

# Pride and Shame in Ghana: Collective Memory and Nationalism among Elite Students

Erin Metz McDonnell and Gary Alan Fine

**Abstract:** Based on an original dataset of university students, this article investigates Ghanaian collective memories of past events that are sources of national pride or shame. On average, young elite Ghanaians express more pride than shame in their national history, and they report shame mostly over actions that caused some physical, material, or symbolic harm. Such actions include not only historic events and the actions of national leaders, but also mundane social practices of average Ghanaians. Respondents also report more “active” than “receptive” shame; that is, they are more ashamed of events or practices that caused harm to others and less ashamed about events in which they were the “victims.” We advance the idea of a standard of “reasonableness” that Ghanaians apply in their evaluation of events, behaviors, or circumstances: they apply contemporary standards of morality to past events, but they temper their judgment based on considerations of whether past actions were “reasonable” given the power and material imbalances at that time. Ghanaian students identify strongly with both national and pan-African identities, and they frequently evoke their international image to judge a national event as either honorable or shameful. Ethnicity can be one factor in an individual’s judgment of precolonial events, whereas political party affiliation is the stronger predictor of attitudes toward postindependence events.

**Résumé:** En se basant sur des archives originales rassemblées par un corps étudiant, cet article enquête sur la mémoire collective ghanéenne d’évènements passés

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qui sont source soit de fierté soit de honte pour la nation. On découvre que en moyenne, les jeunes Ghanéens expriment plus de fierté que de honte en ce qui concerne leur histoire nationale, et qu'ils éprouvent plus de honte pour les événements qu'ils ont provoqués que pour les événements dont ils ont été victimes. Nous soutenons l'idée que les Ghanéens appliquent à leur jugement du passé un standard rationnel calqué sur des standards contemporains de moralité, mais que leur évaluation est biaisée par des considérations liées au pouvoir et aux inégalités matérielles actuels. Les étudiants Ghanéens s'identifient fortement aux identités nationales et panafricaines, et ils évoquent souvent une image internationale pour juger un événement national comme honorable ou honteux. L'ethnicité peut être un facteur dans le jugement individuel d'événements précoloniaux, tandis que l'affiliation à un parti est le facteur le plus déterminant dans l'évaluation d'événements ayant eu lieu après l'indépendance. Enfin, nous avons découvert que la jeunesse Ghanéenne ressentait des sentiments de fierté ou de honte non seulement envers des dirigeants nationaux et des événements historiques, mais également envers les comportements du peuple ghanéen lui-même.

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I am a woman and a woman of Africa. I am a daughter of Nigeria and if she is in shame, I shall stay and mourn with her in shame.

—Buchi Emecheta, *Destination Biafra* (1994)

Sankofa: Go back and fetch. Remember the good and the bad of our past that we may make a stronger future.

—Traditional Ghanaian adinkra symbol

## Introduction

Since independence, most African states have struggled to create a sense of “nation” out of the various geographic state boundaries inherited from colonial powers. Though a concrete definition of “nation” is often difficult to pin down, efforts typically point to shared language, territory, cultural traits, and common history. As Hobsbawm (1997) points out, all of these elements—though seemingly tangible in the public imaginary—are remarkably fluid. A critical factor, then, is the way in which history is construed by a nation’s citizens, not only as a series of past events, but also as a shared legacy of “our” past events. Some element of nation-building inheres in the seemingly small shift that takes place when citizens look back on past events—both honorable and shameful—and take some measure of personal, emotive ownership over those events as a member of a larger collective. Whether or not this ownership translates into support for the government, it often produces a love of and meaningful engagement with the nation, or what Michael Herzfeld (2005) speaks of as “social poetics.” We cannot fully understand nationalism—a feeling of ownership, civic responsibility, and emotional intensity—without examining how it intersects with collective memory.

The field of collective memory has been a growth area in studies of the affiliative relationship of citizens and their state. Following from the influential writings of the social theorist Maurice Halbwachs (1980, 1992), there has been a recognition that how individuals and groups collectively create a shared past influences the form of community and nation. As Ernest Renan (1996) wrote in his often-cited essay “What is a Nation?”:

A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form.

Perhaps Renan’s reference to “soul” is overly romantic, but the linkage between nationalism and emotion, both positive and negative, is salient in terms of how one evaluates the moral stature of the state. In this we can see an echo of Benedict Anderson’s (1991) resonant claim that nations reflect imagined communities, a notion that connects ideas about the past of the nation with a collective representation of intimacy (see also Herzfeld 2005:6).

While studies of collective memory have covered many states and have examined mostly patriotic memories, the literature on African nations has focused largely on memories of colonialism, apartheid, and ethnic violence.<sup>1</sup> Little work has examined the nationalist memories of citizens in contemporary African states, however. Citizens of sub-Saharan African nations share many different layers of social affiliation as an outgrowth of the history of colonialism (Mamdani 1996), but our knowledge of how African citizens see their continent, their nation, their region, and (where appropriate) their ethnic group needs to be expanded. In particular, it is important to connect the linkage of emotive evaluations—such as shame or pride—to issues of national identity. The idea of nationalism, according to Gellner (2006), is itself entwined with sentiment, and sometimes even defined by it. Both shame and pride may be particularly important sentiments in Africa, given the image of the continent as a subjugated community (see Solway 1994), even as a sense of national honor is important to many regimes. To this end, we examine the case of contemporary Ghana, focusing our attention on college students, a sample of rising elites with a belief in and access to higher education. This is an especially salient (although demographically specific) group in terms of how a nation-state conceives of itself. As one of the more successful sub-Saharan African states, Ghana is also an interesting focus of study because an expression of nationalist pride is evident. Further, in a democratic system, participants may be more willing to express criticism of the state than if they worry that consequences might result from their responses. Therefore the findings, while

rich, may simultaneously be less generalizable to nations with less salient and expressive nationalist sentiments.

