"We agree to disagree"

– A Study of Ghanaian University Students’ National Self-Images

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Abstract:

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This thesis is based on a field study conducted in Ghana’s capital Accra between September and November 2010 where data, in the form of inter alia interviews with Ghanaian university students, was collected. The underlying aim for the study is to gain a deeper understanding for the many times troublesome nation-building process in the African context. The thesis’ objective then is to gain a deepened understanding of a part of the “successful” Ghanaian nation building process and the national identification in Ghana via the concept of national self-images: the affective and cognitive views of the own nation and people.

The Ghanaian national identification is explored via the concept which here is divided into two wide dimensions (the Temporal and Relational - primarily based on the works of Bo Petersson and Noel Kaplowitz) and the data is then organised and analysed according to these. The national self-images are further divided into positive respective negative images with presumably distinct influences on national and political stability. The result from this study is that the interviewed university students hold predominately positive images of their own nation, people and polity which may indicate a continued support for the nation building process. However also some negative images exist which hold the potential threat of weakening the support and trust for the national project among the students.

Keywords: Ghana, National Self-Images, Nationalism, University students, Bo Petersson
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgments ........................................................................................................... 2

Abstract ......................................................................................................................... 3

Table of Contents ............................................................................................................. 4

1. Introduction .............................................................................................................. 6
   1.2. The Choice of Ghana and Accra .......................................................................... 6
   1.3. The use of National Self-Images ......................................................................... 7
   1.4. Objective and Research Questions ...................................................................... 8
   1.5. Thesis Structure .................................................................................................. 8

2. Method ...................................................................................................................... 9
   2.1. Data Collection and Data .................................................................................... 9
   2.2. Processing the Data .......................................................................................... 10
   2.3. Delimitations and Choice of Interviewees ......................................................... 11
   2.4. Positioning the Research ................................................................................... 12
   2.5. Validity and Reliability ...................................................................................... 13

3. Theory ...................................................................................................................... 15
   3.1. The Theoretical Context .................................................................................... 15
   3.2. Ghanaian Nation Building in Earlier Research .................................................. 16
   3.3. National Self-images in Earlier Research ............................................................ 18
   3.4. National Self Images in this Study .................................................................... 19
       3.4.1. The Temporal Dimension ........................................................................... 20
       3.4.2. The Relational Dimension .......................................................................... 21
       3.4.3 Positive respective Negative National Self-Images ....................................... 22

4. The Ghanaian context ............................................................................................... 24
   4.1. Before Ghana became Ghana ............................................................................. 24
   4.2. Nkrumah and Rawlings: the Path to a Two Party System .................................... 24
   4.3. Contemporary Ghana ......................................................................................... 26
   4.4. Accra: a National Centre ................................................................................... 27

5. Analysis .................................................................................................................... 28
   5.1. The Temporal dimension .................................................................................... 28
       5.1.1. The Past ....................................................................................................... 28
       5.1.2. The Future ................................................................................................... 31
   5.2. The Relational dimension ................................................................................... 33
5.2.1. Ghana in relation to other nations and supranational actors..........................33
5.2.2. Ghanaians in relation to other peoples.........................................................36
5.2.3. Relationships between distinct parts of Ghana.............................................37
5.2.4. Relationships between people in Ghana.......................................................39

6. Conclusion........................................................................................................45
   6.1. The Analysis and the Research Questions..................................................45
   6.2. General Reflections.....................................................................................48
   6.3. Future research............................................................................................49

References.............................................................................................................51

Appendix 1 - Map of Ghana..................................................................................55
Appendix 2 – Interview Guide...............................................................................56
Appendix 3 – Description of Interviewees.............................................................57
1. Introduction
The nation building processes in Africa has proven to be difficult. Nation-building in the African context is framed by past imposed colonial borders but also by nationalistic freedom struggles against colonial rule when nationalism from an early stage came to stand as a potential force against colonial domination (Young 1994:32). It was by early nationalist leaders, such as Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana, seen as the preferable way to free the colonially ruled masses. After a while also the pursuing of a civic nationhood became a way to try to move away from what was seen as divisive ethnic affiliations (Carr 1995:4). Nationalism thus initially had a positive connotation and the optimistic territorially framed African nationalist movements, via the creation of free nation-states, needs to be seen as initially successful. Nevertheless, even if liberation from direct colonial rule during the 1960s and 70s in most cases was achieved, national cohesion and the identification with a certain territory and state apparatus would prove to be more difficult than first expected (Young 2007). It is valid to talk about an African crisis when it comes to statehood in the 1980’s (Young 1994:2) and in some ways the crisis seems to have continued with several conflicts and state collapses in the 1990s and onwards (Young 2007).

The disrupted nation-buildings are not surprising when the post-colonial African nation-state stood the challenge to form a coherent and inclusive nationality out of arbitrary demarcated areas cross-cutting a multitude of communities. The spread of contemporary nation-states in Africa can thus be seen as ahistorical when the mutual historical background and identification within the national borders that European nations-states stand upon in almost all cases are lacking (Young 2007:241, 2008:91). One of the greatest challenges for African states is therefore to transform their diverse identities into united nation-states and to develop inclusive nationalities (Deng et al 2008:31). When state erosion, civil-wars and ethnic clashes since the independence struggles hence in many cases have been rule rather than exception (for example recently in the case of Sudan) the status of the African nation-state in many ways can be seen as critical. This is thus what forms the background and motivation for this study when a deepened understanding of the nation building processes in the African context from a political science perspective thus could be said to be valid.

1.2. The Choice of Ghana and Accra
Ghana is here chosen when it forms an example of “successful” nation building. It is seen as this because even if the country has had its shares of local and regional conflicts since it
became an independent state in 1957, for example a number of chieftaincy related “ethnic clashes” during the end of the 20th century (Lentz & Nugent 2000:22), Ghana nevertheless does not follow the same pattern of crisis as many other African nation states. The country has not suffered from any civil wars, quite contrary to neighbouring countries in Sub-Saharan Africa such as Côte D’Ivoire, Liberia and Nigeria. In a comparison with Côte D’Ivoire Ghana moreover can be seen as more successful when it comes to inclusive nationality and citizen rights (Kobo 2010:91). The relatively peaceful development since the Fourth Republic came into being in 1992, as for example the successful transitions between elections, is further seen as an indicator of peaceful and stable development (Odonko Svanikier 2007:115). Ghana has both internationally and within Africa been labelled a “successful example” of development and stability in Sub-Saharan Africa1, and the recent findings of oil have increased the hope of many that the country will continue to develop in a positive direction. What characterises the development in Ghana seems to be stability rather than conflict.

Not much attention has further been given Ghana when it comes to nation-building in the field of political science2. Maybe because of its reputation as a peaceful nation it has not evoked interest when “problems” often trigger research. But only because no current major conflicts or obvious tensions are present the national identification within the country does not mean it does not constitute an interesting object of study. Rather, I state the opposite and mean that it is exactly because of this that Ghana should be given attention. I see that a deepened understanding of “successful” nation building can shed light also on other nation building processes and the image of “success” can further be questioned and nuanced. To conclude this section the focus in this study will be on individuals in Accra because of the city’s role as a national centre.

1.3. The Use of National Self-Images
One way to gain a deeper understanding of a nation building process is to examine the national sentiments surrounding the nation building. These can be reached via the affective and cognitive images citizens have of their own nation and people. The concept of national self-images3 is thus here used in order to come to a closer understanding of how people and

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1 For example see Encyclopædia Britannica Online where following can be read: “As Ghanaians celebrated 50 years of independence in 2007, prospects for the future were bright, with the country poised to continue its role as a leader of African progress and development.”

2 During recent years Michael Amoah’s Reconstructing the Nation in Africa – the politics of nationalism in Ghana (2007) is the only larger work I found that direct concerns national identification in Ghana.

3 A closer description of the concept is found in the theory section (3.4).
territorial parts within Ghana’s national borders, according to some citizens, relate to each other. The concept is further also used in order to see how these images of the own country and people in their turn can be related to the surrounding world. Via the national self-images Ghana’s nation building here is position in relation to other nations, peoples and supranational communities. These national self-images are reached via a field study in Ghana with participant observations and interviews with Ghanaian university students.

1.4. Objective and Research Questions

The objective of this thesis is thus to gain a deepened understanding of the nation building process and national identification in Ghana and this objective further will be reached by my time in field and by the use of the concept of national self-images.

My research questions are as follows:

- Which national self-images concerning temporal and relational aspects come forth during the field study?
- Are these constituted by predominately positive or negative images?
- What might these perceived national self-images say about the students’ continued relation to the Ghanaian nation building process?

1.5. Thesis Structure

The thesis will here first continue with the method section (2) where the field study and choice of interviewees, the gathering and processing of the empirical data, the study’s epistemological base and aspects concerning validity and reliability will be addressed. The thesis then continues with the theory section (3) where the underlying theoretical context first is roughly sketched and then some earlier research concerning both the Ghanaian national construct and the concept of national self-images follow. Then how the concept will be used in this thesis and the dimensions which will form the base for the analysis are presented. In the following section the Ghanaian context is sketched (4) and then the analysis section (5) follows directly after where the empirical data is organised under the separate dimensions. In the last section then (6) the analysis first will be summarized and discussed in relation to the research questions and the suggestions for future research will conclude.
2. Method

2.1. Data Collection and Data

In order to collect the empirical data I conducted a field study in Ghana’s capital Accra between September and November 2010. The data consist of interviews and participant observations, the whole experience of being in Accra. Everything that I met which could shed light upon my analysis and findings is considered. During my field study I kept a journal and in writing reflected on the research process with the collection of data; expressions from the formal and informal discussions and meetings I had, what happened during the interview situation, the literature I read and general reflections of my experience as a first time visitor to Accra and Ghana. I hence tie to an ethnographic research methodology (Creswell 2007:68,72). This method is chosen in order to get an as insightful picture of the field as possible and when it thus is well suitable to fulfil this study’s objective.

The starting point of my study was general but I still had a clear focus, deriving from my problem formulation, which laid in examining the Ghanaian national construct and process. When this examination partly would be done by interviews with Ghanaian citizens I based on literature in the area\(^4\) created an interview guide. This guide had open ended questions and a wide approach to the concept of national identification and I came to follow this, only with slight modifications, during all of the semi-structured qualitative interviews I conducted. With time I gradually released myself from the guide and had more of a conversation.

The interviewees in my study consist of eleven university students pursuing their education in Accra\(^5\). The first interviewees were found via an informal contact with an ex-political science student of the public University of Ghana. Via his contacts I found other contacts which in their turn had contacts which they recommended. With time I found some interviewees also via other contacts. I thus here use a so-called snowball process to find my interviewees (Esaiasson 2003:212). Further, some of the interviewees knew each other, some of them did not and they came from three different universities.

Even if my aim never was to have an interview base representative for the population in order to be able to generalise my findings I still wanted my interviewees to have fairly


\(^5\) For a closer description of the interviewees see Appendix 3. The choice of interviewees is further explained in section 2.3. below.
various backgrounds. I based the selection of interviewees on my wish for them to be of different gender and also of various geographical, ethnic and religious backgrounds. A socio-economic disparity was also desirable. Exactly how I would realise these disparities among my interviewees was nevertheless not easy to approach. My tactic came to be to primarily draw on the obvious features of gender, geographic and religious backgrounds and hope for also the other differences to follow. Eventually it appears to me that I succeeded in creating all the wished disparity among my interviewees.

