The Noise Silence Makes

Secularity and Ghana's Drum Wars

MARIAM GOSHADZE

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Cover art: Ga ritual drums, 2016. Courtesy of the author.

For Ida and David

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A Note on Orthography

Ga language belongs to the Kwa branch of the Niger-Congo language group. It was first written down in the Latin alphabet in 1764 and has been revised several times since then, with the most recent revision in 1990.

The Latin-based alphabet includes twenty-six letters and three additional letter symbols: Ɛ/ɛ, Ŋ/ŋ, and Ɔ/ɔ. Longer vowels are represented by doubling or tripling the vowel symbol. Tones and nasalization are not represented. There are eleven digraphs and two trigraphs in the Ga alphabet:

gb—/ɡb/	ŋm—/ŋm/
gw—/ɡʷ/	ŋw—[ŋʷ]
hw—/hʷ/	sh—/ʃ/
jw—/ɟʒʷ/	ts—/ʨʃ/
kp—/kp/	shw—/ʃʷ/
kw—/kʷ/	tsw—/ʨʃʷ/
ny—/ɲ/	

A Note on Pronunciation

To assist the reader with correct pronunciation, below is a phonetic guide to the Ga words used frequently in the text:

akutso /aˈku.ʧɔ/, pl. akutsɛi /aˈku.ʧɛ.i/

blematsɛ /blɛˈma.ʧɛ/, pl. *blematsɛmɛi* /blɛˈma.ʧɛmɛi/

gbatsu /gbɑː.ʧu/, pl. *gbatsui* /gbɑː.ʧú.i/

Hɔmɔwɔ /hɔ̀.mɔ́.wɔ̀/

jamɔ /jà.mɔ́/

jemawɔŋ /dʒɛˈma.wɔŋ/, pl. /dʒɛˈma.woʤ̂i/

maŋtsɛ /mãˈʧɛ/, pl. /mãˈʧɛmɛi/

ŋmaadumɔ /ŋmaˈaduːmɔ/

ŋmaakpamɔ /ŋmaˈakpamɔ/

ŋmɔ /ŋmɔ/

ŋyɔŋmɔ /ɲɔŋmɔ/

shikpɔŋ etsii /ʃikˈpɔŋ ɛtsi/

wɔŋ /wɔŋ/, pl. *wɔji* /wɔʤ̂i/

wɔyoo /wɔjoʊ/, pl. *wɔyei* /wɔjei/

wulɔmɔ /wuˈlɔmɔ/, pl. *wulɔmɛi* /wuˈlɔmɛi/

Introduction

Altered Ontologies and Reversed Paradigms

My very first visit to Accra in 2014 marked a point of departure for my research. I was wandering around the suburb of La Paz with a friend when I was struck by the realization that the city was buzzing, humming, panting, and puffing all along our promenade. I had never encountered a city that breathed so loudly. My friend was dismissive: "This, ooooo, this is nothing. This month is quiet because of the ban." I was intrigued. "The ban? What ban?" "The Ga ban on noise for Hɔmɔwɔ, you didn't know?" he asked, clearly amused by my ignorance. While I was familiar with the Ga community of Accra and their harvest festival, Hɔmɔwɔ, I was unaware of the ban on noise. The news was riveting since it meant that the followers of the Ga religion were not only regulating the soundscape of the metropolis, but they were also doing so far from the city center, where their authority was concentrated. This reality flew in the face of the established scholarly narrative that

Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity had swallowed up Accra's religious market, prevailing over traditional religions and permeating almost every dimension of urban life via "a centrifugal dispersion of audiovisual signs" (Meyer 2006a, 299).

I was first introduced to traditional religions as a subject of scholarly interest in a course taught by my MA advisor, Robert M. Baum, at the University of Missouri–Columbia. In fact, my enchantment with Paul Stoller's *In Sorcery's Shadow* (1987) served as my portal to the religious life of Africa. As uncomfortable as it is to admit this today, enchantment is the word that most accurately describes my frame of mind at the time. Having reflected extensively on my own positionality since then, I realize that my background played a decisive role in my scholarly journey (Madison 2005; Reinharz 2011). I grew up in post-Soviet Georgia, where the institutionalized religiosity of the Orthodox Church of Georgia dictated the patterns of the new national identity, and my public-school education was heavily flavored with the Christian ethos. My religious horizons gradually expanded as my studies took me to various parts of Europe, yet I remained profoundly unprepared for the allure of the mysterious world that Paul Stoller chronicled. The reality of traditional religions did not dawn on me until my visit to Accra in the first year of my doctoral studies. I had come to explore the notorious witch camps in the northern part of the country, a topic I had been working on for several years. Much to my surprise, I was ready to sweep all previous plans under the rug the moment I learned of the ritual noise restriction that affected Accra. It was the ordinary omnipresence and unassuming mundane flavor of traditional religions that attracted me most. The urbanity of the Ga religious presence also proved decisive in rectifying some of my own misconceptions about traditional religions. Far from the remote, isolated rural backdrop that prevailed in the early anthropological imagination, traditional religions flourished in the heart of Ghana's administrative, financial, and entertainment center. Thus began my long journey of learning about the history, culture, and language of the Ga community, attending services of Pentecostal/Charismatic churches throughout the city, and talking with government officials about noise-abatement politics in Ghana. The research adventure would span fourteen months of fieldwork and several visits in 2014–2018, during which I would learn that the Ga religion shows no signs of waning in the face of the Pentecostal/Charismatic presence. With time, I also began to experience a sense of familiarity with the postcolonial struggles of Ghanaians that echoed my own feelings of inferiority and discomfort derived from the perpetual sense of flux so familiar to the citizens of postsocialist countries. Perhaps the most difficult part of my research was breaking down the distance between the sense of affinity I felt for my interlocutors on a sociopolitical level and the Euroamerican identity

immediately ascribed to me because of the color of my skin. Nonetheless, I like to think that the combination of the shared struggle to come to terms with the neoliberal order and disenchantment with the state as caretaker—attributes postcolonial and postsocialist countries share—paved my path to better appreciating the complexities of Ghanaian modernity.

As Ga elders will tell you, the tradition of the ban on drumming—the official name of the ritual noise restriction—dates far back in time, before Ga people settled the territory of present-day Accra and brought with them their customs structured around the Hɔmɔwɔ festival. Since then, the Ga have remained faithful to the tradition, annually inaugurating their sonic fast in preparation for their sacred holiday. Even as Ghana transitioned into a modern nation-state, the Ga community continued to be granted the privilege of extending the ritual restriction on noise to the entire city, including commercial and religious institutions, because they are the official guardians of Accra's lands under customary law.

At least that was the case until the late 1990s, when the Ga community's right to shape Accra's soundscape was challenged by Pentecostal/Charismatic churches. Against the backdrop of a rapid influx of labor migrants and media liberalization, the newly popular churches refused to reduce their sonic footprint to honor the ritual silence.[1] This act of defiance should be seen in light of the salience of sound in Pentecostal/Charismatic services and its central role in establishing the monopoly of this strand of Christianity over Accra's public spaces. In the late 1990s, the long-standing antagonism between the Ga traditional community and the Pentecostal/Charismatic congregations in Accra reached a critical point. Vexed by discriminatory comments and disdainful treatment from popular born-again pastors as well as numerous socioeconomic issues plaguing the community, the Ga community retaliated with physical attacks on wayward congregations. The state responded by resurrecting a 1995 noise abatement bylaw and mobilizing a Nuisance Control Task Force, a special interinstitutional body whose mandate was to enforce the bylaw about noise abatement in the city. The newly enforced sonic control was publicized as a remedy for the problem of noise pollution, yet the issue was settled in favor of the Ga community, as the regulations were enforced only during the ban on drumming.