We build upon an ongoing research project of Barry Schwartz and his colleagues, called “Judging the Past,” to examine how citizens respond to events in their national past.<sup>2</sup> What do citizens feel pride about? What are they ashamed of? And beyond this, what do they as citizens feel responsible for? Our study employs a similar logic of analysis and theoretical model of collective memory, while extending the analysis beyond the United States, Germany, Israel, Korea, and Japan. This work also supplies new information about West African national identities. Evidence suggests that pride is understood similarly in Africa as in Western nations (Tracy & Robins 2008), though the specific conditions that evoke the emotions may be distinct. The touchstone for conceptualizing honor in Africa is the work of Iliffe (2005), whose broad historical monograph focuses generally on the attainment of individual honor and the ways in which its social construction differs for women, male householders, heroes, or youth. Our study is distinct in that it attempts to understand how individuals attribute honor to past national events, and it considers not only honor, but also shame. Up until now we have known very little about how West Africans think about their nations, and this article addresses this gap by presenting an important case, while also contributing theoretically to collective memory research.

### **Pride and Shame in the National Imagination: The Politics of Memory**

Issues of pride and shame are particularly relevant for understanding nationalism because of their emotional intensity. Where a sense of national identification exists, citizens may simultaneously embrace their nation as representative of the self, and yet recognize that over time the nation and its leaders have made grievous errors. Of course, citizens do not speak with a single voice, but the idea of nationalism in contemporary nation-states assumes a relationship between citizens and the government. The question then emerges as to what extent individuals hold themselves responsible for the actions of the state in which they are citizens, even if they have had little power in national decision-making.

Ghana is an ideal case study for a comparative project focusing on African national experiences: it is an African state with democratic governance closer to international institutional standards, while at the same time remaining a model of and for other African states. Of course, Africa is a continent of many different kinds of states and “nationalisms.” We recognize that citizens may conceptualize nationalism differently; countries ruled by authoritarian leaders, for example, may have populations with less personal and emotive connection to the morality of the state, because one response to the absence of a deliberative democracy is to withdraw from participation, behaviorally or emotionally. Of course, no case—Ghana or any other—is

fully representative of all African states. Relative to other African states, Ghanaians tend to be stronger proponents of free speech, participate more in voting, and report the highest levels of satisfaction with their democracy (Bratton & van de Walle 2008). Yet in other important ways, Ghanaian society is similar to other African societies. Ghanaians report similar levels of identification with both ethnicity and nation. Ghana is broadly representative of social trust in African states: trust in relatives and other known associates approximates the Afrobarometer sample average, and, like half the countries in the survey, Ghanaians report relatively high levels of trust in other citizens (Bratton and van de Walle 2008). Therefore, we analyze a case of a nation with a strong level of citizen engagement and identification with the state in order to begin to build theoretical understanding of African collective memory more broadly. Research on national identity in failed states will be difficult, but important, future work for understanding how nationalism is constructed through citizens' memories of shameful and proud moments from the past.

Ghana separated from Great Britain in 1957 and was the first sub-Saharan former colony to gain independence. While not without periods of political tension, particularly during the authoritarian rule of Kwame Nkrumah and later Jerry Rawlings, Ghana is widely considered today to be one of the few stable democracies and economic successes in sub-Saharan Africa, and is the highest-ranked African state according to the Ibrahim Index of African Governance. Since the establishment of the Fourth Republic in the mid-1990s, the country has had several elections in which power changed hands without violence or claims of serious corruption. Fifty years of independence have provided the country with enough time for collective memory to solidify and become integrated into the citizens' conception of the nation.

Nevertheless, though Ghana is often touted as a "success story," its history contains events that have earned the country condemnation as well as acclaim in both the international and domestic press—which is important in that media narratives shape how citizens, and particularly elites, conceptualize the state. The range of representations of Ghanaian history that our sample has been exposed to provides for the possibility of considerable variation in responses to national identification. Ghana's history, therefore, provides a particularly interesting background for investigating the politics of memory: how citizens interpret past events, and whether and when they consider themselves personally responsible.

## Methodology

Our survey followed a similar protocol to that employed by research teams participating in Schwartz's multisociety "Judging the Past" study. As in all survey research based on anonymous responses, one must assume that those responses reflected some measure of belief, rather than just publicly

approved behavior. Those students who feel no pride or shame in their nation could answer without consequence or choose not to respond. We do not contend that every student feels great pride and shame. But the responses indicate a strong sense of pride and shame in regard to at least some issues, and the same emotions are found in media discourses as well.

The survey began with a set of open response questions that asked students without priming which events in Ghanaian history were sources of pride or shame for them. For purposes of comparability, questions were adopted from previous “Judging the Past” surveys and applied to the Ghanaian context by focusing on events in Ghana and sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>3</sup> In addition, questions of particular relevance to an African case were generated based on the first author’s ten years of prior research experience in Ghana. This survey was initially administered in a small focus group of volunteers selected through a stratified convenience sample: we selected residents from the dormitory of a Ghanaian research assistant who were heterogeneous in terms of ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic background. At the beginning of the focus group session, the students were asked to generate a list of events that are sources of shame or pride to them as Ghanaian citizens. Researchers did not offer any detailed definitions for “shame” or “pride,” because part of the research project is to understand—through their application to specific events—how Ghanaian students understand and interpret these ideas. The list of events was then discussed by the group in order to evaluate which events were known to a majority of the students. Events that were mentioned by more than one student and that were known to most of the students constituted the list from which specific survey questions were selected that could target theoretical relevance for use in the final survey instrument.

