Asante compelled the southern states to forge alliances, both among themselves and with the colonialists. The colonialists themselves needed the cooperation of the Africans to subdue the Asante. Such alliances among the coastal states and their increasing dependence on the British for protection were important stages in the gradual emergence of Ghana as a territorial unity with a common government. Especially, starting from the time of George Maclean, feuding parties, including states, turned to the European officials for arbitration in matters of disagreement.

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[98] Boahen, Ghana*: Evolution,* 37 & 38.

[99] Pope Hennesy, *Journal of the Society of Arts*, May 2nd 1873, 437 cited by S. K. Odamtten, *The Missionary Factor in Ghana's Development Up to the 1880s*(Accra: Waterville Publishing House, 1978) 43.

[100] Article by Rev. Daniel Awere in *Kristofo Nsenkekafo*, (May, 1908) 50 – 53.

[101] Fage*, Ghana*: *A Historical Interpretation*, 51.

[102] Isaac Ephson, *Ancient Forts and Castles of the Gold Coast (GHANA)* (Accra, Ilen Publications, 1970) 79; see also, W. Walton Claridge, *A History of the Gold Coast and Ashanti. From the earliest times to the commencement of the Twentieth Century* (London: Frank & Cass, 1964) 99-100.

The formal establishment and exercise of British colonial authority   and the application of English common law meant the introduction and spread of the values implied by such law.[103] While the policy of indirect rule did not enable any radical transformation of the traditional customary judicial system and the values underpinning it, their subordination to English common law which was secular tended to undermine the aura of sacredness that surrounded customary law processes.

4.5.6 The emergence of new elites
Contacts with European modernising forces led to the rise of new indigenous elites, who became agents for the promotion and spread of new cultural values. Two groups of elites emerged; many of them were mulattos. The first group came to be known as 'merchant princes.' These were mainly merchants who made some fortune and became influential in society, becoming opinion leaders and playing important roles as agents of social change.[104] Such people included the Akrosang Brothers, Edward Barter, Aban, John Kabes, Asomani, Peter Passop and John Konny. Others were Henry Richter, Prince Brew, Tamkloe, Geraldo de Lima, John Korankye, and the Ghartey Brothers. The second group were the intelligentsia. Their strength was the education they had acquired. Quite a number of them had had part of their education abroad. Among them may be mentioned James Bannerman, G. E. K. Ferguson, J. E. Casely-Hayford, S. R. B. Atto Ahuma, J. M. Sarbah, W. E. G. Sekyi, and J. B. Anaman. They championed the modernisation of political and social institutions and spearheaded the protest against colonial rule. Some of this group of elites also advocated integration of the Gold Coast and Asante into one country. Women were part of both groups of elites. Most of these women, especially on the coast, were educated and wealthy, and had considerable influence. Women's activism was organised under the auspices of women's[105] voluntary organisations such as the Native Ladies of Cape Coast or the Ladies of the Gold Coast.[106]

Though small in number, the elites exerted significant influence on the society. The importance of the merchant princes on the coast equalled or even surpassed that of the traditional chiefs in some cases; and the intelligentsia became the opinion leaders, regularly consulted by the various councils of chiefs in matters related to the colonial government. Wealth, western education, and Christianity combined to reshape the thinking of the new elite. They acquired new tools for evaluating not only the conditions of their own indigenous society and its institutions but also the colonial institutions and the behaviour of the officials. Most of them stood for the critical evaluation of traditional institutions and practices and their modernisation, and even their abolition where necessary. Against this background many of the 19th and 20th century elites saw in the colonial enterprise the hand of providence and advocated for a united modern country under the rule of Great Britain, though they were not blind to the injustice inherent in the colonialism. Ekem

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[103] William B. Harvey, *Law and Social Change in Ghana* (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1966) 354.
[104] Daaku, 'Trade and trading Patterns of the Akan,' 168.
[105] Cheryl Johnson-Odim, 'Actions Louder than Words: the Historical Task of Defining Feminine Consciousness in Colonial West Africa,' in: Ruth Roach Pierson and Nupur Chaudhuri, (eds.) *Nation, Empire and Colony: Historicizing Gender and Race* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998) 82.
[106] Kwabena O. Akurang-Parry, 'Aspects of Elite Women's Activism in the Gold Coast, 184 – 1890' *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 37/3 (2004) 470.

Ferguson,[107] C. C. Reindorf,[108] and Casely-Hayford[109] were some of the intelligentsia who promoted such an idea.

Another group, described as a 'non-literate sub-elite,'[110] emerged in Asante. This group was made up of people, most of them non-literate, who had settled on the coast and other places as traders and had become wealthy. Though most of them made their money long before Asante became a British domain, they could not assert themselves openly in Asante. The rigid social stratification in Asante, in which differentiation between nobles, ordinary citizens and slaves was diligently maintained, made it difficult for such a class of people to emerge earlier than it did. In the period before colonisation, the Asante state placed limitations on individual capacity to accumulate capital to the level that they could become as wealthy and influential as the 'merchant princes' of the coast. Several mechanisms were employed to achieve this. According to Arhin they included the imposition of various taxes on goods and compelling emerging rich people to grant loans to traditional power holders.[111] The object of this was to prevent the accumulation of wealth that would make ordinary citizens rivals to the natural holders of power.