In West Africa, writes Mamadou Diouf (1999), "the city has long been thought of exclusively in terms of the colonial ethnology of detribalization, rural exodus, and the loss of authentically African traits and values" (44). In what follows, one of my main objectives is to rewrite the prominent account of traditional religions as being out of place in contemporary urban Ghana or as the evil twin of Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity, sustained only for their function as the undeniable Other. In recent literature, African religions in urban contexts

have received some attention, but mostly through their entanglement with Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity or Christianity more broadly. With respect to Ghana, the works of Birgit Meyer (2015), Marleen de Witte (2008a, 2008b), Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu (2005a, 2015), and Paul Gifford (2004) are particularly noteworthy. While I appreciate the visibility that their perspectives accord to traditional religions, I think that it is also crucial to produce counternarratives that present these religions as authorities that dictate the terms of engagement with Christianity. Despite significant shifts in the study of religion, there is a persistent tendency to push traditional religions to the margins, to the domain of the local, suspended outside the common trajectory of history. Achille Mbembe (2001) argues that even as we are increasingly trained to discern the traces of missionary and colonial prejudices, "the corpse obstinately persists in getting up again every time it is buried" (3), tenaciously finding its way into new approaches and theories. Recentering traditional religions demonstrates their engagement with modern urbanity and, more important, counters the implicit hierarchization of religions still evident in the study of religion.

This book places the Ga community and Ga religious life at the center of the discussion via a close reading of the ban on drumming as a historical, religious, and above all, political phenomenon that has provoked its share of turmoil in contemporary Accra. The confrontations surrounding the ban serve as the nucleus of the book, from which I branch out into the past and the future to tell a story about colonial techniques of power and the role of religion in modern secular Ghana through the lens of the transformation of noise-control procedures. The narrative begins with the rise of official noise-abatement initiatives in Europe and North America in the late nineteenth century and their spread to colonial urban centers with the goal of managing specific sociocultural groups. Monitoring the sonic profile of traditional communities exploited epistemic differences between the colonizer and the colonized in order to produce docile religious subjects. As I unfold this history, I juxtapose these top-down ventures with the bottom-up ritual techniques of silence embedded in the Ga custom. I chronicle how noise-control strategies transformed from an instrument of Christocentric colonial hegemony in the British Gold Coast into a quasi-religious structure jointly supervised by the Ga community and the independent Ghanaian state. While the colonial tactic of noise control was deployed to oppress and control the local population, contemporary measures to regulate noise represent a blend of customary and secular notions of order that the Ga used to counter Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity and reassert their guardianship over the city. I suggest that the state-assisted imposition of the ban on drumming on the territory of Accra cannot be disengaged from its discursive designation as part of the

custom or culture that exists in tandem with the Christocentric rhetoric of the Ghanaian public sphere. The arrangement, I argue, typifies Ghanaian secularity, a layered epistemic and sensory order that blends the customary, community-centered orientation that favors shared religious space and shared custodianship of land, and secularism, a Christocentric institutional and ideological regime that pushes traditional lifeworlds either to the bottom of the religious hierarchy or outside it altogether as nonreligion or culture.[2]

Unlearning the Classical Paradigms

A remarkable feature of the Drum Wars—as the media astutely dubbed the noise-related conflict of the late 1990s—was the new noise-abatement patterns they spawned. As extensive literature on noise ordinances suggests, similar initiatives elsewhere have been mostly instituted by the state in the name of communal well-being and peaceful cohabitation (Bijsterveld 2001; Cardoso 2017; Sykes 2015). Ideologically, they echo the post-Enlightenment hierarchy of senses, and structurally, they tend to be biased against the poor and vulnerable factions of society. In line with the established paradigm, a religion with the most power and recognition is accorded the privilege of expressing its sonic identity and imposing restrictions on other religious communities. Consider, for instance, the opposition to the Muslim *adhan* in various European countries because of the alleged noise it generates, even though church bells are seldom perceived as a nuisance (Tamimi Arab 2017). Adopting a *longue durée* perspective has led me to argue that the legislation and monitoring instruments the Ghanaian state instituted in the aftermath of the Drum Wars replicate the noise-abatement strategies of the colonial administration, but with one major difference. The colonial tactic was deployed to repress and control a range of human and nonhuman personhoods perceived as rowdy, barbaric, and demonic. Over time, the technologies came to be indigenized, mutating into a mechanism that the Ga community, which had been the targets of noise control in the colonial context, have deployed against the most dominant religious movement in Ghana. In the aftermath of the Drum Wars, the state allowed adherents of the Ga traditional religion to control and regulate the most popular expression of Christianity for one month each year, signaling a paradigmatic shift in the classical model of nuisance control. My treatment of the subject was inspired by Brian Larkin's (2008) account of the use of radio technologies in Nigeria and his conclusion that technologies imposed by colonial power structures transcend their designers' imagination, often mutating into unruliness. Although Larkin is specifically concerned with the media infrastructure the British introduced, I reconceptualize

the notion of technologies as sound-control techniques the colonial authorities used to manage, discriminate against, and ostracize the Gold Coast population.

The mobilization of formerly top-down noise control techniques to challenge the power of the most popular religious movement in Ghana represents a significant shift in the previously recognized patterns of sonic authority, especially in reference to religious entities. At first glance, it is also a counterintuitive development, given the status, authority, and state support that Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity enjoys in contemporary Africa. Public discourse in postcolonial, Christian-majority African countries is structured around an implicit hierarchy of religions that presents Christianity as a civilized and advanced rendering of religious belief. Traditional religions, on the other hand, are relegated to the lowest rung of the religious ladder or are even pushed out from the taxonomy to become trapped in the category of culture.

To translate these hierarchies into the classical model of sonic authority, the closer a religion is to the top of the given evolutionary taxonomy, the more control it is granted to express its sonic identity and to impose restrictions on other religious communities (see Bailey 1996; Payer 2007; Thompson 2002; Yablon 2007; and Weiner 2014). Through the lens of history, the hierarchization of sounds on the spectrum between quiet and loud has often coincided with how proper or improper these sounds were deemed, with louder sounds classified as noise when they were emitted by social, religious, or cultural Others. "Noise does not exist in itself," writes Jacques Attali (1985), "but only in relation to the system within which it is inscribed" (26). Alterations between noise and silence allow groups to communicate their identity and erect boundaries (Oosterbaan 2009). In fact, noise-abatement regulations were essentially born out of the desire of the upper class to safeguard its mental "refinement" from the sonic manifestation of socially, culturally, religiously, ethnically, and racially defined spaces (Bijsterveld 2008; Scales 2016; Sykes 2015). The most recent expression of this tendency is the association of disadvantaged, low-income neighborhoods with unbearable noise in the imagination of the secular middle class and the subsequent noise-abatement campaigns in urban areas (Chandola 2012).

In light of the missionary and colonial legacy and of the religious hierarchies inherent in secularism as an ideological and institutional regime (de Roover 2011), Christianity is publicly recognized as the epicenter of modern religiosity in contemporary Ghana. Thus, within the auditory hierarchy, it should be licensed to dominate the soundscape and dictate the sonic terms. What we see instead is that traditional religions and Christianity occupy opposite ends of what Isaac Weiner (2014, 57) calls the "auditory evolutionary matrix," but this time the prevailing archetype is reversed. With the encouragement of the

state, the Ga community acts as the guardian of silence, conventionally a sign of "mature faith," and Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity insists on producing excessive noise, the historically recognized trait of the barbarous Other. Sound thus emerges as a historically contingent category, expanding and retracting, shifting and transforming in shape and form in relation to the tangled power dance between those who produce it and those who monitor it.