The survey was conducted in a large upper-level political science lecture at the University of Ghana at Legon, Ghana’s flagship university, during spring 2008. The survey was administered in English, which is the customary language of instruction at the university. A total of 215 students completed the survey. We explained to the students that their participation was voluntary and would not affect their grade. Surveys were anonymous; no names or identifying numbers were collected. Students were informed that “the questionnaire is designed to elicit your judgments about Ghana’s past and to enable us to see what connection, if any, exists between these judgments and your opinions on the matter of moral responsibility.”

The survey began with short open-response questions that asked students to identify two “events that make you *ashamed to be a Ghanaian citizen*, and give you a sense of *dishonor, disgrace, and/or remorse*. There are no right or wrong answers; no event is too big or small as long as it makes you feel ashamed as a Ghanaian.” Students were then given a short space to explain why this event was a source of shame or dishonor. Next, the students were asked to identify two “events that make you *proud to be a Ghanaian citizen*, and give you a sense of *honor, esteem, dignity, and self-respect*.” Again we pro-

vided a short space for explanation. These free response questions proved to be particularly illuminative, as the data section will show, both because they did not impose theoretical models of the types of events that should be considered, and because they allowed students to explain the reasoning behind the particular events they selected.

Students were then asked to evaluate specific historic events, based on the information generated by the initial focus group. These included six statements about specific potentially shameful historical events, and seven statements about potentially honorable events. Students responded by agreeing or disagreeing that the events were shameful or honorable on a seven-point Likert scale (with 7 representing "strongly agree" and 1 representing "strongly disagree"). The third section assessed students' orientation toward the relevance of historical events for contemporary Ghanaian life and the general nature of justice in their society. This was followed by a section of general social-psychological questions from other "Judging the Past" surveys about the student's beliefs about moral authority and sense of personal responsibility for collective acts. The fifth section included a set of questions on political attitudes and evaluations of authority, including the extent to which they identified with their ethnic group, region, nation, and as an African. Finally, we requested basic demographic information, including age, year in school, sex, ethnicity or tribe, and the highest level of education completed by their mother and father.<sup>4</sup>

Seventy-two students identified themselves as female and 135 as male. With the exception of a single question (pride in the role of Ghanaians as peacekeepers), there were no significant gender differences, and so we do not discuss gender in this article. In terms of ethnic identification, fifty-seven students indicated Ashanti, forty-five Ewe, twenty-four Fanti, eighteen Ga, four Hausa, and fifty-eight "other." (Of those indicating "other," twenty-seven reported an Akan ethnic group, including Akuapem, Akyem, Wassa, Bono, and Brong, and some wrote in the more general ethnic category "Akan," which includes Fantis and Ashantis among others). Thirteen students specified mixed ethnic heritage and nine respondents declined to mention any ethnicity. The distribution of ethnicities in our sample compared roughly to that found in the 2008 Afrobarometer survey: Akan, Ewe, and Ga populations are found in rough proportion to one another, and each of these three largest ethnic groups has a somewhat larger share of the total sample. Relative to national statistical estimates, less populous groups and northern ethnicities were underrepresented in our university sample, likely because of socioeconomic disparities and geographic distance. However, ethnicity, which is constructed differently in different African populations (see Vail 1989), had only a small effect on most responses, and we discuss it only when relevant.

Students at the University of Ghana at Legon are not a representative sample of the Ghanaian population, and this sample limits our conclusions about Ghanaian citizenship in general, as is true for all focused samples.

These young men and women are the future elites of the country. Still, they are useful for a first study of this type in that they are particularly likely to be aware of and sensitive to the important moments of Ghanaian history, and perhaps as future representatives of the nation, they may be more sensitive to how the broader public responds. They are likely to be more invested in the Ghanaian state and in the image of Ghana overseas than the population at large. Further samples, as well as intensive ethnographies based on occasions of commemoration, will be crucial in expanding our understanding of the reactions of Ghanaian citizens to their national identity.

## Findings

We asked survey respondents to rate on a seven-point scale their feelings of being “ashamed to be a Ghanaian citizen,” or feeling a sense of “dishonor, disgrace and remorse,” in response to six issues: (1) Ghana’s inability to prevent colonization; (2) Ghana’s status as a Highly Indebted Poor Country; (3) the significant influence of international organizations and donors on Ghana’s policy decisions; (4) Ghana’s political history of military coups; (5) the participation of Ghanaian tribes in the slave trade; and (6) the 1982 political assassination of former presidents and high court justices.