The interviews consist of eleven main interviews between 45 minutes to one and a half hours long and when I needed some clarifications from my first interviewees also of five shorter follow up interviews. All of the interviews were audio recorded which resulted in a large amount of audio data of which I transcribed almost everything but not all and where the parts that I chose not to transcribe were of lower interest for my study.

### 2.2. Processing the Data

How to approach and analyse the data collected during my field study crystallised when my theoretical knowledge increased with the reading of literature within the field as well as when my empirical knowledge of the local context via both interviews and participative observations deepened. The analysis phase started with several reviews of both audio recordings, the transcribed interviews and field notes. This was made in order to detect patterns which in their turn could lead me to which theory to use and to exact which questions to pose to the material. The reviews resulted in the creation of two wide theoretical dimensions by which I further organized the empirical material. It is also from these dimensions which my final research questions derive. My analysis has a highly interpretative approach where I draw on both what is said explicitly in the interviews but also what is said implicitly in between the lines. Further the accounts are seen in the light of the participant observations I made. A qualitative and interpretative approach is here preferable when it is well suited to deepen the understanding of the Ghanaian national construct and it is thus appropriate for and in accordance with the study's objectives.

When the presentation of the empirical data was born in a close interpretive and critical dialogue between me, the data and the theoretical literature at hand my way to work hence is inductive: I do not follow a theory from the top down but the research is formed from the ground up (Creswell 2007:19).

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6 Described in the theory section (2.4.1-2.4.2.)
2.3. Delimitations and choice of interviewees

With the consideration of the limited time and space I had to first collect, process and then present my data the study inevitably needed to have some scopes of limitations. When my aim was to via interviews and participant observation achieve a deeper understanding of the Ghanaian national construct and culture I chose to limit the interviewees to only university students in Accra. I chose this instead of a wider spectrum of the population or individuals operating in distinct parts of Ghana. In doing so I see that my study became more focused when I could concentrate on this specific group and its eventual meaning for the national construct in Ghana. The students thus were chosen by several reasons. One is that they, by means of their operating in Accra, form a part of the national centre. Another is the significance they have as university students.

Cati Coe (2005) who examines the relationship between the Ghanaian state and its populace emphasises the meaning of schools and education for the expansion of states (also see Anderson 2006). Schools according to her form one of the most sustained zones between people and state in which the state can attempt to reach and shape its populace. One of their functions is to transmit “national culture” which in its turn serves to legitimize state power (Ibid:4). This strategy is according to Coe very clear in Ghana when the country has a long history of cultural programming shared and promoted by all political parties. One of the political goals has been to ensure the sense of national unity and strengthen the nation through the encouragement of a unified Ghanaian culture (Ibid:10). When the students then have gone throughout the Ghanaian educational system they most likely have met this promotion of “national culture” which makes them suitable interviewees to explore this culture trough.

Further, even if the students today do not necessarily fall within the definition of influential or wealthy elite, as my interviews show they do not identify as part of an elite themselves, they nevertheless are fortunate with schooling up to university level. Thereby they hold the future potential to be part of the political or economical elite and as such their importance cannot be mistaken. The elites are closely tied to the nation-building process when they often are the ones to promote nationalism (Brown 2000:31). The importance of intellectuals in the process of articulating and promoting the ideas of the nation can further not be stressed enough (Smith 1991).

Even if the political situation in Ghana and the continued nation building will be formed by the negotiation between state and populace some citizens will have a stronger position in this negotiation. The views of the students with their time in the educational system and their
stronger social capital than the average citizen, which I argue that they have, will thus be of considerable importance in the nation building process. They will be so when they both have the knowledge of how to in different ways express their opinions to the polity and therefore be potential agenda setters but also themselves potentially form a part of that polity.

All these factors make university students suitable and preferable interviewees when examining the views surrounding the national construct and culture in Ghana.

2.4. Positioning the research

This study connects to the view that research never is neutral or objective: it will always be coloured by the researcher’s starting points. When performing a study of this kind I inevitably carry my identities and former experiences with me into the research setting and influence both the production and the interpretation of the data (Kohler Riessman 2008:139). As a researcher I hence need to “position myself” in the research in order to try to make any biases and assumptions that might impact the inquiry explicit to both myself and the reader. It is important when it creates an awareness of how my interpretations are formed both for me and the reader (Creswell 2007:21). Not only who I as a researcher am and what I might represent for the interviewees is important to consider but also who the interviewees are and what they represent for me as well as the context of the research and circumstances which might impact our interaction (Creswell 2007:20, Petersson 2003:38).

By way of what explicitly and implicitly is expressed in the interviews I understand it as I am seen as a foreigner, a white person, a woman, an academic, a Scandinavian and a Swede who is a representative for the “Western world” and a “western type of living”. I am also seen as a potential tourist to the students’ country. From my understanding the students’ see themselves as Africans, Ghanaians, students, blacks, young, inhabitants of a developing country that is successful in Africa but thrive to “catch up with the west”.

In my turn I see the interviewees as students coming from the strata of the population where university education is possible and they thus, for me, are part of the educated elite in Ghana. Further I see them as Africans and most of them as blacks. With the history of slave trade in the former colony the fact that they come from a young post-colonial nation is clear to me and I presume that they are coloured by this. Also, I see them as coming from a collective and not individualistic culture where extended rather than nuclear family is

7 All of the interviewees except from one have “black” complexion and would generally be perceived so. In some of the interviews the identification as black is made clear explicitly in some not, but according to my understanding most of them identify themselves as blacks, also because for many of them as I understood it being African goes hand in hand with being black.
practiced and where social interaction among people is extensive. For me the students come from a country with the label “developing country” on the international stage. Thus, both I and the students are aware of the power and status relationships with their belonging stereotyping of “developing” and “developed” that are to my favour (Chambers 1997:58).

I here see it as important to remain some in the relationship between “developed” and “developing” when it is tightly tied to the idea of “the West”. Because of mine and the students’ positions this idea clearly affects the interviews and thus the whole study. The idea especially comes forth in the comparisons the students make and this is something that I will come back to also in my analysis. It becomes clear that “The West” and “Western” as constructed concepts represent the idea of societies that are developed, industrialized, urbanized, capitalist, secular and modern regardless of where they are found on a geographical map. The concept of “the West” further functions as an evaluator for “non-Western” countries where “the West” generally represents developed, good and desirable whilst the “non-Western” represents under-developed, bad and undesirable. The goal for “non-Western” countries thus often is to “catch up” with “the West”. The concept thereby functions as an ideology which serves to firmly position societies in a global hierarchy (Hall 1992:276-277).

It becomes even more apparent how no research is made in a vacuum one must observe how these relationships can influence the interviews both during the interviews themselves and in the after-work with the interview data. For example, I as an interviewer face the risks that the students either want to consciously shape the image of Ghana as a successful example comparable to “the West” or they might want to give satisfying answers to the questions that I pose (be “good” interviewees). I have tried to deal with these risks by being observant of when the students’ accounts have been contradictive or explicitly exaggerated both during the interviews themselves and in the after-work. I have tried, to an as large extent as possible, to listen to both my own and the students’ vocal pitch, note facial expressions or be observant of if “gaps” occurs in the students’ accounts. In short, I have had a critical approach to my material and the interview situation, and I claim that I thereby to the utmost possible extent have uncovered biases and minimized the risks for intrapersonal influences (Yin 2009:107).

2.5. Validity and Reliability

The positioning of the research and the awareness of what might influence the interviews mentioned above form a part of the validity process but the validation discussion yet needs to be developed further. Even if I have a highly interpretative and qualitative approach the question of validity and reliability still is important if not even more so than in a quantitative
study when qualitative studies more often are criticised for deficiency in these aspects. The construct validity of this study, that is to identify correct operational measures for the concepts being studied, can be said to be secured when the reader clearly can follow my work from the research question to the conclusion (Ibid:40,122). I enhance the transparency in my thesis when I in my interview guide present the questions posed in the interviews which form the ground for the larger part of my empirical data. Further I show how I via literature have operationalised the concept of “national self-images” and the reader can thereby decide if she or he finds this operationalisation valid. How I thereafter have applied the operationalised concept on my empirical data comes forth in the analysis. These parts further clearly tie back to my objective and research questions and thereby I have created a “chain of evidence” which can be said to strengthen both construct validity and reliability (Ibid:122-123). I have also used multiple sources of evidence by a data triangulation when both interviews and observations form the base of my empirical data: the interviews are seen in the light of my participant observations during the field study which further also can strengthen construct validity (Ibid:116).

I have documented my procedures and try to make them as clear as possible in order to make it possible for the reader to make an own valuation of the reliability in my research. This is in addition made in order for someone else or myself to conduct the study all over again in order to secure the results even if they never because of the nature of the research can be exact the same (Ibid:45). Reliability is further enhanced by my detailed field notes, good-quality tape recordings and my transcription of the interview data which are available to the reader in anonymised form if requested (Creswell 2007:209).

The external validity can here because of the study’s nature not be secured by any statistical generalization of the findings beyond the immediate study. I can not generalize my findings to all Ghanaian citizens or the whole population of Ghanaian university students. The intention is not to do so. The intention instead is to deepen the empirical knowledge of a part of the Ghanaian national construct and the theoretical knowledge in the wider field. External validity is then here achieved via the finding that theories of national self-images are suitable for the identifying and analyzing of similar “cases” of national identification. This study can thus also be seen to contribute to the theory formation of national self-images. It is so when external validity not only concerns statistical generalization but also can be measured by analytical generalization. In order to secure this kind of external validity more studies based on the same theoretical framework then need to be done (Yin 2009:43-44).
3. Theory

3.1. The Theoretical Context

The literature on national self-images comprises a rather small part of the otherwise extensive theory building in political science concerning nations and nationalism. The nation nevertheless must be considered one of political science’s more classical focuses. When the field is so wide an overview could be very extensive but I will here try to focus on the parts of the field relevant for this study. Both Anthony Smith (1991, 2001) and Benedict Anderson (2006) can be said to be influential theorists when it comes to the views surrounding nation building and nationalism. In his now classical work *Imagined Communities* Anderson addresses the rise of the contemporary nation-state. He sees the nation as an “imagined political community”. This community is imagined in the sense that even if the members in the smallest of nations never meet or hear about each other they still in their minds are connected and feel togetherness. The contemporary nations according to him grew out of inter alia territorialisation of religious faiths, the decline of antique kingship and the interaction between imperialism and print and as such they are products of a changing world order. Social relations that were not possible before the national consciousness existed are made so via the imagined ties (Anderson 2006).

The nations in Africa are according to Anderson further created in “the Last Wave” during the post-World War II period when the nation-state had become the legitimate international norm (Ibid:113). They grew out of the increased physical mobility which came with industrial capitalism: where people and ideas travelled faster and in much greater numbers than before. It came from the increase of specialised workers such as clerks, schoolteachers, engineers within first the colonial and then the post-colonial administration and then also from the spread of modern-style education by both the colonial state and private religious and secular organizations. With these prevalences the spread of western culture in a broad sense, and the models of nationalism, nation-ness, and nation state spread in the African colonies (Ibid:115-116).

This view of contemporary nationalism as in essence being a Western invention which has spread to other parts of the world is also shared by Elie Kedourie (in Amoah 2007:17-18). According to him nationalism started in Europe during the beginning of the 19th century and had its roots in the French Revolution, where Britain and France early constituted role model nations. The nationalist doctrine then spread the view that humanity is divided into nations,
that these nations are known by certain characteristics, which can be ascertained, and that the only legitimate type of government is national self-government. The creation of nations according to this view co-existed with the emerging modern state (Ibid).