Isaac Weiner (2014, 20) writes that the production of sound is not a matter of actual capacity to make a loud noise but rather the implicit or explicit right to do so. Against all odds, the champions of "progressive" sensibilities in Accra— Pentecostal/Charismatic denominations—became a sensory nuisance while representatives of traditional religions, a category that in the conventional paradigm would be designated as noisy, emerged as the principal advocates of a tempered urban soundscape. In this new framework, members of the Ga community, despite their lower socioeconomic status, find themselves side by side with the middle- to upper-class groups who insist that religious activities should not disturb others in a "civilized" society.[3] In light of a global recognition of Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity as the most formidable presence in the religious market of Africa, I suggest that state authorization of a traditional religion to control the aural template of a megapolis like Accra is an unmistakable indicator of the weight of that religion in Ghana's sociopolitical affairs. In this framework, silence is political since its production requires taking command of noise, an inherently subjective category contingent on the distribution of power between the involved parties (Ballinger 1998). Along the same lines, the fact that Pentecostal/Charismatic noise remains the subject of complaint intimates that the actual authority of those congregations is by no means absolute.

In the course of my research, I became aware of the fact that the strong sensory dimension of my inquiry meant that conversations with my interlocutors and my attendance at various events could produce only a fragmentary picture of what was really happening. "As part of our listening positionality," writes Dylan Robinson (2020), "we each carry listening privilege, listening biases, and listening ability" (7). A full engagement with the situation called for reflexivity about my own listening positionality—a recognition of the varieties of acoustic perceptions and their rootedness in cultural and historical landscapes (Howes 1991, 2005; Classen 1993, 1997).

This involved comprehending not only cross-cultural acoustemologies— Steven Feld's prominent notion of sound as a "habit of knowing" (2012, xxvii)— but also a mindfulness of cross-world sonic exchanges understood in terms of a "ritualized cohabitation and relationship between humans and nonhumans" (Etikpah 2015, 344). Shifting sensory gears proved to be decisive in taking

seriously the sonically determined relationship between human groups and between human and nonhuman actors, both of which were at stake in managing the conflict. Settling in Adabraka, a Ga neighborhood in the central part of Accra, for the longest stretch of my fieldwork was also invaluable for fathoming both the existential and political meanings behind the city's sonic happenings. Adabraka is composed of an eclectic mix of Ga and non-Ga residents with equally eclectic aural tracks. At specific points each day, I heard the sound of the *adhan* from a nearby mosque, and in the early morning, the racket of the neighboring Pentecostal/Charismatic churches repeatedly reminded me of the rationale behind the Drum Wars. On weekends, I shared the soundscape of my neighbors' weddings and child christenings, celebrated with vigor in makeshift tents on the streets, and I jubilated with soccer fans as their team scored a goal at the Sahara soccer field next to my street. The proximity of Adabraka to the nucleus of Ga traditional authority was especially beneficial during the ban on drumming as I could capture the gravity of noise restrictions in the daily life of Accra's residents. To put it in the words of Alex Waterman (2017, 118–19), I "listened to how I listen" more frequently and this alertness enveloped my other sensory experiences as well.

ANOTHER KEY IMPETUS for my project is a close examination of the nature of secularity in Ghana. In 1999, as an amendment to his earlier position, Peter Berger (1999), one of the early proponents of the secularization thesis, declared that the world was "as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some ways more so than ever" (2). Recognizing that religion was far from the brink of extinction, scholars in the late twentieth century set out to reconceptualize its role and status in the contemporary world (Casanova 1994; Cox 1984; Stark and Rainbridge 1987). The critical dissection of the secular as a category and secularization as a historical process has meant scouting out new pathways for interpreting the multiple secularities that thrive in non-Western contexts. Although the complex relationship between religious institutions and the state around the world has been substantially theorized, the configurations of power on the ground are rarely addressed. Furthermore, the subject of the secular remains grossly underexamined in Africa. In the few existing accounts, authors usually focus on the relationship of Christianity and Islam with the state, while little attention is paid to understanding the role of traditional religions in the public sphere.[4] This is partially because of the discursive culturalization of the latter, a process rarely recognized in studies of the secular in Africa (see Meinema 2021).

In what follows, I aim to remedy these shortcomings by shedding light on Ghanaian secularity. I should clarify that I distinguish between secularism and

secularity. In this book secularism refers to an archetypal epistemic and institutional framework derived from the European model and secularity denotes the reality on the ground in a given geographical context, including institutional, discursive, and epistemological dimensions. I engage with these concepts through a close reading of the ban on drumming, which I believe represents a convenient entry point for the study of secularity in Ghana. Ghanaian secularity is a blend of secularism, imported without much refinement or adaptation to the existing ideological and power structures, and customary understandings of the role and place of Ghana's three religions, along with the associated human and nonhuman actors. Taking inspiration from Shmuel N. Eisenstadt's multiple modernities (2000) and Monika Wohlrab-Sahr and Marian Burchardt's multiple secularities (2012), I treat the secular reality of Ghana as an alternative, viable version of being secular. Going beyond the narrative of deficiency and incompleteness that presents non-Western secularities as flawed copies of the Western original allows us to appreciate the cultural specificity of the current setup and to unsettle the vision of secularism as the engine behind the "civilizing" mission of the West (Cady and Hurd 2010; Göle 2010).

The response of government agencies to the Drum Wars illuminates Ghanaian secularity: the state collaborates with traditional authorities in the administration of the Accra metropolitan area yet publicly grants Islam and (especially) Christianity a superior status. In violation of the country's constitutionally mandated right to religion, the Ga traditional religion is endowed with significant authority to co-manage the city's soundscape. Collaboration between the state and customary religious authorities is made possible by the amended public status of traditional religions as a common culture that all citizens can claim. The arrangement is further facilitated by Ghana's parallel system of justice that marries modern constitutional law and the plurality of customary laws. While Christianity and Islam are managed as religions, traditional religions are commonly regulated by customary law, a practice rooted in Ghana's colonial and missionary past. As missionaries undertook to invalidate the indigenous world view, they reframed it as culture, demarcating it as a religiously neutral and therefore less threatening context (Meyer 1999). In the postindependence era of cultural revival, neutralized culture was a building block of the new national identity (Coe 2005). The culturalization of traditional practices, a process that historically aimed to marginalize those practices, now endows traditional authorities with the sociopolitical leverage to function as prominent actors in the Ghanaian public sphere.

The ban has received some scholarly attention following the hype surrounding the attacks on Pentecostal/Charismatic churches in the late 1990s. The perspectives offered by Justice A. Arthur (2017), Marleen de Witte (2008a), and

Rijk van Dijk (2001) were particularly valuable in the course of my research. While none of these studies address the two central concerns of this book, they have helped expand my understanding of the purview of the ban on drumming and its impact on Ghanaian society. Van Dijk's (2001) elaboration of the Christian use of music to oppose the traditional mandate was instructive for my conceptualization of the struggle against all expressions of backward culture in light of the globally oriented Pentecostal discourse. My discussion of Ga and Pentecostal/Charismatic theologies of sound benefited greatly from Marleen de Witte's (2008a) nuanced claim that beyond the political role of sound in the conflict as a tool for gaining symbolic control over Accra, it is construed similarly by the conflicting parties as a fundamental force that can both thwart and foster spiritual advancement. By far the most informative source—given the rich ethnographic data and multifaceted analysis of the conflict—is the only monograph on the subject written by Justice A. Arthur. Published in 2017, Arthur's work served as an important resource for fact-checking some of the information I collected and for fine-tuning my findings. As with the other authors mentioned here, Arthur's primary concern is the interfaith confrontation, which he analyzes through sociological theories of boundary making and social conflict. Despite our distinct interests, Arthur and I agree on the indispensable import of the Drum Wars in uncovering the pertinence of traditional religions in contemporary Ghana.[5]