According to the results, Ghanaians are most acutely ashamed of what Ghanaians have done, not what was done to them. In this sense, Ghanaians are similar to Western students, but differ sharply from Asian students. International research on different cultural orientations to shame find that Asian students report more of what we term “receptive shame,” that is, shame for their inability to prevent things that were done to them (Schwartz & Kim 2002). Where memory cultures are characterized by high levels of receptive shame, individuals locate shame internally and engage in “self-blame” for actions taken by others, particularly actions by others that render them in a subservient material or symbolic position. Korean students, for example, report feeling ashamed that they were colonized by the Japanese. By contrast, Ghanaians do not feel dishonored that they could not prevent colonization, with more than a third of the sample strongly disagreeing with this question. However, Ghanaians indicated shame at the ongoing policy influence of foreign donors. This result could be interpreted as humiliation over failure to control one’s own destiny, a form of “receptive shame.” However, we argue that Ghanaian orientation to such “receptive shame” should be understood according to their sense of what is “reasonable” in the historical context and given the impact of Western models of education and religion on African identity. Reading the survey and free-response sections together suggests that these young Ghanaians claim that their nineteenth-century predecessors cannot have been expected to resist the superior weaponry and resources of the invading British, but that their modern government should reasonably be able to resist the contemporary international policy pressure. Their sense of receptive shame is mediated by consideration of



whether material and power imbalances at the time the event occurred render the Ghanaian response “reasonable” given the context, or conversely, shameful because more could have been done to resist.

In sharp contrast, the two events about which the respondents expressed the most shame were both related to actions: Ghanaians’ historical participation in the slave trade and recent incidents of political violence.<sup>5</sup> Both of these questions also showed the lowest standard deviations of all the shame questions, indicating a higher level of consistency in respondents’ sentiments.

Responses to seven questions asking about national pride and feelings of honor, esteem, dignity, and self-respect suggested that, overall, Ghanaian students feel more pride than shame. When they were asked whether “on balance the bad (immoral) parts of Ghanaian history outweigh the good,” the responses overwhelmingly rejected this proposition. Students agreed that “Ghanaians tend to think too much about the mistakes of the past.” We asked for feelings of pride about: (1) Yaa Asantewa’s defense of the Golden Stool from British invaders; (2) the Black Stars’ strong performance in the 2006 (soccer) World Cup; (3) the Ghanaian military’s reputation for successful peacekeeping missions in Africa; (4) Ghana’s status as the first colony to gain independence in Africa; (5) Kwame Nkrumah’s pan-Africanist leadership in the independence campaigns of other former colonies; (6) the conduct of Ghanaians in the recent democratic elections; and (7) the value of the new Ghanaian cedi (US\$1.00) after redenomination. Six of the seven pride questions received a higher rating than any of the six questions about shameful events (only the equality between Ghanaian and U.S. currencies received a somewhat neutral response).

Perhaps, given the importance of sport as a reflection of national identity, it was not surprising that the students expressed the most pride in their national soccer team’s success in the 2006 World Cup. As the BBC Sport Service noted in an article on June 22, 2006, it was the country’s first appearance in a World Cup, where they became the only African team to advance out of the first round that year, and only the sixth African team to ever do so. (The survey occurred prior to the Ghanaian success in the 2010 World Cup, where the team beat the United States in one of the elimination rounds.)

The other events that students agreed were strong sources of pride referred to Ghanaian leadership on the continent: being the first independent colony, leading peacekeeping operations, and supporting a pan-African identity. Thus, pride was linked significantly not only to internal events, but even more strongly to Ghana’s status compared to other African nations: the degree to which Ghanaians are the outstanding citizens in their global “neighborhood” (Cerulo 1995). This was also evident in the students’ agreement with the question, “Every time fighting breaks out in another African country, I feel more proud that Ghana has never had such violence.” A sense of outward orientation was also evident in the relative

**Table 1. Top ten free-response categories for shame, by number of respondents mentioning the category in either response**

<b>Response Category</b>	<b>N<sup>a</sup></b>
Politics	71
International influence	41
Poor development	27
Women's issues	26
Health & Environment	26
Colonization	23
Violence	23
Racism	20
Slavery	14
Indiscipline <sup>b</sup>	14

<sup>a</sup> Note: 215 respondents, each answering two free-response questions, for a total N of 430 responses. The 285 responses comprising the top ten response categories covered slightly more than 66% of the total responses

<sup>b</sup> "Indiscipline" was the word most commonly used in responses in this category, which refers to both a lack of regard for the rule of law and a disregard for the informal norms of polite society.

sense of shame: the event for which the respondents expressed the most shame was Ghanaians' historic participation in the slave trade. Though this occurred before Ghana's inception as a nation, it is the event with the most global gravitas. Ironically, it is also the source of much tourism and economic benefit, as people come from around the world to visit the monuments and historic sites of the slave trade (some of which are designated UNESCO World Heritage sites).

A similar but subtly distinct picture of Ghanaian collective pride and shame emerged from the analysis of the free response questions (see table 1). Many of the free responses also suggested that a "reasonableness" standard was in place for receptive shame. In other words, the respondents seemed to judge whether, or to what extent, it was reasonable to hold the nation and its citizens responsible for shameful acts. This expands on Illiffe's (2005) work on honor, suggesting that shame, too, is based not on a universal code, but rather on a localized and changeable value system. For example, some students retrospectively attributed shame to events that might not have been considered shameful by contemporaries (such as slavery), but they also demonstrated a deep consideration of the material and power context of past events and mitigated their judgments accordingly. For example, many responses expressed what we categorized as "shame

over international influence” on Ghanaian politics, which included Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) status, the acceptance of foreign aid, the encroachment of foreign culture and goods, and “the docility of politicians toward the West.” The free responses explaining why these examples were sources of shame captured the sense of shame vested in the failure to resist external forces when resistance should be within an actor’s power and material abilities.

