

Paul Schauert. 2015. *Staging Ghana: Artistry and Nationalism in State Dance Ensembles*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. 342 pp.

This study based on phenomenology, centered on the lived experience of individual participants and their perspectives, examines how artists in state dance ensembles “manage,” or negotiate, personal creativity and opportunity within postcolonial nationalism. The text focuses on the Ghana Dance Ensemble (GDE), based at the University of Ghana in Legon, and its splinter organization the National Dance Company (NDC). Throughout his chapters and sections within, Schauert clearly reinforces his thesis with examples from artistic directors, dancers and musicians. A Preface lists several multimedia examples that assist the reader with understanding performances described in the text. Each URL has to be typed separately as no online menu is provided, and the quality of the videos is low. Yet, such companion videos bring to life the descriptions and comparisons given.

The Introduction and Conclusion chapters act as bookends for a series of six chapters, each discussing varying aspects of the GDE’s development in chronological order. Schauert gives a brief history of the GDE and summarizes how performers operate independently within an otherwise strict, state-sponsored ensemble. The Introduction presents his thesis and methodologies—using the belly as metaphor, power matrices negotiated through the body, cosmopolitan identity, and Michel Foucault’s technology of self. Most intriguing is his examination of the “dynamics of embodiment,” wherein individuals internalize external sensory experiences that produce bodily ways of being-in-the-world and self-knowledge (pp. 26-27). Throughout the book, Schauert will return to this concept through examples of the ways in which dancers manipulate dance movements within the choreography, demonstrating their agency as they negotiate the state system.

Chapter 1 only hints at the history of nationalism beginning earlier than Kwame Nkrumah’s presidency. In fact, the focus of this book relies on the development of African Personality and Pan-Africanism as expressions of nationalism dictated by Nkrumah and his administration. These directives aimed to institutionalize culture and were realized in the GDE through the artistic director Mawere Opoku and embodied by the performers.

Schauert explores what he terms “sensational staging” in Chapter 2. This term identifies the process of aesthetic transformation wherein cultural projects are created as a blend of the so-called best aspects of traditional local with foreign modern culture. In the GDE this translates as a hybrid of certain Ghanaian dances, primarily those by the Asante, Ewe, and Dagomba, with modifications to the costumes and choreography that would be more appealing to foreign audiences. Tensions and paradoxes develop between Opoku’s desire to please foreigners and the foreigners’ desires for authenticity. Yet, most consider the GDE’s traditional dances to be more authentic than those in communities today because the GDE continues to perform much of Opoku’s choreography based on community dances from the 1960s, while the community performances continue to evolve.

The next chapter deals with how individuals adhere and resist the ensemble’s disciplinary structure based on western military and professional practices. Despite strict punishments of humiliation and extra practices, performers aspire to be part of the GDE for monetary and career development, especially opportunities to travel abroad. Chapter 4 discusses how performers act as cultural soldiers promoting the state, yet also criticize the state—a Ghanaian

cultural pastime. To avoid overt criticism, performers utilize “indirection,” where the individual politely redirects the conversation. The use of metaphors and proverbs achieve this redirection through communication, song, drumming, dance, and visual symbols.

In 1990, the GDE split into two entities—the GDE continues at the University of Ghana and the new National Dance Company (NDC) is created and based in the new National Theatre. Chapter 5 compares the GDE who call themselves the “Originals” and the NDC who utilize the slogan of President J.J. Rawlings regime “Moving Forward.” The two groups represent competing ideas of nation and nationalism through Nkrumah’s rhetoric of “authenticity” and “traditional” (GDE) and President John Kufuor’s ideas regarding modern “development” (NDC) which has evolved into Francis Nii-Yartey’s African contemporary dance choreography.

Chapter 6 is a continuation of the former chapter, exploring the possibilities and limitations on creativity within these ensembles. In the Conclusion, Schauert revisits these ensembles in 2012, five years after conducting his primary research for the book. The NDC is thriving after receiving the bulk of government funding, yet the GDE continues to manage despite the challenges because of performer’s desire to adhere to so-called traditional dances.

This book makes an excellent contribution to the understanding of Ghanaian state dance ensembles and how individuals negotiate their socio-political position and artistic creativity within nation-making ideologies. Like many texts focused on Ghanaian arts today, this book focuses on the independence period with little reference to how nationalism played a seminal role in the arts of the colonial period.

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Kate Skinner. 2015. *The Fruits of Freedom in British Togoland: Literacy, Politics and Nationalism, 1914-2014*. New York: Cambridge University Press. 298 pp.

As Kate Skinner explains in *The Fruits of Freedom in British Togoland*, few people have examined the ongoing consequences of the unification of British Togoland with Ghana. Although Skinner benefits from the work on Togolese integration that has developed since Dennis Austin’s 1960s publications on the Ghana-Togo dispute, she disagrees with David Brown and Paul Nugent that the conflict surrounding Togoland’s status died down in the 1970s (p. 169). This came as a revelation to Skinner following Ghana’s National Reconciliation Commission in 2003-04 and Kosi Kedem’s 2010 petition for Constitutional Review to redress the history of Togoland’s integration. She argues that the way in which British Togoland was integrated into Ghana in 1957 had a long-term impact on the lives and careers of the men and women who campaigned against it. From interviews with former activists or their children, Skinner learned that the failure to achieve *ablode*, the Ewe term for “freedom,” remained a source of resentment.

During their campaign for freedom, British Togolese activists fought to maintain their status as a Trust Territory in order to address the United Nations directly to negotiate for joint independence with French Togoland. Skinner reveals that the struggle to reunite with the French territory had less to do with a shared ethno-linguistic Ewe identity, as the majority of Togoland did not identify with this language and ancestry. Instead, she considers how Togolese people imagined citizenship through their past, particularly experiences of infrastructural development and violence under German rule. Claiming this shared history with French