Religion, Culture, Custom

Before moving forward, I would like first to elaborate on the terms "culture," "custom," and "religion" as I use them in the course of the book, and second to emphasize the ultimate inadequacy of these terms in wholly capturing the lived reality of intercommunal relations. While religion as a universal category tends to be taken for granted in popular discourse, it has been rigorously questioned in the academic study of religion. A range of scholars including Timothy Fitzgerald (2000), Jonathan Z. Smith (2004), Tomoko Masuzawa (2005), and Russell T. McCutcheon (1997) have repeatedly challenged religion as a universally disguised rendering of Euroamerican theological notions of religiosity. In Ghana, missionaries were the first to introduce the term, but it did not gain traction until the colonial period. Even so, as the tension between the categories of culture and religion in the context of the Drum Wars reveals, the term continues to be only haphazardly applied to traditional lifeworlds. Since the declaration of independence in 1957, the state has officially recognized three religions that are central to the country's history—Christianity, Islam, and traditional religions. Yet it is rare to find a common word for these three religions in local

languages, which often distinguish between traditional practices, on the one hand, and Christianity and Islam, on the other. The Ga community, for instance, uses the word *jamɔ*, roughly translated as "to worship," to delineate practices associated with Christianity and Islam, and they speak of *kusum*, interpreted as "custom," when referring to their own practices. The etymology of the word *kusum* is debatable. Although the Ga-English dictionary suggests that it derives from the Portuguese "costume," meaning "custom," my Ga interlocutors argue that it is a combination of two Ga nouns—*ku*, which officially stands for "heap, pile" but is understood as "group," and *su*, which means "nature, character, color, appearance" (Kropp-Dakubu 2009). In the latter interpretation, then, *kusum* is the overall character or nature of a community that permeates all aspects of life. In order to properly convey these semantic and ideological intricacies, I use the term "traditional religions" only when speaking of indigenous lifeworlds in the post-1957 context, when the label was officially recognized in public and state discourse, and I talk about "traditional practices" or "traditional lifeworlds" when referring to the colonial era.

Even then, however, I am aware of the challenges that the term "traditional religions" poses for scholars of African religions. On a fundamental level, the adjective "traditional" has been criticized for intimating obsoleteness, immutability, and geographical boundedness as opposed to the novelty, progress, and outreach of world religions.[6] Since formerly used terms such as "primal religions" or "primitive religions" are widely recognized as not only derogatory but also grossly inaccurate, some scholars have turned to the label "indigenous religions" instead. I find this choice counterproductive since "indigenous" evokes very similar associations as "traditional" with an even more pronounced sense of locality. Moreover, the use of the term is often quite general and derives from the world religions model, in which indigenous religions are simply a leftover, "residual category" (Shaw 1990, 341). As Bjørn Ola Tafjord (2013, 226) has noted, the problem is that the majority of the so-called indigenous religions are not similar at all; they ended up in one category because Europeans perceived them as the generic Other.

The term "traditional religions" comes up against similar obstacles but has a richer, more complex history in the context of Africa. To start with, it derives from "African Traditional Religion," a term Geoffrey Parrinder introduced in 1954 that African scholars of religion popularized in the 1960s and 1970s in an attempt to give due recognition to African religiosity as a single, pan-African belief system framed in terms of the world religions paradigm (Mbiti 1970; Idowu 1973; Opoku 1978). This meant emphasizing, or even ascribing, attributes that are central to the Judeo-Christian cosmology to African religions, including the supreme God, prayer, and the prominence of belief over practice (Horton

1984). Since these authors were leading members of the postindependence intellectual elite who played a key role in the construction of African identity in the context of nationalist and pan-Africanist movements, their use of the adjective "traditional" had rather positive implications. The incentive, after all, was to devise a positive and respectful label that would suggest that African Traditional Religion "consists of that which is handed down from generation to generation as an integral part of life" (Shaw 1990, 342). A return to traditional lifestyle for inspiration in the nation-building process was considered as the only viable way to extricate Africa from colonial epistemologies. The inadvertent by-product of the concept of African Traditional Religion, however, was not only the Christianization of African religions but also purist readings of them as part of an ancient, unchanging wisdom.

In contemporary Ghana, "traditional religion(s)" is the term most commonly used in reference to African forms of religiosity in state and popular discourse as well as within Ghana's numerous traditional communities. For lack of a better alternative and to avoid neglecting contemporary usage of the term by the Ga people themselves, I refer to Ga religiosity throughout the text as traditional religion. However, when speaking of the multiplicity of these religions across the country or the continent, I use the term in the plural because a wide variety of religious expressions are accommodated under this umbrella. At times, as I look into the Ga insights on religion and culture, I also resort to emic categories, fully recognizing that a complete reliance on emic terms does not resolve the challenges mentioned.

The concept I routinely use in conjunction with religion, especially when speaking of the legal dimension of the conflict, is culture. Much like religion, culture is a widely debated construct that does not stand for a coherent system of meanings. It is rather a constant effort to form, negotiate, mobilize, contest, and challenge these meanings, which in turn are solidified in institutionalized, materialized, and bodily forms (Lentz 2017). While acknowledging its shortcomings, I stand with authors who see value in working with the term (Brumann 1999), if only to observe how the meanings behind it are appropriated, contested, shaped, and delineated in the relevant discourses in this book. In state discourse in particular, culture refers to a set of practices, habits, beliefs, values, and life forms that are collectively recognized as constitutive of the traditions and knowledge of past generations that must be preserved and perpetuated for the sake of reinforcing national identity. Tradition, an analogous construct, is the building block of culture; it, too, is invented or imagined as a timeless, static product (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Ranger 1993). Cultural programming has been central to the construction of Ghanaian national identity since the declaration of independence, as evidenced by the establishment of the Institute of African Studies and the

Arts Council of Ghana (renamed the National Commission on Culture in the 1980s) during the presidency of Kwame Nkrumah. The legal dimension of this particular understanding of culture is customary law, which seeks to safeguard the traditional lifestyle of various communities in Ghana. Culture as a national heritage, as Michael Bomes and Patrick Wright (1982) propound, is an over-simplified articulation of the past since it insists on historical timelessness and "projects a unity which tends to override social and political contradiction" (264). While the general sentiment within this national discourse is to celebrate and preserve culture, its treatment is also bogged down by the imperial under-standing that culture belongs to the domain of the primitive and backward. This leads to attempts to refine and neutralize the historically bounded culture via acts of reimagination in order to make it fully compatible with modernity.

Scholars recognize that there is a profound connection between religion and culture, but the exact nature of the relationship is debated. While some suggest that religion and culture are fundamentally opposed to one another (Niebuhr 1951), a position that is articulated in Pentecostal/Charismatic rhetoric, others argue that religion can transcend culture, as it encompasses the mundane and per-ceptible as well as the extraordinary and the imperceptible (Albanese 1999). More commonly, however, religion is seen as a subset of culture and religious studies as the study of religious cultures (Hulsether 2005). Indeed, culture is also the cat-egory to which traditional religions are often assigned in the public discourse. Practically speaking, this can be explained by the conceptual overlap between the two terms because traditional practices fail to neatly correspond to the academic definitions of religion, which are modeled after the Judeo-Christian template (see Fitzgerald 2000; Masuzawa 2005; and Smith 2004). Moreover, culturalization of traditional religions dates back to the hierarchy of religions and its associated discourse on civility and barbarity (Fitzgerald 2007). Since religion in this frame-work was associated with Christian truth, traditional lifeworlds were viewed through the prism of falsity. The lack of a pronounced religious value, however, did not mean that local practices had to be disregarded; instead, they were re-framed in terms of culture. In the current context, while the state officially rec-ognizes traditional religions, there is a tendency to refer to their public expres-sion as cultural. Such culturalization not only downplays the religious fervor of the practices in question but also removes them from real time as displays of premodernity (Guss 2000, 14). In this discourse, culture and custom are usually used interchangeably. While culture is a more established yet also more ambig-uous term in the official state, international, and nongovernmental discourse, custom is commonly used in a positive context by the traditional communities or is more narrowly associated with customary law.