Colonization, the sixth most commonly cited shameful event, might seem to contradict the reasonableness standard for receptive shame. However, when respondents explained *why* colonization was shameful, they did not focus on colonization as a purely receptive and historical event—as in “I am ashamed that Great Britain formerly subjugated Ghana.”<sup>6</sup> Rather, colonialism was explained as a source of shame (1) because of what it signaled about Ghanaians themselves, or (2) because it resulted in shameful contemporary practices (racial inferiority) and conditions (underdevelopment). For example, one respondent commented that “Ghanaians were ruled by foreigners and this implies that Ghanaians were not able to manage our own resources.” The explanations that focused on the aftermath of colonialism were almost evenly divided between two points of view. Roughly half focused on a colonial legacy of feelings of racial inferiority: for example, “It makes Ghanaians value Europeans more than their fellow Ghanaians” and “The history of colonialism reminds me of being inferior to the white coloured race.” The other half focused on retarded development, explaining that colonialism had “stolen” human and material resources and resulted in slower growth and development. For example, respondents said that the “majority of our human resources were taken away from us,” “colonialism . . . set us backward in development,” and “this event took away the natural resources of the country and has contributed to the economic system and the reliance and overdependence on western nations for development.”

The most distinct feature of the Ghanaian memory culture, as compared to other national memory cultures documented, is the focus on everyday mundane social practices as a source of national shame. In contrast to Schwartz et al.’s findings on Korean and American students, who tended to focus on large momentous events, in the free response questions many Ghanaian students tended to allocate shame to commonplace events. In some cases commonness itself seemed to be the source of the shame: electricity or water shortages, for example, were cited as a source of shame *because* they are so common. Some responses suggested that frequent utility shortages are shameful because their recurrence is an indicator of an underlying political ineffectiveness: the shortages regularly recur, are predictable, and yet have not been corrected.

Other commonplace events mentioned as shameful illuminate the students’ elite social positions, straddling the local and the international. The students find some commonplace practices shameful because they reflect

a low level of education among the general population or are considered embarrassing according to cosmopolitan international standards. For example, the fifth most common category, "Health and the Environment" consisted primarily of complaints about commonplace acts including widespread littering, public urination, and "indiscipline," such as driving carelessly. As with water shortages, some respondents saw poor waste management as a reflection of the government's ineffectiveness, as in the attribution of shamefulness to "the inefficient way or manner of managing waste in . . . our various communities . . . [and] how the authorities in charge leave this waste around." But many respondents focused instead on what the commonplace events reveal about everyday Ghanaians: for example, "People just litter around wherever they find themselves and [this] does not help improve the sanitation of the country which at the end of the day brings a disgrace to the whole nation." Some of these responses evoked a reasonableness standard, suggesting that "better" action should be possible, but their countrymen chose not to do so, either because of a "bad attitude" or an unexplained disregard for public health information made broadly available in awareness campaigns. One respondent said that "Dumping of filth around principal streets . . . makes me feel very bad and ashamed as a Ghanaian because of our bad attitude towards good health," and another wrote that poor sanitation is shameful because "most cities and towns are still dirty even after all the education gotten."

However, these Ghanaian youths were just as likely to find pride in how average Ghanaians conduct their daily lives, particularly in acting hospitable, peaceful, and patriotic. One respondent proud of "hospitality and tolerance" explained that "the two things account for the relative peace Ghana enjoys which results in it being an island of peace in the sea of conflict in the West Africa sub-region." Another student who expressed pride in "Ghanaian hospitality" noted, "It gives a good image of Ghana and encourages more people to visit Ghana as a result of the friendly nature of Ghanaians." Others were proud of Ghanaian "patriotism" or "nationalism." This included general sentiments of nationalism, but also specific, concrete actions. One student explained that "Ghanaians are proud of Ghana and can hoist her flag very high everywhere on the continent," and another wrote that "in the recent tournament . . . one would not go into the streets of Accra without seeing an individual clad in national colours."<sup>7</sup> Similarly, some respondents attributed aspects of the honorable "national" reputations for peace and strong democracy to the actions of most Ghanaians. One respondent explained, "The peace that continues to prevail upon the country is partly due to the fact that Ghanaians are peace loving people." Another was proud of "our peaceful nature" which makes it possible "to conduct peaceful elections."

As the comments above suggest, the free responses showed a trend that was not obvious in the survey responses alone: Ghanaian students are intensely conscious of their international reputation. This proved to be a

**Table 2. Top ten free-response categories for pride, by number of respondents mentioning the category in either response**

Response Category	N <sup>a</sup>
Soccer	91
Democracy	68
Hospitality	37
Nationalism & Unity	27
Culture	27
Peace	25
Independence	25
Golden Jubilee	17
International Leadership	17
Development	11

<sup>a</sup> Note: 215 respondents, each answering two free-response questions, for a total N of 430 responses. The 345 responses comprising the top ten response categories covered slightly more than 80% of the total responses.

very common explanatory trope: sixty-four responses evoked some kind of international image, reputation, recognition, or comparison when explaining why a particular event was a source of national shame or pride (see table 2). Several students expressed pride in Ghana's successes in football specifically because it has raised awareness of Ghana: "It has heightened Ghanaian recognition across the globe and most people now recognize Ghana as a country"; "Ghana became dominant in the foreign media"; "The World Cup in Germany in 2006... made Ghana known to many who might not have heard of the country."