Considering nationalism as a Western invention the hindrance the nation-building processes in Africa have met might not seem as hard to understand. Nevertheless according to both Young (2007) and Nugent et al (2007) the national identification in the post-colonial African states can be said to have been and still is fairly strong. The main problem according to them has rather been how to see to an even resource allocation within the new territories and how ethnicity has been used in the fight over resources. These aspects can then stand as further indicators for the complexity of the African nation building process.

In the field of nation building there additionally exist two myths that potentially are in tension with each other. These are the ethnocultural nationalist myth of common ancestry and the civic nationalist myth of common commitment to the inhabited homeland. Ethnocultural nationalism portrays the nation as a community united by its ethnocultural sameness deriving from a common ancestry and often depicts the nation as a biological family. In civic nationalism “the nation is defined in terms of a shared commitment to, and pride in, the public institutions of state and civil society, which connect the people to the territory that they occupy” then supposedly regardless of ethnic origin. (Brown 2000:34). The two myths thus offer different grounds for the national community to build its kinship on. They have traditionally been seen as each others opposites where the ethnocultural which predominantly has been said to exist in “the South” generally has been labelled “bad” and the civic predominantly found in “the West” has been labelled “good” nationalism. They are however according to Brown usually intertwined and do not necessarily exclude each other. They can both together or separate form potentially “good” or “bad” nationalism depending on how they are used (Ibid:35).

3. 2. Ghanaian Nation Building in Earlier Research

When it comes to national sentiments in the specific form of national self-images I have not found anything in particular on Ghana. David Brown (2000) has nevertheless dealt with the Ghanaian nation-building via the nationalist and state-legitimizing strategies used during two of Ghana’s regimes. His study can be valuable to consider as a background to this study. He means that Ghana has been able to build both regime and state legitimacy during times of erosion in the living standards of many Ghanaians by the repeated use of what he calls a
‘garrison nationalism’. This type of nationalism is recognised by its identifying and exaggerating of a series of threats undermining the society. National unity can thereby be generated reactively against those threats and the nation-building receives political legitimation, but this needs to be identified and concretised in order to be credible. The choice of enemies then is vital for the regime’s survival (Ibid:113-114). Brown compares the success of Nkrumah’s versus Rawlings’ nation-building via garrison nationalism and concludes that Rawlings was more successful than Nkrumah.

Nkrumah and his Convention People’s Party (CCP) before the independence became promoters of a nationalism where colonialism and neo-colonialism were the biggest threats. They promised a positive development and a future social justice once neo-colonialism was defeated (Ibid:110). Nkrumah identified his political opponents as part of neo-colonialism; they were the “enemy-within”. The enemies were ethno-regional tribalists and especially the Ewes in the Volta region were noticed as a threat. All resistance against the regime eventually was labelled anti-nationalist. According to Brown this strategy did not succeed to convince the people of Ghana. Rawlings garrison nationalist strategy after 1982 on the other hand succeeded in restoring both regime and state legitimacy by identifying the enemies as élite corruption and the remoteness of the state. Rawlings, even if he did not always keep what he promised, succeeded to unite the nation in peoples’ consciousness. He could do this by offering credible enemies to national unity and development. The proposal that the enemy was a corrupted élite rather than different ethnic groups worked to a much larger extent than the tribal threat. Thus Rawlings’ success depends upon his choice of credible enemies more than anything else (Ibid:115-124).

Michael Amoah (2007) who also has addressed Ghanaian nation-building, does not concur with Brown but means that it rather is the post-Nkrumah leadership that has failed to connect with the psychology of the Ghanaian citizens on what is to be achieved. He sees that the focus on the Ghanaian national construct and the spirit of the nation has withered since independence in 1957 and this much because nationalism at that time meant anti-colonial struggle. Thus, Ghana’s nationalism according to him needs to be reconstructed. Politics have a big part in dissolving the national construct when politicians not have seen to an even distribution of opportunities and resources among the populace. A fair distribution of the national cake has not been achieved which has fuelled antagonism among people. He means that the disparity of groups within Ghana needs to feel belongingness and a national identity of one nation, people and destiny to a larger extent than they do today. He illustrates this with an account of what he means is an ethnic, or ethno-national, voting pattern in Ghana where he
tries to map-down the ethno-national groups, their background and their voting pattern in
order to highlight their importance for national politics. According to Amoah Ghana in many
ways has succeeded with fusing an ethno-nationalism with a civic nationalism when being
ethno-national; loyal to the ethnic identity group has become the same thing as having a civic
loyalty; loyalty towards the state institutions. This relationship is not necessarily good when it
exists because in Ghana it is rational to vote in order to best serve the own ethnic affiliation
(Amoah 2007).

Also Kwame Boafo-Arthur (2008) sees the ethnic voting pattern as an undermining
threat against the political and national stability in Ghana. He means that the complacency of
the political leadership does not halt the instrumental use of ethnic affiliation in the search of
votes and political advantages. The ethnic cleavages thus risk being reinforced. He also
highlights how Ghana still has been more successful than other nations when it comes to
keeping sound relationships between ethnic and tribal groups. Generally he means that
national unity and the cause of the nation together with a common bond between the ethnic
groups are promoted but concludes that the biggest threat still is constituted by the politicians
and their aspiration for power via the instrumental use of ethnic allegiances.

3.3. National Self-Images in Earlier Research

The concept of “national self-images” has been considered within the field of International
Relations (IR) (Kaplowitz 1990, Hirshberg 1993) and political science (Peterson 2000) as
well as in education (Hughes 1997). The earlier research with most relevance for this study is
nevertheless Noel Kaplowitz’s and Bo Petersson’s works and they also here form the major
theoretical base. Kaplowitz (1993) does in his work of political psychology consider national
self-images and perception of enemies in relation to various types of conflict behaviour and
interaction. His contribution here mainly is constituted by his description of national self-
images as the perceptions of “how a people sees itself, that which it most likes about itself,
that about which it is most disturbed, the ways in which it may want to change, perceptions of
the nation's history, conceptions of national purpose and interest, and views of the nation's
power and limits” (Ibid:39).

Petersson, (2001) in his work via in-depth interviews with Russian politicians, examines
the Russian national construct with its political division and centre-periphery tension. It is
seen in the light of the upsurge of regional identities which he means severely have hampered
the building of an overarching Russian national identity. Petersson’s work must be considered to constitute the major source in the theoretical construct of this study.

Matthew Hirshberg’s work (1993) which addresses American national stereotypes is used here mainly used to highlight the importance for a nation to attain and maintain positive national self-images. According to him these are fundamental for public consent and support for government (Ibid:78).

Even if the theories which the two theoretical dimensions used in this study\(^8\) are based on previously have been applied on Russian (Petersson 2001) international relations (Kaplowitz 1990) and respective American examples (Hirshberg 1993), I nevertheless see them as useful for a deeper understanding of the Ghanaian nation building process. Even if these separate national contexts to a large extent vary and also the nations’ conditions, especially compared to Ghana, I still see that the theory surrounding these are applicable for this case. I argue that they are usable partly because I am of the view that the mechanism behind nation building processes as very similar regardless of context and conditions but also because these theories after adaption have shown to be very suitable for the empirical conditions in Ghana and for the processing of the empirical data.

### 3.4. National Self-Images in this Study

The concept of national self-images is here used in order to come to a closer understanding of national identification and construct. National self-images are, according to this definition, constituted by individuals’ images of what their own state polity is and ought to be. They are “cognitive and affective conceptual lenses, organising devices and information filters which partly represent, and partly inform national identity” (Petersson 2001:7) They consist of how citizens of a country see their own nation and answer the questions ‘What is our country? What is it not?’ When national self-images not only are based upon what individuals know about their country but also what they like and dislike they are highly affective (Ibid:6-7). They not only include how individuals perceive and value their country but also how they perceive and value the people of their country. National self-images include what a people most likes about themselves, of what they are most disturbed by, and the ways in which they may want to change (Kaplowitz 1990:39). Because of the concept’s nature the study of national self-images can give the status of national sentiments within a country and is closely connected to political attitudes and behaviour (Petersson 2001:2, Kaplowitz 1990:42).

\(^8\) Described further in sections 3.4.1 - 3.4.2.
In order to be able to distinguish and describe the students’ national self-image I have here created two broad analytical dimensions which I can divide them into. These are the Temporal respective the Relational dimension which mainly are based on Petersson’s (2001) respective Kaplowiz’s (1990) works and cover separate aspects of the students’ national self-images. In the Temporal dimension the temporal aspects of Ghanaian national self-images will be explored: the students’ perceptions about Ghana’s and Ghanaians’ past and future, how these might be connected and the importance of these perceptions. In the Relational dimension the “inside”-“outside” perspectives concerning Ghana and its people will be explored where both territorial and social relationships in the present will be emphasised. The dimension will compare and contrast potential ‘us’ and ‘them’ relationships both inside and outside Ghana’s national borders. Here a closer description of the two dimensions follows.

### 3.4.1. The Temporal dimension

The temporal dimension is used in order to detect which meaning temporal aspects have for the students’ national self-images. In the temporal aspect especially cognitive and affective views of the past are of importance. The past, in all countries and all societies, is an inherent part of the present and vice versa; they do mutually influence and create each other. The present constantly ‘recreate the past’ but also the views about the past affect in which light the present is seen. It is thus important to acknowledge how the individual’s own preferred reading of history is highly crucial to her or his sense of collective belonging i.e. identity (Petersson 2001:21-23).

The history can for example represent something deterrent which the nation should not go back to (Ibid). It can be a dark past that needs to be denied and forgotten. For example there might be shame of how the nation behaved towards oppressors which in its turn can generate needs to prove that one’s people is not weak (Kaplowitz 1990:51-52). An unflattering past can further be used as confirmation of how ‘it was worse before’ where the present is seen as brighter or less worth criticism in contrast to the past (Petersson 2001:23). But the past can also serve to reminisce of a golden age where it generates desires to recapture periods of past glory. The current status can then be questioned in the light of this glory or the past can stand as an inspiration for future glory. The importance of the perceptions of history here regardless if it is dark or light can be said to lie in if the history mainly is a source of pride and self-esteem or of shame and diminish (Kaplowitz 1990:51-52).
Nevertheless, not only the past but also predictions of future common goals or a common mission might form part of the national self-image. Especially the political elites in a post-colonial polity that wish to keep the polity together should rather more naturally use the strategy of working towards common, unifying goals in the near future than use recollections of the past when building nationhood. A justifiable and possible way to gather internal cohesion would then be to appeal to a better common future. The images of the future can have a strong impact on how well a state polity succeeds to build a national consciousness (Petersson 2001:25-27).

3.4.2. The Relational dimension

The relational dimension will primarily deal with the “inside” – “outside” perspective of Ghana. It will address what is seen as ‘inside’ and what is seen as “outside” territorially and socially when Ghana as a territory and Ghanaians as a people will be compared and contrasted to other nations and peoples. Also the relationships between distinct territorial parts and potentially distinct groups within Ghana will be explored via the division between “us” and “them”. This is made when nationalism’s “us” and “them” are “constituted by boundaries of inclusion and exclusion both above and below the level of the state” (Nugent et al 2007:9). Via this detection the images the students hold of their own country and people in the present are distinguished.