Contemporary discourses of culture date back to the missionary enterprise on the Gold Coast. Cati Coe (2005) divides the missionary treatment of culture into two forms—the romantic notion of history and traditions and the efforts to preserve them and the notion that traditions, which ultimately constitute the totality of culture, are an obstacle to being modern. While both of these approaches can be recognized in state discourse, it is the second one that we find in the Christian reading of culture as the realm of the devil and a domain that is in complete opposition to the progressive and civilizing impulse of Christianity (Steegstra 2005). The polarization of culture and modernity intensified with the rise of Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity and its clearly pronounced hostility to anything traditional. Within this discourse, traditional religions are false belief systems that are part of culture and must therefore be eliminated if Ghanaians are to move forward.

Finally, as I demonstrate in this book, the meaning behind these concepts is always situational and thus merits close work with the discourses prominent in the research context. The Ga community is incredibly versatile in its use of the categories of religion, culture, tradition, and custom in relation to its practices, changing the designations depending on the context and purpose of its engagement. The Drum Wars are an example of how the realization that practices attributed to culture have more freedom to navigate the public sphere than practices attributed to religion, which led to the framing of the ban on drumming as a cultural rather than a religious operation. As elsewhere, the traditional leaders of the Ga community are aware of the political power nested in these terms, so their semantic choices often correspond to the specific goals they have set for the community.[7] In the process of interaction and negotiation, the categories merge, overlap, and borrow from each other. By highlighting the inaccuracies and imperfections of these terms in capturing lived experiences, I hope to encourage readers to be critical of them when considering intercommunal relations in a modern state.

Who Let the Noise Out?

The analysis that follows centers on three players who were involved in the Drum Wars and the subsequent negotiations. My research strategies with these actors alternated between participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and informal conversations. The majority of these interactions took place in English, the official language of Ghana and the preferred mode of communication for many Pentecostal/Charismatic congregations. My interactions with the Ga community transpired in a blend of English and Ga, and I often relied on the kind assistance of my friends and companions for discussions that were ex-

clusively in Ga. By virtue of my modest reading skills in the language, I was able to transcribe the interviews I recorded with the help of my Ga language teacher, Adokwei Sacker. To corroborate the collected data and validate my conclusions, I also consulted with prominent Ghanaian scholars and Ga public figures.[8] I was also invited to attend numerous rites associated with the Hɔmɔwɔ festival, opportunities that I always welcomed with great pleasure and curiosity.

Since I will be referring to the three key actors in the Drum Wars in general terms in the course of the book—the Ga traditionalists or the Ga community, the Pentecostal/Charismatic churches, and the state—I should delineate these categories for the reader. The Ga traditional community consists of *wulɔmɛi* (priests), *maŋtsɛmɛi* (chiefs), *wɔyei* (priestess mediums), musicians, and devotees of the Ga religion as well as members of the Ga Traditional Council (GTC) and all individuals from the six Ga townships who endorse the position of the Ga traditional authorities. The GTC is composed of priests and chiefs from selected royal houses and is the proxy for the Ga community in the public domain. Following the Drum Wars of the late 1990s, the GTC has been coordinating Ga participation in the regulation of the ban on drumming. It provides storage space for confiscated instruments, publishes statements about the impending ban, and is the main liaison with the state and Christian representatives.

The reader will notice that when speaking of the Ga, I use the term "traditionalists" interchangeably with "Ga community." Both the public and Ga individuals ubiquitously use the label "traditionalist" to refer to those who subscribe to the traditional community as defined above. In a general sense, a traditional community is a group of people who occupy one of Ghana's traditional areas, territories under the authority of traditional councils established under the Chieftaincy Act of 1970 (Act 370) (Atiemo 2015, 158). My use of the term "traditional community" is not intended to suggest that there is a separate analytical category with fixed content that represents this group. Instead, I see this designation as a discursive tool that is useful for referring to people who claim the Ga identity via associated enactments, productions, and contestations of the Ga culture.[9]

The term "traditional community" does not fully capture "the reality of physical mobility, overlapping networks and multiple group membership" (Lentz and Nugent 2000, 9). Individuals who represent the Ga traditional community can and do often regroup based on other identity markers. This is evidenced by the fact that the Ga community was not unanimous in its interpretation of the Drum Wars. In particular, individuals who identified as Pentecostal/Charismatic Christians felt that the Ga backlash in the late 1990s was excessive. Nonetheless, I continue to refer to the community as a unit because by and large, the communal consensus that Ga traditional authority in Accra was being unfairly singled out

for disrespect, especially compared to other regions of Ghana, repeatedly out-weighed the dissenting voices. Although traditional communities are frequently conceptualized as ethnic groups in public discourse, I prefer to avoid references to ethnicity due to the associated conceptual challenges. Cultural primordialists trace the concepts of ethnic groups or tribes to Africa's precolonial past, but constructivists such as Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1983), John Iliffe (1979), and John Lonsdale (1994) maintain that the parameters of the category are historically defined—in this case, in the course of the colonial enterprise—and that we should be wary of its implications in the contemporary context.

On the other side of the conflict is the collective category of Pentecostal/Charismatic churches in Accra. This group encompasses pastors, ministers, and congregants of this particular brand of Christianity, with a focus on the churches that were attacked during the tensions.[10] When speaking of the historical role and self-positioning of the broader Christian community with respect to the conflict, I also have in mind representatives and members of mainline churches[11] and ecumenical bodies directly involved in the interfaith dialogue, such as the Christian Council of Ghana and the Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council.

The term "Pentecostal/Charismatic" was coined by David Barrett (1988) in reference to the third-wave Pentecostal renewal, which includes both Pentecostal and Charismatic denominations. Barrett divides Pentecostalism into three waves: the first wave originated in 1741 and is known as Pentecostalism, the second wave dates to the 1906 Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles and is generally recognized as the Charismatic movement, and the last wave emerged around 1970 (119). As the fastest-growing Christian denomination, Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity has received ample scholarly attention in the context of Ghana, Africa, and the world at large.[12] Scholars of African Christianity celebrate the movement because of its bottom-up, localized, and Africanized nature, which, in their view, determines its capacity to cleanse the continent of the legacy of the Western missionary enterprise and inaugurate Africa as an important actor in global Christianity (Kalu 2008; Omenyo 2005). The rapid proliferation of the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement has been chalked up to a lengthy list of variables, including the alleged inability of Western Christianity to meet the needs of Africans (Idowu 1965), economic hardship and deteriorating health care systems (Gifford 2004; Sackey 2001), the movement's strong inclination toward a global presence (Meyer 2004a), sanctified consumerism derived from the prosperity gospel (Kirby 2019; Yong 2010), high compatibility with liberal capitalism (Berger 2010; Comaroff and Comaroff 2000; Comaroff 2012), and the movement's focus on entertainment (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005b). Unlike mainline Christian churches, born-again denominations do not have

one supervisory body to guide their interfaith relations and public statements. However, one feature that unites these churches is their ambiguous relationship to traditional religions. On the one hand, they share many attributes with these forms of religiosity, such as a belief in evil forces, a concern for material welfare and healing, and an emphasis on the urgent need for deliverance. On the other hand, Pentecostal/Charismatic churches are almost ubiquitously hostile toward all expressions of traditional religions, including cultural expressions.[13]

Because the Ghanaian state interceded in the wake of the Drum Wars to mend crumbling interfaith relations, it is the third principal actor in the analysis. Within this broader category, I bring together several state bodies involved in negotiating the conflict at various stages, including Ghana's Environmental Protection Agency, the National Commission on Culture, the National Commission for Civic Education, and the National Peace Council. The primary institution of significance, however, is the Accra Metropolitan Assembly, the political and administrative authority of Accra that is part of Ghana's decentralized system of local government and administration. The actions of the Accra Metropolitan Assembly are always coordinated with state policies, and hence when I refer to the Ghanaian state in the book, I usually have this particular institution in mind. At the local level, it is responsible for, among other things, "the overall development of the district," "the maintenance of security and public safety in the district," and "the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage within the district" (Section 12.3, Local Governance Act 936). Most important for the Drum Wars, the assembly inaugurated and managed the Nuisance Control Task Force, a multisectoral group officially charged with ensuring compliance with state-mandated noise-abatement guidelines.