Part of the pride (or the shame) vested in international appearance involved explicit comparison. A handful of respondents who cited soccer as a source of shame, rather than pride, explained that they were ashamed because Ghana had lost to a particular team when they should have won. Conversely, those proud of soccer also sometimes explained their pride by evoking explicit international comparison. This included pride in the ranking of competing soccer teams they had bested: for example, "It was the first time Ghana went to this tournament and we were able to beat world no 2, i.e., Czech, and world no 5, that is, the USA." But the pride in sports performance also included pride in the relative *world power* of the countries behind the opposing teams; for example, "The Black Stars were able to beat the world super powers like the USA," and "The US being a superpower, I felt very happy the team was able to beat the US." Pride by comparison to

others was vested not only in the identity of opponents, but also in superlative performance relative to other African countries. For example, respondents explained that they were proud of the Black Stars performance in the World Cup because they were “the only African team to qualify to the second round.”

In other areas as well, international comparison was occasionally mentioned as a source of shame (e.g., one respondent was ashamed of “military interventions in Ghanaian politics,” explaining that “at independence, Ghana was far ahead of Malaysia and other countries but now Malaysia can give development aid to Ghana”), but explicit international comparison was most commonly used to explain why an event was a source of pride: “Ghana is known to be one of the grand countries who have reached commanding heights in the democratic system”; “Most of the countries we share borders with are experiencing political instability, this makes me very proud to be a Ghanaian”; “The successful maintenance of our political dispensation brings us dignity and self-respect among other nations.” The most common international comparison was to other countries on the African continent. For example, respondents expressed pride in being the *first* African nation to gain independence from colonizers. They said they were proud of Ghanaians’ reputation for being “a leader” and “an example” for peace and democracy in Africa. And they were proud of events where Ghana’s international reputation contradicted negative stereotypes of African nations: “Africa as a whole is known to be a conflict ridden zone but in Ghana we have been so far lucky to avoid such conflicts and instead called upon to help resolve other countries’ conflict.”

The survey responses also made it clear that these Ghanaians, at least, see themselves as intimately connected to other peoples and nations on the African continent, even more so than to their specific ethnic groups. We asked whether respondents considered themselves as a member of the world community, Africa, Ghana, the region of Ghana that they were from, and their ethnic group. Not surprisingly, Ghanaian was named as the strongest identity, but African was second, followed by citizen of the world and the region.<sup>8</sup>

When asked whether other African troubles brought *them* a sense of shame and dishonor, Ghanaian students tended to answer affirmatively: large-scale violence in the Ivory Coast and Liberia, political scandals in Kenya and Nigeria, economic underdevelopment, and starvation in Africa are all shameful memories for them as Africans. Therefore, while we cannot demonstrate this continental emphasis in other nations, our data reveals that at least among university-educated students in Ghana, the identity as African is powerful. By contrast, respondents espoused the least identification with their ethnic group; for example, nearly three-quarters of respondents agreed that “It is important that the traditions of all of Ghana’s tribes be incorporated as part of ‘Ghanaian’ traditions.” Although this sentiment might be connected to their university enrollment or their previous success in the secondary school system, both of which encourage the mixing of

all national ethnic groups, the ethnic-integrationist sentiment of Ghanaian nationalism was evident in the students' responses.

In Africanist research, ethnicity and political party (which are often correlated) tend to be discussed synonymously. By contrast, in the general social science literature, ethnicity may receive some attention but political party affiliation is not often treated as a relevant dimension of collective memory. Yet our data show that on particular measures political affiliation was quite salient to whether respondents found past events shameful, often a more powerful predictor than ethnicity. The increased salience of political party affiliation to memory may be a function of the relatively stable Ghanaian party system. On balance the data suggest that respondents' interpretations of preindependence events are significantly different based on their ethnicity. By contrast, their interpretations of postindependence events are not sensitive to ethnicity, but are significantly different on the basis of reported political party affiliations. We interpret this as the effect of attributing agency or "ownership" over certain events on the basis of ethnic groups in the preindependence era, because ethnic groups were the relevant domestic source of political action. By contrast, postindependence events can be, and evidently are, attributed to specific political parties. For example, those identifying with any of the various Akan ethnic groups were significantly more likely to express pride in Yaa Asantewa's historical defense of the Golden Stool against British raiders.<sup>9</sup> The strong tie of the "heroine" to an Akan ethnic group helps make sense of why Akan ethnicity remains significant when party affiliation is included in the model. Political party was not a significant predictor of pride on this question.

By contrast, many of the national events that took place after independence are associated with a particular political administration, and occurred within the lifetime of students' parents or the students themselves. Thus the question asking whether respondents are ashamed that Ghana declared itself a Highly Indebted Poor Country in 2001, a topic of hot debate and rancor at that time, could be associated specifically with the administration of John Kufuor, who is both an ethnic Ashanti and a member of the New Patriotic Party (NPP).<sup>10</sup> The question about the shameful history of military coups applied broadly to the rapid series of coups in the 1970s, but it also included the military coup that brought Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings to power, a prominent National Democratic Congress (NDC) politician of mixed Scottish and Ghanaian (Anglo-Ewe) descent. The "political assassination of former presidents and justices of the high court" referred to a more specific 1982 event, generally associated with Rawlings's term as chairman of the Provisional National Defense Council (which later became the NDC), although Rawlings has publicly denied official responsibility.