The “inside”-“outside” relationships of Ghana is addressed in the Relational dimension mainly because it is closely tied to the negative and positive description of “others” compared to “us”. It can hence be used to detect potential negative Othering; the phenomenon to ascribe people in the “out-group” negative traits. This detection is important when if not revealed and dealt with negative Othering risk to have large political consequences (Petersson 2001:29). The separation between “us” and “them” is further important in the case of Ghana when it early on became a way for the new but still very fragile African nation-states to deal with both inside and outside threats on a global and local level and a greater understanding of this division should lead to a greater understanding of the national construct (Nugent et al 2007:9).

In the “inside”-“outside” perspective here territory is emphasised when it plays such a central part in national identification (“inside” often represents inside the national borders). Even if national identity not only consists of territorial aspects national identity to a large extent is a territory bound collective identity where “the homeland” is filled with symbolic meaning. The national identification is mostly challenged by other spatially constructed
collective identities such as regional identities on a micro (e.g. Catalonia) and macro level (e.g. the African Union). Especially in societies and areas of the world, such as Ghana and Africa, where the demarcations have been forcefully imposed cross-cutting, family- or clan-based solidarities rather than build up over a long time, regionally grounded loyalties are more likely to exist. (Ibid:27-28). The territorial “inside”-“outside” perspective hence might not be as clear.

Thus, what the own country is and is not to a large extent comes forth in comparison with other countries both close and far away – in the comparison between “us” and “them” (Ibid:93). How the students see Ghana in comparison to other nations and what they represent in relation to Ghana will therefore be explored. Nations can for example then stand as enemies, deterrent examples, friends or role models (Ibid:103). The nation’s powers and limits which come forth in comparison with other actors’ power and limits can moreover be important for how a people express likes and dislikes about itself (Kaplowitz 1990:51). The own people’s behaviour is also often explained by others’ behaviour: “we” behave the way we do in response to “their” behaviour (Ibid:47).

When it comes to the relationship between territorial parts and between potentially distinct groups within Ghana the centre - periphery relationship will be of importance. This emphasis is made when an uneven or infectious relationship between centre and periphery severely can affect a country’s stability (Petersson 2001:29,177).

3.4.3. Positive respective negative National Self-Images

Further the students’ national self-images in the Temporal and the Relational dimensions continuously in the analysis will be divided into potentially positive respective negative images. The distribution is important when these have potentially distinct consequences. The attaining and upholding of positive national self-images which rest upon patriotic stereotypes help to sustain “political order, public acquiescence and policy support” (Hirshberg 1993:77). To maintain positive national self-images is then vital for the on-going functioning of the state when they lead to continued public compliance and support for government. In contrast negative national self-images make democratic stability almost impossible when discontent could lead to disruption or even revolt. But as long as citizens hold a predominant positive image of their nation-state and interpret national policies in a mainly positive light the government can go about doing its business. It can then be relatively safe from internal dissent and expect a healthy level of public support in times of crisis (Ibid:78). Regardless of
whether or not the positive national self-images concur with “reality”, they constitute an important part of fostering towards national unity and stability (Ibid:96).

In the analysis the prevalence of positive respective negative national self-images in the students’ accounts hence additionally throughout will be tied to their importance for the students’ continued relation to the Ghanaian nation building process.
4. The Ghanaian context

In order to position the students’ accounts in context I here briefly will present the aspects of Ghanaian politics and society which I consider important for an understanding of my study and of the following analysis.

4.1. Before Ghana became Ghana

In 2007 Ghana celebrated its 50th anniversary as a nation. In 1957 it was the first Sub-Saharan African nation to free itself from colonial rule. After nearly a hundred years of British domination the nation then changed from its colonial name “the Gold Coast” to Ghana. The British were not the first colonisers, as the people of the Gold Coast earlier also had experienced for example Portuguese, Dutch and Danish domination (Gocking 2005:32).

Ghana has a history of various influences and as the area has since prehistoric times been populated by migration waves from the north, northwest, east and northeast. In the 15th century the first centralized states were established and power struggles between the smaller and larger states or kingdoms went back and forth during the centuries. Nevertheless in the late 18th century the Ashanti Confederacy, with Kumasi as its capital, after the incorporation of other states covered a large part of present day Ghana (Ibid:21). In northern parts of present day Ghana the influence of Islam with the immigration and trade from the north from an early stage was significant and blended and co-existed with traditional religions. With the increasing contact with the Europeans from the 15th century and onwards Christianity was introduced but then naturally mostly in the south where the commercial and colonial centre was. The Christian missionaries’ work and strong influence did nevertheless not really begin until the 19th century (Gocking 2005:20,29-30) but the pattern of a predominantly Muslim north and a predominantly Christian south partly derives from these distinct flows of influence.

4.2. Nkrumah and Rawlings: the Path to a Two Party System

When demands for liberation from colonial rule were raised in the Gold Coast, especially after World War II, Kwame Nkrumah came to be the liberation movement’s front man and eventually also the father of the nation. The young doctoral student who had studied both in the US and the UK started his political career when Joseph B. Danquah invited him to become Secretary-General for the party United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC). UGCC which was founded in 1947 as the first party in the Gold Coast included members of the
African intelligentsia. It captured the Westernized elements in Gold Coast society and stood for “self-government in the shortest possible time”.

Nkrumah who during his studies was part of an anti-imperialist Pan-African movement which called for independence and unity amongst African states, soon became too radical for the UGCC who in contrast to Nkrumah appeared more compromised with the colonial powers. In 1949 Nkrumah broke away from UGCC to form the Convention People’s Party (CCP) and with it presented a more radical nationalist program with the call for ‘Self-Government Now!’ With his hostility towards the establishment, both the African and the colonial, he together with the politicized commoners succeeded to gain mass support and obtained overwhelming majorities in the elections held in 1951 and 1956 (Svanikier 2007:129-130, Bussuroy 2007:4-5). When the First Republic of Ghana was founded in 1960 Nkrumah by CCP’s majority, he became the first president. He soon made socialism the official ideology and from an early stage came to be connected with socialism and anti-imperialism.

At first CCP and Nkrumah succeeded to keep their popularity but when the promised prosperity escaped and living standards were declining, and Nkrumah and CCP becoming more and more authoritarian and challenged by other political aspirants their popularity decreased. During a visit abroad in 1966 he and CCP hence were overthrown (Fage and Maier 2011). Even though Nkrumah eventually died in exile he up to this day nevertheless still in many ways personifies the father of the nation. His portrait, together with the Ghanaian flag, is found everywhere in the capital Accra and so are also his manifests of anti-imperialism and Pan-Africanism.

After Nkrumah was overthrown by a coup the ones in power did not succeed to take the country back to parliamentary democracy as initially promised and up until 1981 the country experienced several more or less unsuccessful military coups and regimes. In 1981 flight lieutenant Jerry Rawlings seized power for the second time via a military coup and together with his supporter created the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) and held on to the power (Ibid). With Rawlings’ populist “peoples’ revolution”, where he lashed at former politicians as well as the business and professional classes, a new set of political elites was created. During the PNDC regime harsh methods, including many human rights violations, were used against political opponents. These struck former political enemies alike and in its turn created potential identification and opened up for a common fight against Rawlings’ regime (Svanikier 2007:132-133,Aneho 2007:39). Despite the harsh methods Rawlings had a massive support especially from the rural areas and according to Anebo, any objective
analysis of contemporary Ghanaian politics would come to the conclusion that Rawlings still remains the most popular politician in the country today (2007:44).

Maybe with this in mind it is easier to understand how in 1992 Rawlings quite amazingly ended his and PNDC’s regime and imitated the first presidential election since 1979. He represented his new political party the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and was elected president. In 1996 he won a second term with almost two thirds of the votes despite that he was criticised by his opponents for a rather dictatorial political style and his economic policies (Fage & Maier 2011). He then won over a coalition amongst others the National Patriotic Party (NPP) with roots in Danquah’s former party. In the election of 2000 when Rawlings was not allowed to campaign again he stepped down and was succeeded by John Kufuor from NPP. This was the first peaceful transfer of power between democratically elected governments since Ghanaian independence in 1957. Kufuor and NPP were re-elected in 2004 and the current president John Atta Mills from the NDC came into power in 2008 where he marginally beat the NPP candidate in the second round. Today Ghana, even if not so in theory, in practice is more or less a two-party system with the NDC respectively the NPP political parties fighting for power (Fage & Maier 2011).

4.3. Contemporary Ghana

Since 1993 Ghana officially has been known as the Fourth Republic of Ghana and it is a constitutional democracy where the head of state also is the head of government. It consists of ten administrative regions with their own regional capitals where Accra, the capital, is located on the coast in the Greater Accra region (see map appendix 1). The country is rich in natural resources such as gold and other minerals, timber, cocoa and coffee beans (Gocking 2005:1-2.6) and recently some oil reserves also were found and oil production started in mid-December 2010. The rather small country has a population of about 23,8 million people with a predominantly young population. Roughly half of it now lives in urban areas even if agriculture employs more than half of the country’s work force. A majority, about 70 percent, is followers of the Christian faith in different communions and Islam is the next largest religion followed by traditional faiths (CIA- the World Fact book).

Linguistically it is possible to distinguish no less than 75 different groups within Ghana but many of them are very small. The largest ones, according to the 2000 census definition, are Akan (where among others Ashantis are included), Mole-Dagbon, Ewe, Ga-Dangme, Guan and Gurma. The official language in Ghana is English but the numbers of languages
spoken are obviously many. According to the 2000 census the largest one is Ashanti, closely followed by Ewe and Fanti (CIA-the World Fact Book, Fage & Maier 2011). The ethnic and tribal division in Ghana if today can nevertheless partly be questioned when people in Ghana before colonisation simultaneously belonged to “a bewildering variety of social networks – nuclear and extended families, lineages, age sets, secret societies, village communities, diasporas, chiefdoms, states and empires” (Lenz & Nugent 2000:5). These continued also during colonialism but yet no definite loyalties or identities that could add up to clearly demarcated tribes living in well-defined and bounded areas existed. It instead was the British who laid the foundation for Ghana’s ethnic identities of today when they imposed a number of “native states” which they believed mirrored established tribal boundaries. But clearly also older “we”-group processes and African actors with own self-interests contributed to these ethnic identities (Ibid:5-6,9). Nevertheless, even if ethnic affiliations such as “Ewes”, “Gas” and “Ashanti” in much here will be dealt with as given identities their stableness still can be disputed.

4.4. Accra

In Accra, not only the capital but also the largest city with roughly 1 850 000 inhabitants, an abundance of national symbols are found. The maybe most obvious being the Ghanaian flag seen swaying everywhere in the air but also posters with the current and past presidents and commercials playing on national sentiments are common sights. Not to mention the many signboards showing the “Black Stars”: the national team in football which gained much success in the Fifa World Cup in 2010. It is thus clear that Accra is Ghana’s national centre.

Both before and after the colonisation the Accra area has been dominated by the Ga ethnic group but when the area for a long time has had extensive immigration the city holds all ethnic groups as well as many foreign citizens. Accra is the administrative, economical and educational centre of Ghana and you there have an abundant access to infrastructure and communication compared to other parts of the country. Also the media density is much higher when several daily newspapers are issued and the many radio stations broadcast in a variety of languages. Accra in many aspects thus constitutes not only the national but also the urban centre of Ghana (Accra, Encyclopædia Britannica 2011).
5. Analysis

5.1. The Temporal dimension
The Temporal dimension will cover the temporal aspects of the students’ national self images. It begins with how the students relate to and perceive Ghana’s past and continue with their views of the future. The views of the past and the future are further continuously related to the present.