It would be an oversight not to address the shortage of Islamic aurality in the study, since Islam is a key player in Ghana's religious landscape. Much like mainline Christians, Accra's Muslims pride themselves on maintaining cordial relations with Ga traditional authorities, which includes accommodating their traditional religion (Odotei 2002, 27; Owusu 1996, 322). The only attribute of the Muslim sonic profile that figured in the discourse surrounding the ban on drumming was the call to prayer. Even then, it did not enter the picture until tensions escalated, and then always alongside other types of urban noise (de Witte 2008a, 705). My Ga interlocutors often pointed out that their Muslim brethren never contested or disrespected their customary authority and that there was therefore no need to impose constraints on their call to prayer. This situation changed somewhat in the 2010s when Pentecostal/Charismatic Christians began to earmark the early morning *adhan* as a sonic disturbance and their subsequent demands to the GTC that Muslims be subject to the same supervision

as Christians. In response to this pressure, the GTC decided to prohibit the use of loudspeakers for announcing Muslim prayer times during the ban on drumming.[14] However, my conversations with council representatives suggest that the restriction was mostly formal. Given these factors, coupled with the fact that there were no reported conflicts over the ban with Accra's Muslim community, the latter are not included in my analysis of the Drum Wars.

The Guardians of Accra

Before concluding, I should properly introduce the guardians of modern Accra, the Ga, by offering a concise historical profile of the group. Oral tradition suggests that the Ga have occupied the territory of present-day Accra since the fifteenth century. In this respect, they are the quintessential urbanites, a community at the center of Accra's transformation into a cosmopolitan commercial center. There is no consensus on the place where Ga people originated, but scholars generally agree that they came from the east, likely the region of present-day Nigeria, Benin, Togo, and Chad (see Field 1937, 142; Henderson-Quartey 2002, 54; Reindorf [1895] 1966, 5; and Ward 1967, 57).[15] Recently, Ga intellectuals have been particularly fond of the hypothesis that the Ga people originated in Israel or Egypt, a theory that has the merit of inscribing the community into Judeo-Christian history (see Abbey 1967; Omaetu 2006; Amartey 1991; Ammah 2016; and Laryea 2011). The claim is based on the presumed similarities between Ga people and biblical Jews, including the practice of outdooring children, puberty rites, priestly leadership, male circumcision, and resemblances between Hɔmɔwɔ and Passover.

From the time they arrived in Accra, the productive activities of Ga people focused on agriculture, fishing, salt production, and livestock. Gradually, however, the combination of their strategic location and the arid climate of Accra encouraged them to transition to fishing and trade. Soon enough, the Ga people made a name for themselves as skillful intermediaries between Europeans and inland traders. They mastered the Portuguese trade jargon and later taught themselves Dutch and English. Sensing an opportunity to expand their authority, they established a monopoly on trade with Europeans. According to Georg Norregard, "the Accra [Ga people] did not allow the traders coming from the interior to enter into direct trade with the foreign ships, thus they were assured of a substantial profit, often 100 percent or more" (1966, 44–45). In 1677, the monopolistic policy of the Ga Kingdom culminated in a military conflict with the Akwamus and the subsequent loss of command over their lands (Anquandah 2006, 5). In the aftermath, the majority moved inland, while those who were

FIGURE INTRO.1. The Nungua traditional community performing *gbɛje* (path clearing).
Photo by author. 2016.

engaged in trade formed *akutsɛi* (quarters) around the coastal forts and capital-
ized on their role as middlemen. By the end of the seventeenth century, there
were three forts in Ga territory: the Crèvecœur (Dutch), the Christiansborg
(Danish), and the James Fort (English) (Odotei 1995). In 1742, Accra was incor-
porated into the Ashanti Empire, where it remained until the mid-1820s, when
Ga joined forces with the British to defeat the Ashanti (Wellington 2011, 31;
Parker 2000, 29). In the period 1874 to 1880, the city was transformed from the
three largely autonomous Ga townships that flourished around the forts into
the colonial capital of the British Gold Coast.

Owing to their active engagement with Europeans, foreigners have often
viewed Ga people as tainted by the world views and lifestyles of others (Parker
2000). This view has left its mark on scholarship. Despite, or perhaps because
of, their conspicuous location, Ga people continue to be the underdogs of aca-
demic inquiry, which has favored groups believed to be unaffected by European
influence. Consequently, only a handful of in-depth ethnographic studies of the
Ga community exists, most notably by Margaret J. Field (1937), Marion Kilson
(1974), and E. A. Ammah (2016).

The groups that established the six Ga townships—Ga-Mashie, Osu, La, Tes-
hie, Nungua, and Tema—allegedly migrated via distinct routes at various times
and maintained relative authority despite various political alliances (Omaboe

2011). British colonial policies, including the Town Councils Ordinance (1894), the Public Lands Ordinance (1876), the Native Jurisdiction Ordinance (1910), the Municipal Corporations Ordinance (1924), and the Native Administration Ordinance (1927), sabotaged Ga chiefly authority (Quayson 2014, 43). To smooth the way for uninterrupted governance, the colonial administration also attempted to elevate the Ga-Mashie *maŋtsɛ* to the position of the paramount chief. The Ga-Mashie community found it hard to disassociate itself from the superior reputation accorded to them by virtue of their chief, even after other Ga chiefs were reinstituted in the postcolonial period.

Although the Ga community maintains four cults of worship, one of them—*Kpele*—is the primary mode of religious expression.[16] The Ga word *kpele* means "all-encompassing" and could be understood to refer to the pervasive nature of the cult as an ideology that encompasses all aspects of the Ga world view. In contrast to the other three modes of worship, Kpele is "national" in character, meaning that it is practiced by all six Ga townships and is tightly interwoven with the Ga social structure (Nketia 1964). When I talk about the Ga religion in the book, I opt for an open-ended definition that includes various amalgamations of the four modes of worship combined with whatever additional practices the Ga choose to incorporate into the categories of religion or custom. I concur with Marijke Steegstra's (2005) argument that traditional religions can only be studied in tandem with Christianity since the latter is largely accountable for the categorization of traditional religion as culture or custom. I therefore keep Christianity in mind as I analyze the ban on drumming in the context of Accra.