In a model that included only ethnicity, Ewes were statistically more likely than other groups to disagree that a past history of coups and the political assassination of former presidents and justices was shameful, whereas Akans were more likely to agree that coups and political assassinations were

shameful. However, this apparent correlation with ethnicity disappeared once we controlled for political party affiliation.<sup>11</sup> Contestation over the meaning of the event appeared not to center on who was to blame, but on different interpretations of whether the event should be considered shameful at all. NDC supporters were considerably less likely to view the political assassinations as shameful, with more than a third of respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. By contrast, all other respondents saw the event as highly shameful. The statistically significant relationship between party affiliation and feelings of shame over coups and political assassinations thus diminished the apparent correlation to ethnicity; though these administrations can be dually characterized by ethnicity and party, party had the most salience for events that occurred after independence. One interpretation of this pattern is that national-scale events are initially multivocal, with multiple viable interpretations and identifications, suggesting a contemporary politics of memory. Which identification comes to dominate subsequent memory of these events may depend on which groups act as reputational entrepreneurs to claim agency for themselves, ascribe agency to others, or distance themselves from blame (see Fine 1996).

## Discussion

In this analysis, we have focused on the responses of Ghanaian informants, rather than providing a detailed comparison of Ghanaian feelings of shame and pride in light of European, American, and Asian attitudes according to the studies of Schwartz et al. However, Ghanaian emotional responses to national affiliation were closer to European and American responses than to those from Asian subjects when considering their own responsibility for shameful actions. In making cross-national comparisons, the Ghanaian case highlights several important dimensions: (1) the interpreted graveness of the event itself, which may be the extent to which an event is seen as an exemplar of deeply held national values or a violation of the same; (2) the extent to which events—both shameful and honorable—had direct effects outside of national borders; (3) the time since the event occurred, perhaps particularly whether events are considered part of recent “lived” history or more distant history; (4) whether the event occurred before or after statehood; and (5) the distinctness of the event in the world-historical timeline.

In making cross-national comparisons, one must attend to how events differ in the extent to which events are viewed as truly grave and significant. For example, some might assert that in contrast to Germany’s actions in the Holocaust, the systematic destruction of the American Indian population, and Japanese aggression toward their Asian neighbors, the shameful events of pre- and postindependence Ghana were simply less grave. Even Ghanaian involvement in the slave trade, surely important and part of national memory (as evidenced in several memorial World Heritage sites



where slave ships departed), occurred long before the establishment of a national Ghanaian identity. Its historical distance, coupled with the lack of embeddedness in a national narrative prior to the existence of “Ghana” as a political entity, makes such shameful acts less dramatic than a more recent governmentally sponsored genocidal policy might be for citizens of such states. Thus we expect that attitudes differ somewhat in African countries with instances of government-precipitated violence after the inception of statehood, such as Sudan and Rwanda.

However, when we compare the Ghanaian case to nations outside of Africa such as the United States or Germany, Ghana’s peripheral placement, economic marginality, the relative brevity of the time since independence, and the effects of this marginal placement in terms of its position in established accounts of global history may also mean that compared to some other countries, the nation has fewer specific events to be proud of in light of the world historical narrative.

Still, our sample of university students does reveal that Ghanaians share collective memories that connect them in bonds of history. They reveal both pride and shame in their national past (with pride predominating), and the sources of pride and shame are their own national actions. The data thus suggest that patriotism in Ghana is real and powerful. Further, the Ghanaians in the study revealed a supranational pan-African sensibility, perhaps as a lingering effect of the teachings of Kwame Nkrumah or a function of the specific cultural placement of these cosmopolitan students. These Ghanaian students defined themselves as citizens of Africa far more than as citizens of a particular ethnic group. Given the often-claimed stereotype of Africans as “tribal” in their political or cultural orientation, this finding is significant. Students, as the future elites of the nation, were more likely to be transnational than local in their orientation: they express themselves as cosmopolitans, rather than locals.

## Conclusions

This study has explored the relation of collective memory to the conceptualization of nation among Ghanaian university students. We show that, on average, these elites report more pride than shame in their country’s past. They demonstrate a relatively high level of attention to how particular events shape the country’s international reputation when explaining why an event is honorable or shameful. Similarly, on average these students also demonstrate a high level of identification with a continental African identity, surpassing their identification with ethnicity and second only to their national identity. We also show that these Ghanaian youth are ashamed and proud not only of national leaders and momentous events, but also of mundane aspects of daily life: they are ashamed of poor sanitation and “indiscipline” among Ghanaians, and intensely proud of Ghanaians’ reputation for hospitality to strangers.

This article is a step in a larger project of conceptualizing how citizens of African nations understand their present and their past. This undertaking, however, is no easy task. With the diversity of African nations, and the diversity of ethnic and linguistic groups within each nation, the possibilities in content and experience of social memories are large (see Olick and Robbins 1998). But memories—both positive and negative—can lead to community cohesion or disarray. Some memories bolster democracy and nationalism in demonstrating that citizens have some memories of which they are proud. These need not remain only memories, but may also become the basis for celebrations or commemorations—patriotic moments of gathering—or monuments whose material reality ties peoples together.

Collective memories of pride and shame, when shared, contribute to a sense of citizenship and belonging. Certainly we can appreciate this when citizens feel pride about the same things. Pride is likely not only emotional, but also revealed in common social behaviors and tied to moments of commemoration. Often these affects and beliefs are shaped by government practices, a process creating citizens—and outcasts—through the constructions of governmentality (see Dean 2009). Feelings of national loyalty and distance are situational, and filling out a survey is one way in which these feelings come to the fore. Shame is somewhat more complex, as it reveals not only the recognition that something “bad” has occurred, but also that one should feel somehow responsible for it, if only as a citizen. Shame is different from the mere recognition of evil or vice. When manifested in a shared sense of shame, past events have contemporary repercussions. To be sure, citizens do not feel shame constantly, but when considering their history this recognition is often evident and in some circumstances leads to actions: demands for apology, amends, or, in extreme cases, reparations. Democratic regimes are distinctive in that they allow for expression of both pride and shame without framing such expressions as detrimental to national unity. A vibrant press, part of a democratic society, further enables discussions and debates over the propriety and extent of pride and shame. For both shame and pride, nationalism is filtered through the emotions of recalling the past. Nationalism is more than a citizenship card; it is a sense of belonging, of identifying with a larger social collective. This is true even if sentiments of belonging and identification are not always uppermost in one’s consciousness, but may be sparked by events, discussions, or news accounts. In feeling a shared sense of responsibility for past events of that collective, citizens begin the project of creating a shared stake in the nation’s future conduct.