5.1.1. The Past
Here how the students perceive Ghana’s and of Ghanaians’ past will be addressed. The foundation for the views of the past, positive or negative, to a large extent is when the community of Ghana and Ghanaians according to the students began. Most of the students mean that Ghana of today came into being during independence. Before independence they refer to the pre-colonial situation with a variety of larger and smaller independent societies without clear attachment even if cultural similarities also were seen to exist. These societies were eventually gathered together by the colonial borders and these borders since independence more or less constitute the borders of present day Ghana. According to most of the students the people without a clear community then instantly came together under these borders and felt that they belonged to the same entity: the establishment of a “Ghanaian” community was a fact. Others stress that the commonality and social attachment between the people living in the area existed before the political borders were there and that these are of minor importance for the social attachments:

I guess, Ghana has always been Ghana. The only thing that has changed is the name…but the people are being the same, the attachment being the same, shared values have been the same so Ghana has always been Ghana. It is just the name…that has changes… (Int 6)

One student (Int 9) even completely disregards the importance of the national borders for how people relate to each other when these according to him merely are a product of colonialism. Thus they have little to do with the reality of the people already living in the area who had strong social and cultural bonds also before colonialism and independence; he instead emphasises a wider African community:
If there were no independence…we would have been African, and not Ghanaians, no. There would not have been a border so any Ewe everywhere is African…any Dagomba anywhere is African, any Hausa anywhere is African so the independence is just a colonial thing that came to divide us many more than unite us. (Int 9)

The perceptions about Ghana’s past thus start even before Ghana came into being as a nation. Even when the students talk about Ghana as something being there as a result of independence, most of them also acknowledge the importance of the social attachments that were there before the borders. The civic notions of nationhood are here thus blended with the importance of ethnocultural bonds. The relationship between the people, both before and after Ghana came into being as a nation, forms an important part of Ghana’s past which is seen as positive and important for how people relate to each other today. In between the lines in almost all interviews it comes forth that the students feel proud about and cherish that Ghana stands on ancient traditions which have shaped the populace. For example how the strong Ashantis not would give up easily when they met colonial powers is mentioned:

We really fought for our independence. And something that is important in our history is the war between the British and the Ashantis. They fought a lot in the Ghanaian history, for Ashantis were people who, wouldn’t give up…or would trouble the British when they came to the Gold Coast. (Int 2)

Here the ancient past is seen as an inspiration for the present and the past is thus seen in positive light. I interpret that this part of the history can form a source of strength and thereby it indicates positive national self-images. These images then also speak for a continued support for the nation building process based on the ancient traditions and community.

The positive perceptions of the past also after Ghana become a nation continue when quite a few of the students are proud of the fact that the nation was the first to gain independence in Sub-Saharan Africa: the nation is in this case seen a pioneer. Ghana and its first leader Nkrumah thus according to most of the student played an important role in other countries’ freedom struggles and further Nkrumah’s importance as a Pan-African leader is a source of pride for several of the students:

I think we have a proud history, within Africa. You know in Black Africa we got independence first and you look at the president our first president he was really a fighter for people. You know that, people can take care of themselves. (Int 5)
We were the first country, the first Black Country to attain independence...the first country sub of the Sahara who achieved independence and we moved on to became a republic...and we really engineered the independence of most people. (Int 1)

Another part of the past that is positive for many of the student is Ghana’s long internal peace:

I think that my country is a country with not much experience of civil war. Even though we have different tribes within, this is something that not even the US could do, but we found a way, and we have never had civil war in this country. (Int 11)

According to the perceptions of the past ventilated by the students they do not face the risk of seeing their people or nation as weak or inferior during the history. Quite the contrary because they did not, illustrated for example by the Ashanti resistance, give up easily for the colonial powers and further Ghana was one of the first countries to liberate itself from colonial powers. The potentially negative history of colonisation then rather stands as something which, according to at least some of the students has made the Ghanaians people and nation stronger: they have had a mutual cause to fight for. This clearly illustrates how nationalism, as mentioned above, from an early stage stood as an anti-colonial force. These perceptions of the past are thus positive and stand as a source of inspiration and strength. The past also partly explains the success many of the students experience in the present and will further then presumably sustain also a future national support.

The positive images of the past do nevertheless not form the whole picture. There are some aspects of their history which make some of the students less proud. The time of military coups after the independence is something that forms a dark past where political opponents harshly were beaten down and human right violations were usual. In the past also for example ethnicity mattered in how people relate to each to a larger extent than in the present:

When you look at our politics...our politics are...actually in the history of Ghana from the time of Nkrumah up to now...it hasn't always been very good...there have been times when it wasn't...I mean Ghana hasn't always been like now, there has been times when...the conditions weren't so good...there were times when...there was no food around because of political aspects...because of conflict between government and military officials and everything. (Int 3)
Initially when we started our politics, it used to be so [that ethnicity mattered]...but...after those, what I call them the dark ages of Ghana politics, when we had the cup d'états and the rest...it used to be like that. But upon transition to democratic rule in 1992, the Fourth Republic, then we started...we used to be somehow like that because it was a military government, changing over or metamorphosed itself into a democratic government...so there were certain ethnic groups that were dominating but as time goes on...it does not matter. (Int 1)

These negative parts of the past are something that the students seem to want to forget which is shown by how briefly they are mentioned or not at all. Some of the students evidently totally neglect these parts. Maybe partly because they do not want to discuss these with someone from outside the country, in order to keep a positive history view intact or maybe because they not are asked about the past explicitly. Another reason might be that it rather is things in the present that make the students feel ashamed and thus the past is mentioned only briefly. But interestingly, when negative aspects of the past are mentioned they are used to contrast and compare with how it is today. When the consensus seems to be that “it was worse before” (apart from the ancient Ashanti kingdom) it shows how much better it is in the present and how far from those negative aspects in history the nation is today. The history thus first and foremost stands as a source of strength and pride for the students and as a source of positive national self-images where a continued state support presumably can be gathered.

5.1.2. The Future

In the temporal aspect of the students’ national self-images which covers the future the optimism in a majority of the interviews, even if it many times is to find in-between the lines, can not be mistaken. Everyone is somehow convinced that the country will continue to develop in a positive direction and some of them are even highly positive when it comes to the future and see that the country really moves in the right direction. According to them the country in the future will continue to improve both democratically and economically, will continue to be a pioneer within Africa and in not too long reach the development level in the “West”. One of the students even takes the optimism about the future as far as saying that in the future Ghana will be a superpower and lead other nations in Africa towards a better development:

The black star that is Ghana...and it’s shining for...you know that the star in Christianity, you know what it means...the star leading the white man to go and see Jesus. We are leading Africa to the Promised Land... (Int 1)
Here it is clear that the future stands as something bright and positive where common goals will be reach which, as mentioned above, is a good strategy for a post-colonial polity rather than to focus on the past. The nation building here thus can stand on future positive aspirations which have been successfully established within this group of students.

Some others, even if they see that the country indeed in many ways is doing well, nevertheless to a larger extent see that there are things to work with on the way. In order to keep and improve its position the country needs to look over its institutions, politics and economic agreements:

There are some certain things that bother me and it for example is our institutions. The problem is that all institutions are working so slowly or the capacity becomes ineffective. The institutions become ineffective and I think that as a state we are...I think we have corruption everywhere and we have to conquer it. (Int 11)

The future picture is thus not only bright when also a potentially pessimistic future is ventilated. The success according to some in large relies upon if the country succeeds to work against ethnic affiliations, corruption and foreign dependency. According to one student (Int 8) Ghana also has much to improve upon when it comes to attitudes and mentality, which he sees as standing in the way for Ghana’s development. If the students with these negative perceptions see that these aspects are not dealt with, negative national self-images could have the soil to grow in. And these could then risk venturing the continued nation building process.

Something which also can nuance the images of the future is how the students define a future positive development for Ghana. Here many of the students stress the importance of more education for empowering the broad masses:

Positive development is investing in the people, the people. Increasing education in quantity and quality…and creating jobs for the people so that after they are educated they get jobs, and something to do. (Int 11)

Quite a few of them talk about the importance of continued democracy, of an improved economy with available jobs and of poverty reduction. Also the need for more infrastructures and the importance that citizens feel secure are mentioned. Yet again some stress the importance to decrease differences between regions and between individuals’ incomes and opportunities. Also the need to drop ethnic allegiances both on a personal as well as a political

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9 Which then all form a part of the present situation.
level is mentioned as a condition for positive development and further that people’s rights and freedom should continue to exist and be respected. Here thus an in general positive future is depicted but the future nevertheless is bright with some constraints. If what is seen as premises is not fulfilled, according to some of the students it will be hard to achieve a positive development and future. This in its turn then could result in more pessimistic images of the present and the future and thus also the support for the nation building risks being lost. I also see that these temporal perceptions about a future positive development stand as important nuances of the national self-images that come forth in the other aspects of the national self-images when it becomes clearer what the students see as present problems.

5.2. The Relational dimension

In the Relational dimension, which to a large extent represents the national self-images concerning the present, the “inside” – “outside” perspectives of Ghana with their potential “us” and “them” relationships hence will be explored. The dimension will start with comparisons to nations and peoples outside the national borders and then proceed with internal comparisons.

5.2.1 Ghana in relation to other nations and supranational actors

When it comes to other nations that Ghana is compared to, quite a few of the students use Nigeria to emphasise what Ghana is and is not. Nigeria is seen as a much more violent and hectic country with more infectious tribal (ethnic) and religious conflicts compared to Ghana:

A civil servant from southern Ghana can be put in northern Ghana and a civil servant from northern Ghana can be put in the south so it cuts across some integration. They’re uniting Ghana although it is not, I would not say it is the best but it is better than Nigeria for instance...because they can not...the clashes they have over in Nigeria we do not have them here, the tribal ones… (Int 11)

Not only Nigeria but also other African countries are mentioned as being worse than Ghana when it comes to peace, sound relationships between ethnic groups, democracy, citizenship rights, stable and strong state, to attract foreign investors etc. They are used to exemplify how Ghana is more successful:
I mean here in Ghana foreigners speaking Twi is fascinating sometimes. People think it is funny but it could be worse things because Ghana isn’t necessarily a xenophobic country. We do not have problems like South Africa or all the other southern African countries that are very particular about race. (Int 6)

I connect Ghana with peace. Because maybe because where I am from, I am born in Saudi Arabia but I am actually Sudanese, so you know about the conflicts in Sudan...the war and everything, the government and the people...Here it is not like that, it is just peaceful. The government is democratic... (Int 10)

I will always stress the fact that it is very peaceful here and the elections are conducted peacefully. You know you don't get these robbery cases...and not so much corruption and things, you won't find it so much here compared to other places you see. And the killings, say you hear that this person is dead, shot and in the street, you won't find such here. (Int 4)

Ghana is thus seen as a leader of democracy and peace within Africa which is based on how Ghana has a relatively high election participation compared to other places in Africa; the transitions between governments have been peaceful; the state has kept what it promised and the government can, according to the students, offer the citizens their rights and a sense of security to a larger extent than in other places in Africa. Ghana is then emphasized as a pioneer nation which is uniquely successful in Africa and a role-model for other African nations:

Ghana is a very peaceful country, it is relatively peaceful, it is a place where you can come and you are safe. Also the fact that there is so much that we do not only for us self as Ghanaians but also for other African countries and other West African countries look at Ghana as a sort of a star or something, it is a symbol of hope... (Int 3)

I interpret this as it is important for the students to distance themselves from other African developing countries with a low international status. They need to stand separate from these or they need to stand as something “Other” in relation to Ghana in order to defend Ghana’s position in relation to me as a representative for ‘the West’. Here, the power relationship between “the West” and nations striving to be like “the West” addressed above clearly comes forth (Hall 1992:276-277).