The primary actors in the Ga cosmology are the *jemawɔji* (deities) and Ataa Naa Nyɔŋmɔ (Father Grandmother God). Ga people also recognize the existence of lesser powers called *wɔji*, but these have no names and are not usually handled by ritual specialists (Laryea 2011, 48; Field 1937, 111). Because my work is concerned with institutional forms of the Ga religion, I deal exclusively with the *jemawɔji*. Even Nyɔŋmɔ, who is often described as the creator and governor of all things, is not physically involved with humans and is normally represented by the *jemawɔji* (Laryea 2011, 63). The highly involved nature of the *jemawɔji* is consistent with the theory that the term derives from a combination of two Ga words: *jɛmɛi* (here) and *wɔŋ* (deity), designating deities who are worldly and are engaged in daily affairs (Kilson 1971, 68; Kudadjie 1975, 32).[17] While Kpele *jemawɔji* are associated with topographical features, other deities are not tied to specific locations because they were borrowed or purchased from various groups the Ga interacted with over the centuries. Unlike the *wɔji*, which humans instrumentalize for their own benefit, the *jemawɔji* cannot be subjected to human whims. Each Ga township has its own pantheon of *jemawɔji* who

FIGURE INTRO.2. The Ga-Mashie community performs *nshɔ bulomo* (sea purification).
Photo by author. 2016.

oversee the land. However, their position is by no means permanent. If the deities cease to benefit the community, they are gradually forgotten.

Ritual specialists play a pivotal role in the daily life of the Ga. In fact, the *wulɔmɛi* rather than the *maŋtsɛmɛi* bore the burden of leadership for centuries until the taboos attached to their position—above all, the prohibition against venturing outside their respective traditional areas—rendered them incapable of participating in political affairs. To negotiate treaties with partners and enemies, the Ga appointed *maŋtsɛmɛi* as representatives of the *wulɔmɛi* (Reindorf [1895] 1966, 113–14; Robertson 1984, 1). The power delegated to the *maŋtsɛmɛi* gradually blossomed into full-fledged leadership and was legally endorsed by the British system of indirect rule (Akrong 2007, 142). Philip Laryea (2011) notes that the primary function of the *wulɔmɛi* today is that "the *jemawɔji* narrate to them their goals and desires to be translated to the townspeople so that they pray for the town" (113). To ensure a pure state for channeling the *jemawɔji*, the *wulɔmɛi* must desist from all forms of conflict and follow ritually prescribed directives. They are not allowed to see a corpse, eat salt or fermented food, talk to anyone while eating, or have sexual intercourse on certain days of the week (Omaetu 2006, 25–26; Laryea 2011, 113; Manoukian 1950, 96). Messages that the *wulɔmɛi* receive from the *jemawɔji* and translate to their people are channeled through the *wɔyei*, the female priestesses (Field 1937, 8).

Accra is located in an arid region where periodic droughts lead to shortages of staple food crops (Parker 2000). One could argue that the Hɔmɔwɔ festival, which is performed in commemoration of a great famine in the past, celebrates another year of survival in these adverse conditions and defines the essence of being Ga.[18] Socially speaking, the festival binds the community together since it is the only time of the year when individuals living outside Accra are compelled to return to their ancestral homes to bolster kinship ties with living and deceased family members and to give thanks to the *jemawɔji*.[19] Hɔmɔwɔ is the main Ga celebration that is common to all six Ga townships and the only harvest ceremony that belongs to all Ga people (Kilson 2013, 92–93).

Road Map

Chapter 1 and chapter 2 complement each other because they both provide the historical backdrop for the ban on drumming in contemporary Accra. The first chapter explores the previously overlooked history of noise control in the British Gold Coast, with a particular focus on the racial politics that propelled the evolutionary sonic taxonomy used to subordinate the local population. Looking closely at the legal and practical dimensions of nuisance control in the Gold Coast, I illustrate the conflation of colonial and Christian sensory registers and the mobilization of these registers in opposition to African religions. I suggest that the earmarking of the drum as the vilest form of noise production derives from its "sensational quality"—that is, its capacity to mediate between the human and transcendent worlds. An analysis of noise-abatement initiatives from other parts of the world corroborates the arguments presented.

Chapter 2 spans the period from 1957, when Ghana declared its independence, to the mid-1990s, before the escalation of tensions between Pentecostal/Charismatic churches and the Ga community in Accra. I detail the gradual transformation of the ban from a routine custom to a scandalous affair of public concern through a close reading of the most prominent state-owned newspaper, the *Daily Graphic*. In addition to analyzing the public discourse on urban noise pollution and its impact on the changing attitudes toward the ban on drumming, I demonstrate how the Ga community instrumentalized the growing public concern about the repercussions of noise on citizens' health to engineer a defense of the ban on drumming as a custom in the service of the public.

In chapter 3, I break down the sonic theologies and practices of the Ga religion and Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity by drawing on ethnographic material and secondary sources. I pay particular attention to the centrality of quiet in the Ga ritual practice and the Pentecostal/Charismatic reconceptu-

alization of noise as a positive experience. I argue that despite the overt hostility between the two parties, their apprehension of sound is surprisingly analogous. Here, I focus especially on the shared understanding of sound—or the lack thereof—as a force that can both thwart and foster spiritual advancement. Based on these conclusions, I argue that the conflict over the ban on drumming signifies not only a desire to establish political control over Accra but also an attempt to sacralize the urban space and offer respect to the nonhuman actors involved.

I elaborate on the centrality of the case study for conceptualizing the relationship between the state and the two respective communities in chapter 4. I introduce the sonic tensions that unfolded in 1998 to 2001 and examine the legal frameworks the conflicting sides adopted as they defended their positions. My approach diverges from previous works in its explicit interest in the secular discourses employed in the negotiations—the Ga defense of the ritual ban via customary law and the Pentecostal/Charismatic insistence on the constitutional right to practice religion. The distinct legal discourses of these two communities illuminate the culturalization of traditional religions and the religionization of Christianity, a configuration informed by the Christocentric orientation of secularism as an ideological and political regime and the discursive culturalization of traditional lifeworlds in missionary, colonial, and nation-building contexts.

The book's argument about secularity in Ghana is presented in chapter 5, which can serve as an entry point for discussing secularity throughout Christian Africa. The star of the narrative is the state-governed Nuisance Control Task Force, which was established in the aftermath of the conflict. The state presented the task force as a secular enterprise designed to alleviate urban noise pollution and raise awareness about its perils. In practice, however, the Nuisance Control Task Force came together during the period of the ban and continues to function in collaboration with the Ga community. I argue that this arrangement sheds light on Ghanaian secularity, a synergy of the customary understanding of shared religious space and the authority of the custodians of the land and secularism as a regime that despite ostensible religious neutrality grants institutional and ideological advantages to Christianity.

The final chapter introduces two initiatives that engage with the Hɔmɔwɔ festival from different angles. First, I discuss the Hɔmɔwɔ Thanksgiving service that the Christian Council of Ghana launched in 2015. This initiative was designed to contribute to intercommunal peace via Hɔmɔwɔ-themed lectures and services organized in selected mainline churches in Ga neighborhoods. Second, I look at Homofest, a national celebration that the Ministry of Tourism, Arts & Culture inaugurated in 2014. Homofest combines the Hɔmɔwɔ celebrations in the six Ga townships into a carnival-like festival open to tourists and citizens

of all cultural or ethnic backgrounds. The core similarity between these two initiatives is the omission of religious elements in favor of an explicitly cultural interpretation of the festival, an approach consistent with the understanding of traditional festivals as spaces of cohabitation. While acknowledging the intercommunal benefits of these two projects, I also argue that they build on the idea that traditional religions need to be neutralized into cultural expressions in order to become serviceable in the contemporary secular state.

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Notes

INTRODUCTION. ALTERED ONTOLOGIES AND REVERSED PARADIGMS

1   Prior to Ghana's transition to constitutional democracy in 1992, the media were subject to strict government censorship. Media liberalization led to the proliferation of private radio and television stations and private newspapers. Both state and private media began to enjoy unprecedented freedom.

2   While this book focuses specifically on secularity in Ghana, the fusion of customary values and secularism as a political regime described here is by no means unique to Ghana and can be found in various configurations throughout Africa.