Yet such memories can be problematic. The giant statue of African renaissance, erected in early 2010 in Senegal, has led to calls for a governmental change because of its excess and irrelevance. Likewise, some of our respondents felt Ghana’s “Golden Jubilee” ceremony celebrating fifty years of independence was a source of great pride, while others were ashamed because of lavish excess when the money could have been used to help the

country's needy. Further, tourist sites such as Ghana's Cape Coast Castle may be important for international tourism, including diasporic return (see Bruner 1996), but the sites of Ghanaian involvement in the slave trade serve to remind Ghanaians of their difficult past of which some feel ashamed. These sites of memory (see Nora 1996) may be valuable for their economic benefits, but they also generate shame. Their very utility keeps these memories alive. Of course, not every African nation has such a locally difficult, but globally important, memorial site. Ghanaians gain economic benefits from tourism but must simultaneously publicize their own shame.

Ultimately African collective memory and emotions of nationalism constitute a rich research site and topic, given the diversity of nations and also orientations to nationalism, regionalism, and an image of a "glorious past" (Vail 1989:x). This is the basis for comparative studies, not only of the standard macropolitical dimensions that stratify the continent—i.e., democratic and authoritarian nations, or between former British and French colonies—but also as a means of examining the reverberations of particular local political trajectories. To understand the richness of the intersections among collective memory, emotive response, and nationalistic belonging, future research must utilize both survey and ethnographic methods to construct a detailed and nuanced portrait of the social memory of past events and national identification. This study has attempted to expand our understanding of the emotive dimension of belonging and nationalism by examining both pride and shame, but future research might also fruitfully expand this array of emotive responses, for example, exploring distinctions between honor and glamour in African societies (see Griswold, McDonnell, & McDonnell 2007). We have traced the outlines of how elite university students expressed their identification with nation and particular past events, highlighting the connection of collective memory to nationalism and social psychological outcomes. Importantly, we bring findings from an African case into dialogue with a larger international comparative research program, generating theoretical insights. Ghana is a theoretically fruitful and rich case, as is our sample of a rising elite, but other African cases where wounds are still raw may also teach us much about how citizens identify or withdraw, and how nations remember and forget.

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## Notes

1. On colonialism, see Cole (2001); Ranger (1983); Likaka (2009); Apter and Derby (2010). On apartheid, see Dubin (2006); Stolten (2007); Teeger and Vinitzky-Seroussi (2007). On ethnic violence, see Malkki (1995); Alexander, McGregor, and Ranger (2000).
2. For more on the Judging project and its methodologies, see Schwartz and Kim (2002); Schwartz and Heinrich (2004); Schwartz, Fukuoka, and Takita-Ishii (2005); Fukuoka and Schwartz (2011). This series of work by Barry Schwartz and collaborators is the central body of work examining the emotive content of cultures of memory, particularly focusing on the dual nature of national pride and shame. Our study is modeled after Schwartz's studies, and we benefited from communication with Schwartz in the construction of our survey instrument. However, we are not formally affiliated collaborators with Schwartz et al.
3. The full questionnaire is available upon request.
4. Full data are available upon request.
5. Though Ashantis and Fantis are often specifically implicated historically in the slave trade, ethnicity was not a statistically significant predictor of feeling shame. None of the ethnicity variables had a pairwise correlation to this question above 0.10.
6. And about half of the respondents who mentioned colonialism left the section for explanation blank.
7. It is worth noting that before the 2006 World Cup successes, Ghanaian political party flags generally outnumbered displays of the Ghanaian national flag in both rural and urban environments. Since that success in the World Cup, and the accompanying production (mostly in China) of inexpensive Ghanaian flag materials for sale on the world market, there has been an explosion of displays of the Ghanaian national flag.

8. In this regard, elite Ghanaian university students reveal their pan-Africanism and cosmopolitanism and may differ somewhat from the general Ghanaian public. The Afrobarometer (Bratton and van de Walle 2008), a nationally representative survey, suggests that the majority of Ghanaians (58.9%) see themselves as equally identified with both nation and ethnicity (though this survey asks the question very differently from the way ours did, so comparison is difficult).
9. Yaa Asantewa was an Ashanti woman who defended the Golden Stool—a stool that was the Ashanti's traditional symbol of authority and autonomy—from British forces.
10. In simple models, NPP members were less likely to be ashamed of the HIPC declaration, though NDC membership was not significant. Interestingly, the question on whether HIPC was a source of shame showed the most persistent ethnic effects, with Akans significantly less likely to agree and Ewes significantly more likely to agree, even when political party was controlled for.
11. However, when it comes to sources of pride, Ewes were significantly less proud of conduct in past elections and the redenomination of the cedi, an effect that persisted even when political party was controlled for. We are cautious in interpreting the ethnic differences: because of the small sample size, it is difficult to tell whether this is a robust and persistent finding.