The other nations in Africa are not only used as deterrent examples in order to highlight Ghana’s success or seen as distinct “Others”. They are also seen as companions; as related nations with culturally similar brothers and sisters sharing the same history of western abuse. They stand as a potential “us” when it is in the other nations, especially those in West Africa, that the major partners according to the students are found. African unity is further seen to
benefit all African countries on the world stage and Africa needs to stand united in order to achieve a better future for all its countries:

For me, there's no reason having Ghana, it should be Africa. It should be Africa. I mean, there's no reason having Ghana, Togo, Nigeria...these becomes more or less states within a country. (Int 5)

We are bonded in Africa...by our colour, by our continent, by our beliefs, by our [inaudible] by our aspiration...so those borders are just a creation of some people from somewhere. So if you are going to discuss those borders it should be known that they are just on paper...If we are going to discard them it would be better for us... (Int 9)

Here then the African nations both are used as examples of how Ghana is doing better but they are also potentially one with Ghana. They can therefore be seen both as less successful “Others” and as a potential “Us” sharing a common cause. Other African nations are thus either seen as “inside” or “outside” depending on how the students look upon the community and the national borders which clearly shows how blurred the distinction between inside and outside sometimes can be (Petersson 2001:140). These images of Ghana, compared to other nations, indicate that the image of the own nation is mainly favourable and that it will be relatively easy to collect support for the ongoing nation-building process here.

When it comes to territories outside Africa that Ghana is compared to, the US is used as the major role model nation for many of the students, primarily when it comes to economy and democracy. Many count the US as “us” especially now when the nation even have a “black” president in Barack Obama\(^\text{10}\). But even if the nation is a big role model, some of the students also emphasise that not everything is perfect in the US. A clear pattern from the interviews is that the students find their role model nations only outside Africa. Even if specific countries, such as the US, are mentioned they together instead form the image of more successful “Others” which equals “Western” or “developed” countries that Ghana thrives to be like:

Ghana is a country who is coming up, who is growing and developing in ALL sectors. With our economy and with our political system...and our institutions are growing, and…and they are becoming shortly like those in the western world, like those in the west. (Int 2)

I interpret that the success thus lies in “becoming like the West” which also is something that clearly ties back to what was mentioned above about “the West” functioning as an evaluator

\(^{10}\text{T-shirts and posters with President John Atta Mills together with Barack Obama underlined with the slogan 'Yes we can’ was not a rare sight in Accra.}\)
for success (Hall 1992:276-277). The interpretation made here is that the inspiration for the continued nation-building process then is to find in this relationship.

5.2.2. Ghanaians in relation to other peoples

Here the Relational dimension continues with the focus on images of ‘Ghanaians’ that comes forth via comparison with other nationalities. These nationalities stand as positive and negative “them” or “others” compared to “us” Ghanaians. Firstly, in order to be counted as “inside” or part of the Ghanaian community a person according to the students needs to fulfil certain criteria. These could be of constitutional, cultural, traditional or value based kinds and further also patriotism, bloodline and “blackness” were mentioned as aspects which could decide your “Ghanaianness”. Being Ghanaian here thus derives from many criteria either separate or together depending on which of the students I asked.

The general images of Ghanaians as a community that come forth in the interviews are that Ghanaians are peaceful, loving, caring, accommodating and hospitable people. These traits are expressed by all students, who embrace and are proud of these which indicates positive national self-images. These in their turn indicate a continued support for a mutual national cause and nation-building. One student (Int 6) nevertheless emphasised that via these presumably positive images Ghanaians in general have of their people and country, especially compared to other nations and peoples in Africa, they face the risk of not taking real threats towards stability seriously. I understand him as this could make Ghanaians lazy and presumptuous, and Ghana is not free from risks but continuingly needs to work for an allowing societal climate. Here thus the risks with the predominantly positive images Ghanaians have of themselves are highlighted.

The students nevertheless illustrate the peacefulness with how Ghanaians not eagerly fight but instead let things be opposite to for example Nigerians who then are seen as less successful “Others”. Ghanaians avoid conflict, “fear blood” and are willing to “disagree to agree or agree to disagree” (Int 11).

You know Ghanaians generally...our people are peace loving. You can leave people be and that differentiates us from for example our neighbours in Togo or Côte d'Ivoire. Every little thing can turn into a fight there but in Ghana you do not see that. We are generally peace loving, we are very jovial. Ghanaians we like to be jovial and when you are going to fight we joke instead. You can hear an aggressive joke, and they shout to each other in a very nasty language but it's a joke. But in Nigeria you see that they fight. (Int 5)
The image of Nigerians is yet nuanced when Ghanaians, according to one student, not are very opinionated in comparison to Americans and Nigerians. This is in one way sometimes good when it does not lead to fights but it can also be bad when it can lead to being pushed around both on a personal as well as a state level:

Nigerians are tougher, more confident... Nigerians don't take no for an answer whereas Ghanaians are very laid back, whatever comes our way we say yes...we give in a lot, sometimes we are a bit too hospitable (…) Ghanaians are very “yes”, we say “yes” to people...it is an inferiority complex and Nigerians do not have that. (Int 6)

Here the generally positive trait becomes a weakness when it results in Ghanaians being brushed aside. Nigerians and Americans then in some ways stand as more successful “Others”. According to another student (Int 8) it also is negative that Ghanaians avoid conflict to the extent that they become cowards. He sees that Ghanaians do not stand up for their rights in the same way Americans do which yet again shows how Americans are seen as more successful ‘Others’. One interpretation which could be made here is that Americans in this case stands as clear representatives for “Western” ways which the student wants to mimic. One student (Int 2) for example explicitly mentioned how she is grateful that the British came with enlightenment and Christianity to Ghana. Via these mentioned comparisons thus some negative national self-images are ventilated when the own nationality by some is seen as week or inferior to other nationalities which could risk to weaken a continued national support.

5.2.3. Relationships between distinct parts of Ghana

The initial images of the relationship between the distinct territorial and administrative regions in Ghana which comes forth in the interviews are the images of harmony and similarities. Even if some differences are acknowledged when it comes to for example culture, religion and development level it is what unites these parts that is emphasised rather than what separates them. It is clear that the image of a nationally united Ghana is strong with almost all of the students. The parts are seen to be joined mainly by the common values and culture among their inhabitants which are indicated also in the Temporal dimension. In these images no negative Othering between the distinct regions comes forth but instead a strong ‘us’ and a strong picture of all the regions being counted to the same ‘inside’. This picture with little differences between the regions is nevertheless challenged by the division between Ghana’s northern and southern parts which in one way or the other after a while come forth in
all interviews. When it is addressed and in connection to what yet varies among the students.\textsuperscript{11}

The “North-South” divide within the country can according to the students be seen geographically and it is claimed to go between the Volta together with the three northern regions and then the rest of the southern regions. The division holds many aspects but what separates these parts of the country is according to the students’ accounts primarily the level of development and resource allocation. The south, with the capital Accra as centre, has infrastructure, education, health care and working opportunities in abundance in comparison to the north and thus the south forms the economical, educational and recreational centre of Ghana.

We see that southern Ghana is more developed than the northern Ghana in terms of infrastructure and many things. (Int 2)

So it is basically the southern part…you know the Europeans had their activities in the southern part of Ghana leaving the northern sector. That is why the southern part is more developed than the northern…There is more education, the job market…there are more jobs. (Int 8)

This has created a situation where people tend to leave the north to come to the southern part of the country where the opportunities are larger in both number and quality. This according to some of the students forms a “bad circle” where the north constantly is drained on man-power and nature resources and the development partly because of this then continues to increase in the south and to fall behind in the north. For example one of the students, who comes from Wa in the Northern region says:

I just finished my studies. Presume I decide to get back, what would I do? There's no organisation that is willing to take me in up there, I mean, they are not there. Everything is concentrated in the south. So I am forced to stay here. So we keep on increasing the population of the south. (Int 5)

Still even if there according to the students exist a clear divide between the north and the south of Ghana the differences are not to what I can see explained as differences in value. It is instead according to the students something that derives from the different flows of impact, both in the past and in the present. One explanation is that the colonial and trade centre was in the south which resulted in that the production, infrastructure, education and

\textsuperscript{11} For example the division is mentioned when it comes to political affiliation or/and uneven resources.
health care developed there while manpower and raw materials were taken from the north. Also the neglect of recent and current political leaders for some of the students forms part of the explanation for the development in the south and the neglect of the north.

The relationship between north and south does then not seem infectious when no strong “us” and “them” between the north and the south come forth in the interviews. The negative Othering is, based on the students’ accounts, still absent. The relationship is yet not seen as unproblematic when the uneven relationship between the parts is something which all of the students somehow problematize. They want to change this unevenness when unjust resources according to them do not help the nation and the unity but instead seems to fuel discontent and antagonisms. Some students mention that claims for decentralization and federalisation have been made from other regions than the southern ones as a response to what is depicted as unjust resource allocation. Here the distinct regions still form the “inside” and are included but still the need for these parts to be even more “inside” and integrated with each other is ventilated.

The North – South divide further comes forth as an uneven centre – periphery relationship with abundant resources in the centre compared to the periphery. Here Ghana by the lack of attention from the political centre on peripheral regions can be said to face the risk of damaging the relationship between the distinct parts of the country. If not dealt with I interpret that this relationship eventually might lead to problems with state legitimacy (Petersson 2001:177-179). This unevenness could also, if it continues, lead to a weakened national support from peripheral parts but also from the students, if they continue to see this as a national problem.

5.2.4. Relationships between people in Ghana
Most of the students claim that the relationship between ethnic groups in Ghana and people from the distinct regions are harmonious and not infectious which reflects the peacefulness Ghana is known for. This is something that the students time and again emphasise, and it is clear that they feel proud and cherish this peacefulness. The relative harmony is explained by the many inter-marriages and by the relationships people grow when they move between different parts of the country. Also education, where students meet and where mutual respect is taught, is given as an explanation for the respect between people. Many students stress that even if there exist cultural differences between distinct ethnic groups what unites Ghanaians yet again is stronger than what divides them. It is clear that the prominent image of the
Ghanaian people that the students want to mediate and which many of them also have internalized thus is the image of a united people: of a wider ‘us’ that includes all Ghanaians:

We have different ethnic groups and different tribes, depending on the region you come from you speak a different language...but that common thing between us is the fact that we all understand that in as much as we speak different languages we are all from one place...we are all from one country. If they are talking about Ghana, they are just not talking about Ashantis or Fantis or Ewes, they’re talking about the whole country, from the north all the way down to the south and that's what actually keeps us together. (Int 3)

This image is nevertheless somewhat challenged by other accounts made by the students, for example when it came to ethnic stereotypes. Even if these most of the time are seen as stereotypes not necessarily tied to reality and explained by distinct flows of impact they partly are taken for true. Traits are seen by some students to derive from where persons live or which group they belong to. Also some of the students openly stress that even if people not make any extensive differences between ethnic groups they still need to do so even less:

Even if you go to the university now you still have people asking, where is this person from? And it is really difficult to marry across certain tribes. It is shameful of us. For instance I come from Wa and if I was going to marry you it would be much easier than if I was going to cross over to another tribe to take a wife. Among Akan and Ashanti in particular, it would be several differences and though there are a lot of intermarriages these days I think that it should not be any trouble at all. (Int 5)