With the advent of colonial rule in Asante it became safer for these people, who constituted a distinct class of sub-elite 'between office holders and non-office holders,' to assert themselves and exert influence on socio-political issues. This class of people, who came to be known as *akonkofo* (traders) or *asikafo* (rich people) became agents of social change in Asante. They stood for individual enterprise and advocated individual property ownership. They also promoted European ways learned from the coast, and became critics of aspects of Asante tradition and custom:

> Their dress was distinctive, consisting of cloth thrown over a white vest, a hat, a
> pair of sandals and a walking stick. The *akonkofo* were the first group of Asante
> to build wooden storeyed houses, which were modelled on those seen in the
> coastal towns. They were used to riding in what was then known as
> *hwirihwiridie*, wheel carts, with their wives and children.[112]

This group shared the understanding of progress held by some of the intelligentsia on the coast: the establishment and spread of Christianity, the provision of educational facilities, protection of free enterprise, cessation of inter-ethnic wars, uniting the various provinces into one nation under the rule of Great Britain.[113]

A group of Asantes who took refuge in the coastal towns during the Asante Civil War of 1884-1888 expressed similar sentiments, calling for replacement of traditional customs with Christian

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[107] Ferguson was a surveyor in the civil service of the colonial government. He worked hard, drawing the boundaries of Ghana and signing treaties with various ethnic states, especially in the Northern Territories. He stood for a united country made up of virtually all the regions that constitute modern Ghana.

[108] C. C. Reindorf was a mulatto agent of the Basel Missionaries. He wrote the *History of the Gold Coast and Asante*. He argued for a united country made up of the Gold Coast and Asante under British rule.

[109] Casely Hayford was the first to call for a union between the Gold Coast and Asante to form one country within the British Empire.

[110] Kwame Arhin, 'A Note on the Asante Akonkofo: A Non-Literate Sub-Elite, 1900 -1930' *Africa*, 56, (1986) 26 - 31.

[111] Arhin, 'A Note on the Asante Akonkofo,' 26 -31.

[112] Arhin, 'A Note on the Asante Akonkofo,' 26 -31.

[113] Arhin, 'A Note on the Asante Akonkofo,' 26 -31.

and modern ones.[114] They advocated strongly the unification of the territories under the British Crown, including Asante and all the territories that previously constituted what Arhin and Wilks[115] have called 'Greater Asante.' Thus later nationalists and the independence movement who directed their agitation toward achieving independence for Ghana approached their work with the deep conviction that there were sufficient cultural bonds for the various peoples to be considered as one. Dr. J. B. Danquah, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, and the other nationalists of the independence movement spoke of Ghana as containing one people with one destiny.

Notwithstanding this picture of a united country with one people sharing common values, holding together as one nation has been difficult. From time to time,   inter-ethnic rivalries occur and threaten national cohesion. Perceptions of domination by one tribe in national politics and the neglect by governments have sometimes led to the revival of secessionist agitations.[116] Adu Boahen observes with conviction: 'Ghana is far from achieving a nation-state status and is basically a confederation of various regions with ethnicity or tribalism and ethnocentricism still very active, pervasive and decisive forces.'[117] Nevertheless, it is clear that elements that unite the people of Ghana in terms of cultural expressions are much more than the material things that divide the people.

4.6 Conclusion

In spite of the ethnic heterogeneity that marks the nation Ghana, there are common cultural characteristics that bind them together as one people. The elements that constitute these characteristics have been drawn from various sources including the indigenous religion and culture, Christianity and Islam. Encounters such as migration, trade, inter-ethnic wars and inter-marriages produced new cultural forms and also led to the fusion and spread of cultures. The process of evolution of a trans-ethnic Ghanaian culture has led to more than unity in terms of externals. The rather vigorous intellectual acculturation, facilitated by the introduction of the Bible as the first form of literature in both English and the vernaculars, and its distribution on a wide scale; Christian evangelisation, the establishment of schools, the introduction of newspapers and the application of English common law meant the emergence of a common culture, heavy in form and content. This set the stage also for the development and spread of modern ideas such as human rights, which, since independence in 1957, various stake-holders have been trying to promote through constitutional and other arrangements. In the next chapter, the place of religion in the evolving Ghanaian culture shall be explored.

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[114] Wilks, *One Nation*, 57.

[115] Wilks, *One Nation*, 27.

[116] R. B. Bening, *Ghana: Regional Borders and National Integration* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1999) 342.

[117] A. Adu Boahen, *The Ghanaian Sphinx: Reflections on Contemporary History of Ghana 1972 – 1987*(Accra: Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1987) 30.