3   Rachel N. Zakpala, Frederick Ato Armah, Brigid M. Sackey, and Opoku Pabi, "Night-Time Decibel Hell: Mapping Noise Exposure Zones and Individual Annoyance Ratings in an Urban Environment in Ghana," *Scientifica*, January 1, 2014, 2.

4   These accounts generally accept a normative Eurocentric understanding of secularization as a linear process with a specific end goal and do not reflect the significant theoretical shifts of the past two decades. For a more nuanced look at African secularity, see Leatt (2017), Kallinen (2016), and Tweneboah (2019).

5   Richard Asante (2011) and Philip Attuquayefio (2012) interpret the Drum Wars as a reaction to the perceived or actual marginalization of the Ga community. Kwabena J. D. Amanor (2009) contextualizes the interfaith discord in light of earlier tensions between Christian churches and Ga traditionalists. Focusing on music and performativity, Tobias Robert Klein (2010) observes the impact of the Drum Wars in the songs produced in the aftermath of the conflict.

6   The term refers to the established, if outdated, paradigm in the study of religion of grouping religions considered to be of global significance into a single category of "world religions." In the nineteenth century, Masuzawa (2005) argues, the major world religions included Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, Confucianism, Taoism, Shinto, Zoroastrianism, Jainism, and Sikhism.

7   To learn more about the targeted use of these terms in other indigenous communities, see Tafjord (2016), Johnson (2007), and Niezen (2012).

8   I am particularly grateful to Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, Moses Nii Dortey, Kodjo A. Senah, Kofi Quashigah, Abamfo Atiemo, Nii Adjei Klu, Irene Odotei, Koi Larbi, Philip Laryea, Kofi Asare Opoku, Brigid Sackey, and Cephas Omenyo.

9   This approach is inspired by Yael Navaro-Yashin's (2002) argument that Turkish culture does not exist as a separate analytical and anthropological category that designates

essential Turkishness. Instead, one can speak of "enactments, productions and contestations over culture" (10–13).

10   From the attacked churches, I interviewed representatives of the Christ Apostolic Church International (Osu Headquarters), the Evangel Church International (Achimota and Adabraka branches), the Power Miracle Chapel International, the International Central Gospel Church (La branch), the Christ Apostolic Church (North Kaneshie Central and Nungua branches), the Victory Bible Church International (Awoshie Headquarters), the El Shaddai Temple, the Gospel Light Chapel International (Mallam branch), the Church of Pentecost (Alajo Central Assembly), the Assemblies of God (Tesano and Kaneshie branches), and Great Fire Pentecostal International Ministry.

11   I worked especially closely with members of the Osu Ebenezer Presbyterian Church, the St. Barnabas Anglican Church, and the Methodist Church of Ghana.

12   For Ghana, see Asamoah-Gyadu (2005a), Gifford (2004), Meyer (2004a), and Omenyo (2002). For Africa, see Adogame (2011), Corten and Marshall-Fratani (2001), Gifford (1998), and Marshall (2009). For general works on Pentecostal Christianity, see Anderson (2004), Coleman and Hackett (2015), Martin (2002), and Robbins (2004).

13   Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "Did Jesus Wear Designer Robes?" *Christianity Today*, November 2009, 38–41; Gifford (2004).

14   Emilia Ennin Abbey, "Ga Traditionalists Clash with Churches," *Daily Graphic*, May 29, 2014, accessed January 12, 2020, https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general -news/ga-traditionalists-clash-with-churches.html; Mary Mensah, "Observe Ban on Drumming and Noise Making," *Daily Graphic*, April 13, 2016, accessed January 12, 2020, https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/observe-ban-on-drumming -and-noisemaking.html; Gertrude Ankah Nyavi, "Ban on Noise Making to Begin on May 8—Ga State Warns of No Compromise," *Daily Graphic*, April 26, 2017, accessed January 12, 2020, https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/ban-on-noise -making-to-begin-may-8-ga-state-warns-of-no-compromise.html.

15   Irene Quaye (1972, 11–13) challenges this theory and argues that the Ga were formed as a result of gradual fusion with the Dangmes and the Guans.

16   According to Margaret Field (1937, 5), the other three cults are:

    1) Me: deities of Adangme origin whose worshippers sing and dance to Me-type music;
    2) Kpa: deities who were originally war gods of the Kpa people based in Labadi;
    3) Otu and Akɔŋ: deities of Fanti and Akwapim origin whose worshippers dance and sing to Otu and Akɔŋ types of music

17   Margaret Field offers a different rendition of the term that ultimately has a similar meaning. She suggests that it is a combination of two Ga words: *je/jeŋ*, meaning "the world" and *ma/maŋ*, meaning "town." Hence, it signifies beings that "walk about the world and the towns" (Field 1937, 4).

18   Originally, Hɔmɔwɔ was part of the Kpa cult, while Kplejoo was the primary festival of the Kpele cult. However, over time, Hɔmɔwɔ was amalgamated into Kpele in the majority of Ga towns and today it is more prominently celebrated than Kplejoo (Field 1937, 5, 89).

19 For more about Hɔmɔwɔ, see Ammah (2016), Fosu (1999), Gyimah (1985), Kilson (2013), Lokko (1981), Odotei (2002), and Omaboe (2011).

1. JUMPING ON THE ANTI-NOISE BANDWAGON

1 "D.C.'s and Funeral Customs," *The Gold Coast Leader*, August 1, 1903, 2–3.
2 "Accra," *The Gold Coast Leader*, July 18, 1903, 4.
3 "Accra."
4 The term "Accras" was often used in the early writings to refer to the inhabitants of Accra.
5 In this chapter, I focus on the *Ordinances of the Gold Coast* from 1903 because they are representative of the regulations that were in place during the colonial period. As seen below, local laws from 1878 and 1920 have an almost identical approach:

> Ordinance for better regulating the Police of Towns and Populous Places, and Promoting the Public Health (1878), No. 10, Article 36: Any Court may prohibit during the hours of its sitting, and at any place within a radius of three hundred yards from the building where such sitting is held any beating of drums, gongs, tomtoms, or other instruments, or other loud noises of any kind of description, and whosoever, being required by any constable or officer of the Court to desist from beating drums, gongs, tomtoms, or other instruments, or from making any other noise as aforesaid, fails to comply with such requisition, shall for every offence incur a penalty not exceeding forty shillings, and may be apprehended by any Constable without warrant (Griffith 1887, 474).

> Title III, Administration of Justice, Chapter 16, Part VI, Offences against Public Order, Health, and Morality, No. 13, Article 120(1): Every occupier of any house, building, yard or other place situate in any town, who, without a license in writing from the Governor or a District Commissioner, permits any persons to assemble and beat or play or dance therein to any drum, gong, tomtom, or similar instrument of music, shall be liable to a fine of two pounds (Kingdon 1920, 313).

> No. 13, Article 139: Whoever does any of the following acts shall be liable to a fine of forty shillings, namely: (9): In any town willfully or wantonly, and after being warned to desist, shouts or blows any horn or shell, or sounds or plays upon any musical instrument, or sings or makes any other loud or unseemly noise, to the annoyance or disturbance of any person; (10): In any town, without a licence in writing from the Governor or a District Commissioner, beats or plays any drum, gong, tom-tom, or other similar instruments of music between eight o'clock at night and six in the morning (Kingdon 1920, 319–20).

6 Mahmood Mamdani (2012, 2–3) writes that "native" as a category was conceptually tied to the aspirations of the colonial state to pin down, localize, and cast out the colonized.
7 "Minutes of the Board of Education Meeting, 20th April, 1914," *The Gold Coast Leader*, April 10, 1915, 6.
8 "News, Notes and Comments," *Gold Coast Aborigines*, September 8, 1899, 1.