Here it is clear that the student wants the tribal affiliation to be of no importance when it comes to for example marriages but yet he himself also mentions how people of a certain tribe (Ashanti) behave in a certain way which in itself is an example of ethnic stereotyping. Interestingly also a few other students also mentioned the same group in connection to the same issue. It further mirrors a moderate critique I met towards the domination of Ashantis both in numbers and power both within and outside the interview situation. They are seen to be both very strong and proud which indicates that the students’ questioning of how difference is made between distinct tribal groups also comes forth via other observations. One student (Int 6) clearly addresses these ethnic stereotypes which he means are part of almost every Ghanaian and he and the other students who also mention stereotyping mean that the major way to counteract negative effects of stereotyping is via education. Also this is said:

\[12\text{ For example one students and her roommate after the interview quite thoroughly explained the difference between people coming from the Volta respective the Ashanti region.}\]
When it comes to ethnicity, you know people have some kind of technical tie to their community, their ethnic group, even more than to the national interest. They feel like—or make things in their community rather than joining the national community. Normally I feel I am in this community, if they are in their ethnic group, they feel allegiance to their ethnic group and the national issue is less important. (Int 7)

How the ethnic relations between Ghanaians are depicted by the students further needs to be seen in the light of yet some observations I made in field. During various occasions I experienced how what ethnic group a person belonged to somehow affected how a person was seen quite contrary to a majority of the students’ accounts. For example when a Ugandan friend of mine was asked from which region he was and then falsely said that he was from the Ashanti region it clearly was appreciated by the inquirer who instantly made a comment of how great people Akans were. I also experienced how “politically incorrect” it was to be perceived as a “tribalist” and label people according to tribe. This ties back to Brown’s (2001) study of Ghanaian nationalism where “tribalism” became something despicable and seen as a threat towards the nation. Here then the interest for the students to evade being labelled “tribalists” is taken into consideration. Further, even if the newspapers quite eagerly made fun of tribal stereotypes I also experienced that there existed some more serious undertones in the jokes which can be seen to reflect differences made.

The major aspect which nevertheless somehow complicates relationships between ethnic groups and between Ghanaians in general is, according to all except one student (Int 8), the division between the two major parties: CCP and NDC. Both of these are by the students considered to have ethnic and thereby also regional strong holds which the parties are said to use in order to gain votes and advantages. The antagonism between the parties is by all students further seen as the threat towards national unity closely followed by biased and neglectful media. The general pattern according to the students is that people in the north and the Volta region support the NDC and people in the south and then especially the Ashanti region support the NPP. In the relationship between the two parties and their tactic use of ethnicity there lies a potentially infectious “us” and “them”; a risk of negative Othering. Based on the students’ accounts an infectious relationship with potentially fatal consequences

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13 The media was generally seen in a bad light among the people I met in Accra. It was seen not to fulfill its societal commitment but instead to act according to commercial and politically biased interests. It also stood clear to me through the media coverage I experienced that the division and conflict between the two parties and their supporters stood for a large part of the news content.

14 This division between the two major parties and their supporters could thereby also be partly tied to the north–south divided mentioned above.
risks developing if the two parties and their supporters not stop to fuelling antagonism between people in order to win supporters. Here a considerable risk for the politicians to loose the students’ support for a wider national cause then also lies when they here risk to appear to consider political and selfish interests instead of the good for the nation.

Another relationship between Ghanaians that comes forth in the interviews is the one based on level of education and on how far or close a person is from the centre. The difference between on one side people living in the centre or larger cities and who are educated (these two mostly seem to co-exist) and on the other side the ones living in the periphery or the country side and with low or no education. The students quite naturally fall into the first category and even if the emphasis many times is on the equality between people the image that comes forth is that the students are separated from the rural and peripheral masses with low education far away from the centre, especially when it comes to national awareness. The uneducated and the educated somewhat are depicted in an “us” and “them”.

It is implicitly and explicitly expressed that that people far away from the centre and with low education many times do not understand what the national cause or the major good for the people is because their lack of knowledge of the surrounding world and/or education whilst this is something that the educated and urbanites understand. It is mainly also the rural inhabitants with low education who are the ones that most likely will act upon ‘ethnic stereotypes’ and fall for political manipulation or disregard the national cause because they, as said, do not understand it or do not see the national but rather the local as their reality:

National unity is a matter of consciousness within the people that they are one. Especially education is needed because some people do things ignorantly. They never know about something like…the national interest and they go about doing things ignorantly. But in education there is a very good Ghana. National unity is very important for development and I think they all join in because if we are in a rural area without electricity and you do not even have good drinking water there and you are fighting and you do not have national unity there then you can never get those things. But if we educate them there: national unity is comparable to those who have those things I think they will be fighting for national unity, either that or nothing. So our leaders need to educate us…the various political parties, the religious leaders, the ethnic group leaders they are one part of the key to educate their members towards certain (inaudible) for national unity… (Int 7)

This quote stands as a good illustration for that even if there exist an “us” and “them” the students nevertheless are unsure when the rural populace are themselves respective Others. In the same time as he says if “we educate them there” he also says “our leaders need to educate
us”. This can say to reflect that the students many times themselves come from the countryside or have families there which make the distinction unclear. Even if this “us” and “them” can have potentially negative effects it does not, for now, seem to be constituted by any negative Othering.

The mentioning of the leaders brings us to the last relationship between Ghanaians which will be addressed here. The leaders/elite are both depicted as positive and stable leaders able to leadership and as taking Ghana to where it should be, by some students. Others see the leaders as mainly corrupt and as people who enrich themselves on the expense of the people. Nevertheless almost all students nuance the picture and mean that there exist both good and bad leaders:

We have leaders, maybe not every leader, but we have some leaders who are committed to the cause of Ghana, who are fighting hard for the country’s development and that is appreciable…they work for the whole nation to move forward. And that is many of the leaders but not all because some in our leadership supply themselves but others do not so those are the one that I call good leaders and the others I call bad… (Int 9)

Neither the positive nor the negative images of the leaders are however seen as “us” together with the students or the wider populace. The leaders are far from the students and do not seem to be individuals that the students identify with. One student stresses that now when the education level of the population increases individuals at least can question the leaders to a larger extent than earlier which indicates that the gap between leaders and the educated strata has reduced:

Today if you are a politician...the kind of politic you used to do in 1992 is different from the politics of today...because at least somebody has more knowledge than you the policy maker. (Int 1)

The students thus see the political leaders as distant “Others” naturally with a large influence over the country, the populace and the future development in Ghana. Still the main image of the leaders as “them” is that there exist both good and bad leadership and that it also is up to Ghanaians themselves to demand the leaders to act in the interest of the people:

I will urge my fellow Ghanaian that the destiny of the country is in the hands of its people, we do not put it in the hands of the politicians, the politicians are not the people, you do not put the politician there for the politicians’ sake or for you to get something of it, you have to strive, to add to the value of the politician
and you also need to contribute very fairly so that the country in the whole can develop… and everything depends upon that we all put national interest before personal interest. (Int 11)

The national cause or interest here then is emphasised to be every individual’s responsibility and not only a “political” or “elite” project. I understand that the demands for national change and development, according to at least some of the students, are easier to claim nowadays with the empowerment that education brings.

In this “us” and “them” relationship thus both positive and negative national self-images comes forth depending on where the emphasis lies: on corrupt and ineffective leaders or on fair leaders promoting a common national good. The latter nevertheless here seems to dominate. The images of the relationship between leaders and students also partly can be tied to the division between the two major parties and its potential creation of “us” and “them”. If the gap between the political elite; the leaders, and the students and/or the wider populace would widen the politicians further could risk loosing the students’ continued support for the national construct.
6. Conclusion

6.1 The Analysis and the Research Questions

I will here summarize and discuss the analysis in connection to the research questions and then brief some general reflections concerning the whole study.

One of the questions was which national self-images concerning temporal and relational aspects that came forth during the field study. As can be seen above, when it comes to the national self-images concerning the Temporal dimension the past mainly come forth as images which serve to give the students strength and which make them proud over their nation. These mainly show how successful Ghana and its people have been throughout the history. The images of the past also partly explain why Ghana is successful in the present and further stand as inspiration for the future. These images are yet also somewhat challenged by some few darker parts of the history. The images of a successful past nevertheless dominate and are marginally questioned which hence can be seen as an indication for their stableness.

In the images of the future, it becomes clear which hopes and aspirations the students have for Ghana and its people. Here the aspects which the students see as positive in the present and which they want to strengthen come forth, but what they do not yet have and want to achieve in the future is also ventilated. A majority of the students’ future images must be said to be of mainly optimistic character. The majority’s optimism is yet somewhat blended with pessimism concerning certain negative aspects of the present which some of the students see. These aspects further need to be suitable dealt with in order to achieve a positive development and future. In the images of the future a key to the present thus lies when the students while mentioning these aspects, which they see as problematic in the future, also more clearly indicate what they see as present problems. The vision of the future is hence generally bright and inspiring but also comes with some constraints that need to be fulfilled in order to achieve success. A varied and naturally not as fixed image of the future than of the past thus comes forth.

When it comes to the national self-images concerning the Relational dimension Ghana definitely is seen in a positive light in comparisons with other nations in Africa. The images of the nation then are highly affirmative when Ghana to a large extent is seen to have succeeded where other African nations have been less successful. When it comes to comparisons with nations outside Africa, or in “the West” Ghana nevertheless not is seen in an as positive light. Yet these nations stand for what Ghana in many ways strive to be and the
hope and assurance with many of the students is that Ghana also will achieve this. The images of the people compared to other peoples is further mainly favourable when Ghanaians are seen as a harmonious and peace loving people which not easily fight or seek conflict, even compared to people outside Africa. These images are yet not only a source of optimism when the people because of this also are seen to face the risk of being pushed around by other peoples and actors.

When it comes to the internal relationships between territorial parts of Ghana these by the students primarily are seen as positive or harmonious and no large division is at first detected in the students’ responses. The ‘North-South divide’ which after a while nevertheless comes forth is yet seen as problematic. It is seen as problematic when the unevenly spread resources and opportunities are considered as threats to national stability. According to many of the students the division thus might lead to discontent and antagonism and widen the gap between centre and periphery.

The images of the relationships between people in Ghana at first can seem more or less only positive when the in general very good relationships between Ghanaians are emphasised by almost all students. This highly positive image is nevertheless questioned by other accounts and also by observations made in field where a somewhat more problematic picture of especially ethnic relationships comes forth. These images indicate that even if ethnicity is considered to matters less than in other African nations and the Ghanaian populace is seen as fairly united, people still emphasize differences between individuals when it comes to ethnic affiliation. This makes the positive images surrounding this part of the national identification somewhat less strong.

The most problematic relationship between people in Ghana is further also tied to ethnicity and politics where the division between the two major parties is seen as the threat towards a stable and positive national development. The national self-images tied to national politics is thus positive in the sense that Ghana is seen to manage to change political power successfully but negative in the sense that the two parties’ competition is seen to obstruct positive relationships between people and also between parts of the country.

Even if many of the relationships within Ghana are seen as somewhat problematic they nevertheless do not come forth as strongly negative or infectious national self-images. No strong negative Othering or major division between either parts of the country or between peoples within Ghana materializes in the students’ accounts. Other nations are neither in this study seen as threats towards the nation or its people and the prevalence of negative “us” or “them” relationships is thus seen as low.
Another question posed in the beginning of the study was if these national self-images accounted for above were constituted by predominately positive or negative images. And after the review of the national self-images concerning temporal and relational aspects which came forth during the field study it should then be clear that these mainly are constituted by positive national self-images. These positive images are nevertheless also accomplished and nuanced by some negative national self-images.

The last question posed to the empirical data was what the perceived national self-images might say about the students’ continued relation to the Ghanaian nation building process. It has been answered continuously throughout the analysis via the importance and potentially distinct consequences positive respective negative national self-images are said to have upon state stability, support for government and then also upon the nation building process and is here further clarified some.

When the students’ national self-images are mainly positive, provided that these do not change radically, this indicates that they will also be in favour of the nation building process in the future. If these positive images continue to dominate the government’s nationalistic strive should not need to feel threatened by these students but instead it could expect their support in the mediating of a national cause. The national cause is by the students seen as the right cause and it will be via mainly this that the differences between different regions will be evened out. I further perceive that a strong central government with a national agenda is seen as the best suited to achieve this by the students. The belief with a majority of the students seems to be that the political polity and leadership to a large extent see to the students’ and the populace best and the trust level is thus generally high, even if some politicians also are seen to mainly act upon their own self-interests. The belief among the students thus seems to be that the national cause driven by the politicians in large also is the people’s cause. If the trust for the government is kept intact they should be able to rely on the students’ support.

Some of the national self-images nevertheless could indicate that the trust or support for government among the students might be lost or anyhow decrease in force which could lead to that a questioning of the nation building process might arise. One of the negative national images with the highest risk to complicate the students’ relationship to the future nation building process is the view of the two major parties as antagonists who neglect to work towards the major good for the nation. The image that the two parties use ethnicity or play on discontent towards the other party in order to gain votes and advantages should be a problem if allowed to grow when they while they are in power constitute the government of Ghana. If the students increasingly would perceive the parties as not fulfilling their commitments
towards the nation and the populace they risk loosing the students’ trust and not only the nation building process but also democracy might be at risk. Another of these negative images which could be seen as problematic if it grows is the image of unjust resource allocation between distinct parts of the country and also the (yet very little addressed) image that ethnic belonging affects your conditions and opportunities. All these partly negative images mentioned are also tied to the relationship between political leaders and the wider populace which if it widens risk to lead to a loss of trust and destabilisation of the nation building process.

6.2. General Reflections

After addressing the analysis in relation to the three research questions I here will continue with a wider discussion and some conclusive reflections of the field study and its results.

To first tie back to the last question, I see that which national self-images these students will have in the future and how these in their turn will relate to the continued nation building process in large will depend upon which actors, nations and peoples the students will choose to compare with. This in its turn is decided by who they by nationalist promoters are encouraged to compare with. If they continue to compare mainly with other African nations their positive images should be kept relatively intact if the future development would not change radically. But, if they instead in their strive for change mainly compare with role-model nations outside Africa, I see a slight risk for disillusion and less positive images if the own nation’s situation not fast enough would change. The national self-images of Ghana’s and Ghanaians’ relationship to the surrounding world which come forth in this study then positions Ghana as a pioneer in Africa which strive to achieve better for its people, country and continent and then especially in comparison with non-African nations and supranational communities. The destined positive development should nevertheless be gained on Ghana’s own terms and conditions without too much foreign assistance.

It could further be asked if the image of Ghana as a nation with a rather “successful” nation building process has been significantly changed. Even if challenges to a stable and inclusive nation building process clearly via this study can be seen the image of Ghana as relatively successful when it comes to an inclusive nation building process have been kept fairly intact. It according to me is kept so when the potentially infectious aspects, at least up to now, seem to have been kept under control. According to my estimation the national identification among the students, and also among other people I met in Accra, was fairly
strong and held both ethnocultural and civic bonds. Further, even if it alongside the national identification also existed an encouragement and wishes for a wider African community it according to this study does not seem to be complicated for the students to identify with the nation and its polity. The imagined ties which Anderson addresses must then be said to exist and be fairly strong between the individuals I met. The presumed problems which can arise in post-colonial polities following a “Western model” of nationalism are here then scarcely seen.

In the work with my field data the two biggest concerns about Ghana’s future which came forth were of other kinds. These were primarily: the problems deriving from uneven resources and opportunities among the populace and distinct parts of the country. And secondly: how ethnic and tribal allegiances are used in order to gain personal and/or political advantages. Underlying these two perceived threats towards a stable and positive national development I also saw the fear of corruption and foreign dependency. Interestingly thus these results concerning the Ghanaian national construct closely tie to what within the field generally is seen as the biggest challenges for the African nation states: uneven resource allocation and the instrumental use of ethnicity.

To conclude, I experienced that all of the students I met had a rather strong social pathos. They saw uneven opportunities and resources as a general problem which needed to be solved and wanted to even out the existing differences between the strata in Ghana. If this is a solid picture I can only hope that these students carefully use their opportunities to influence because if their views would dominate the future development in Ghana it speaks for, an in my view, just and positive future.

6.3. Future Research

Concerning suggestions for further research it would be interesting to make similar small qualitative studies with students in other parts of Ghana, such as for example in Kumasi in the Ashanti region or in Wa in the Northern region, in order to see if this significantly would change which national self-images that come forth. Additionally these smaller studies would be interesting to complement with larger survey studies of quantitative character in order to be able to compare and contrast the findings. I also see it as potentially beneficial to apply the theory on other presumably similar cases such as for example Nigeria which often is addressed as an important comparison in this study. Another aspect which would be suitable and interesting to explore further is if the results would be very different if other groups
would be the main informants as for example farmers living in the periphery, actors within the media or politicians on a central and/or local level.
References:


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Electronic:
Appendix 1.

Source: http://www.geographicguide.com/africa-maps/ghana.htm
Appendix 2    Interview Guide

Initially: Where are you born? How old are you? Which courses are you taking this semester? What degree are you aiming at? Which languages do you speak? (Which region are you from?) Which languages do your parents speak? What are your parents’ professions? What levels of courses do you take now? Do you confess to any religion?

1. What comes up in your mind when I say Ghana?
2. Is there something that “all” Ghanaians share?
3. Do you yourself feel Ghanaian?
4. Can anyone (for example I) become Ghanaian?
5. Is there anything that makes you (particularly) proud of being Ghanaian? Is there anything that makes you less proud about (ashamed of) being Ghanaian?
6. Can you tell me about some situation or sometime when you have felt extra/particularly Ghanaian?
7. What do you think others think of Ghana/the people of Ghana (both within/outside Africa)?
8. When it comes to choosing a partner, is a similar background (for example where this person is born) important to you or not? (For example would you prefer marrying someone from your own ethnic group or from within Ghana?)
9. There is a mix of people living in Ghana today. Can you say something about the similarities and/or differences between groups?
10. Are there similarities and/or differences between any regions within the country?
11. According to you, does Ghana have a strong national unity? Why/why not?
12. Which are the indicators for national unity?
13. Is national unity important for development in Ghana? Why/why not?
14. Do you see any threat/s against national unity in Ghana?
15. If you were to define “a positive development” for Ghana, how would you describe such?
16. Would you say that your trust in the state is high or low? Why is it so?
17. According to you, what constitutes the elite in Ghana? What comes up in your head when you hear “Ghanaian elite”?
18. According to you, is any (ethnic/social) group in the Ghanaian society favoured (by central/local government)?
19. Is the political system dominated by any particular (ethnic/social) group?
20. According to you, which are the most important historical events in Ghana?
21. According to you did Ghana exist before independence?
22. To what extent would you like to see Ghana collaborate with other countries (African and non-African)?
23. How do you feel about English being the national language in Ghana?
24. Do you think it is important that everyone speaks English in Ghana?
25. Do you think any other language/s also should be national?

Finally: Is there anything further that we have not addressed during the interview that you would like to share or discuss?
Appendix 3. Description of Interviewees

1. 23 years old male born in the Ashanti region. He is taking courses in political science and history (European & Ghanaian) at level 300 (third year) this semester at University of Ghana and he is aiming at PhD in Political Science. He and also his parents speak Twi. The mother is a trader and the father was a farmer before he died. He is Christian.

2. 22 years old female born in Kumasi in the Ashanti region. She is taking courses in business and political science at level 300 at University of Ghana and aiming at a master in political science. She speaks English, a little bit of French and her local language Twi. Her parents speak English and Twi and both her parents are business traders. She is Christian.

3. 21 years old female born in Accra. Studies French and Psychology at level 300 at University of Ghana and aiming at a Bachelors degree in French. She speaks English, French, Ewe (her mother tongue), Twi and Dagbani from the north. She lived up north for 15 years. Her parents speak English, Ewe and Twi. Her father is an administrator and works at the University for Developments studies as a registrar, her mother is a teacher at a school in Tamale. She is Christian.

4. 23 years old female born in Lagos Nigeria by Ghanaian parents. She studies psychology, English and Social Work at level 200 (second year) at University of Ghana. She aims at a first degree in English and Social work and will then continue with a Master. She speaks Ga, Ewe, a little Twi and some Nigerian languages (Yuruba, Ebo and a little Hausa), English and French. Her parents speak Ewe (they are from the Volta region) and English, her father is a teacher and her mother is a beautician. She is Christian.

5. 29 years old male born in Wa in the Upper West region. Just finished a Master in Agricultural Economics from University of Ghana and started to work as a researcher. He speaks Wale, Hausa and English. His parents speak Wale, a bit of Hausa and English. The father is a farmer and the mother is a trader. He is Muslim.

6. 23 years old male born in London and came back to Ghana when he was 6 years old. He is in his third year and will have a Bachelors of science in business and administration (4 years of study) from Asheshi University. His father speaks Ga and
his mother speaks Insuma, Fanti and Twi and a bit of Ga (not so much). His mother is a business woman and deals in cosmetics and hair products and his father is Quantitative engineer. He is Christian.

7. 24 years old male born in Wa in the Upper West region but now has his family in the Brong-Ahafo Region when his parents moved there when he was born. He is in level 400 (fourth year) at University of Ghana. He will have a minor degree in psychology and aiming at Bachelor in political science. He speaks Twi, Ewe, Dagati. His father speaks Twi, Dagati and French, and his mother speaks Dagati. His mother is a trader of foods and his father is a banker. He is Christian.

8. 22 years old male born in Tamale. He is taking a diploma as an accountant of two years at University of Ghana and this is his final year. He speaks his native language Kokumba and used to speak Dagomba which is his mother's language, he speaks Twi, a little bit of Ga, English and learning French. Both his parents are farmers and produce mainly yam and maize. He is Christian.

9. 23 years old male born in the Asutsuare junction in the Great Accra region. He has a diploma in journalism and communication studies of 2 years from Ghana Institute of Journalism and just started to work at a radio station. He speaks English, Fulani (his mother tongue), Hausa, Ewe, Danbi, Ga and Twi. His parents speak Fulani, Hausa and Danbi. His father is a farmer and his mother is a trader of dairy products. He is Muslim.

10. 22 years old female born in Saudi Arabia who moved to Ghana when she was almost 7 years old. She is taking business administration courses and a combined degree of Computer science and Business administration at Ashesi University. She speaks English and Arabic. Her parents speak the same. Her father is an investor and her mother is a house wife. She is a Muslim.

11. 23 years old male born in the Central region. He is taking history and political science at level 300 at University of Ghana and aiming at a Bachelors degree with a major in political science. He speaks Fanti, Twi and English. His parents speak Fanti. His father who was a farmer is dead and his mother is a trader and a farmer. He is Christian.