

Greetings from Ghana #48

The Greatest (*my opinion) Pollution Here is Invisible. . . and Will Now Disappear for Four Weeks

I am not certain what led to what or when it started; although I have my ideas of what possibly happened.

Seventy-one percent of Ghanaians identify as Christian with the majority falling into apostolic or evangelical faith communities. Twenty percent are Muslim. The rest follow tribal religions or chose "not religious" in the 2021 survey. If you think of the Muslim faith you might imagine a



mosque like the National Mosque in Accra. Built over the course of nine years, starting in 2012, this is the second largest mosque in West Africa. It was financed by the Turkish government and religious organizations to the tune of \$10,000,000. It sits on 42 acres and seats 15,000 people. Impressive to say the least.

For the majority of Ghanaian Muslims the mosque they attend is usually in a neighborhood and is closer in resemblance to the one near my house. It is small and holds maybe thirty or forty people in the main hall. Regardless of how ornate the mosque is, there are exterior speakers on the building. There are calls to prayer five times a day over those loudspeakers. The first one is before six in the morning. The majority of the time you cannot hear the prayers or they barely register here, two blocks away. And I know for a fact that it is important to the Imam and his followers that they do not disrespect their neighbors by having the volume be intrusive.

It is a shame that evangelical and apostolic churches, street preachers, and funeral services, did not feel the same way. They saw speakers, heard sound and apparently thought, "Ya know, if I made that louder people would notice me."

There is a "church" which is a concrete slab with cement columns and a roof, no walls but electricity, with probably twenty parishioners, located about three houses down from me. The male pastor cannot carry a tune but loves the microphone and believes in warming up his audience around seven a.m.. There are eight other churches in the surrounding four blocks and more just outside of there. Each contains a speaker system and an amplifier and someone who believes that louder is better. On some Sunday mornings it was like sitting at the family table during a boisterous fight in a different language than you understand.



Lord knows why, but the "Louder is Better" logic has also migrated to retailers and some manufacturers. Typically you would expect the music coming from a bar. Now it is not uncommon for a store to place massive bass speakers outside their entrance and see if they can reach customers hundreds of feet away to let them know they exist. Not necessarily to celebrate anything to announce a sale, just that they are open. So as you draw closer the bass keeps getting stronger and you don't really speak until you get inside.

To remind you they exist, companies that sell goods from bottled water to satellite systems will load up a massive speaker system onto the back of a truck, plaster it with signs and

banners, crank the volume, and drive through traffic in the city. Lord help you if it pulls by you at a traffic light.

I was in a residential neighborhood on the fringe of a small retail area and heard bass beats coming from somewhere. Turned out it was a shop that sold speaker systems. At least there it was understandable.

The worst polluters are, believe it or not, funerals. There was a funeral held just past the "church" that was so loud that the speakers were setting off the car alarms from vehicles parked just outside the property. No one reported it because you could not hear the alarms over the music except for moments when the beats paused. In the meantime the walls in my house were vibrating. I complained to a friend who replied, "It's a funeral. Won't last more than three days. Don't worry about it."

And that is the part that I cannot understand. Take away the loudspeakers and the heavy bass that carries for blocks and people tell you that they want things nice and quiet. Use your inside voice. But gather any size group and have bass that will literally rattle the windows and people will sit in the midst and talk. Oh, I understand how they can do it. I used to work on a flightline around jets. People who did not wear ear protection, after a while, could stand close to the aircraft and talk without discomfort. I feel I should also mention that rabbits that live near runways are deaf.

It is not every day that you get a barrage of noise pollution although it is not really possible to avoid it when it happens. Except on Sundays when you know that from around seven o'clock until some weeks as late as eleven you will need headphones.

It is perhaps because of the elevated level of sound from the new churches and apparent loudspeaker envy that I became quickly aware of the blessings of Homowo, a festival of the Ga people of Ghana. The Ga area encompasses all of Accra and its suburbs as well as surrounding area.

Centuries ago the Damte Dsanwe people migrated to what is now Ghana. They incurred many hardships including famine along the way and upon settlement. They attributed these misfortunes to the displeasure of a god or diety. To restore their society the newly landed Ga people sacrificed livestock, offered prayers and poured libations into the ground to pacify the gods or dieties.

Homowo marks the beginning of the Ga native calendar. Prior to the festival, the seven high priests of the people conduct Shibaa, a planting ceremony of some type of wheat, usually millet, in seven distinct towns, over the course of seven days. During the ceremony Koninfemo is set in place to last four weeks and two days before the festival begins. This is to ensure the crops grow without distractions. (And this is the part I love).

A statement dated May 3 and signed by the head of public relations of AMA (Accra Municipal Assembly) , Albert Nii Ankra, said during this period, churches, roadside evangelists, mosques, and pubs are prohibited from positioning loudspeakers outside their premises. However, they are allowed to conduct their activities indoors without the use of musical instruments.

"During the period of the ban, churches are expected to carry out their activities within their premises and refrain from the use of musical instruments. The positioning of loudspeakers outside the premises of churches, mosques and pubs is banned. Roadside evangelists are to cease their activities during this period," according to the press statement.

- Advertisement -The Ga Traditional Council has also imposed a ban on organizing funeral rites and related activities for the duration of the ban. Additionally, they have urged religious bodies and traditional authorities to demonstrate mutual respect and discourage their followers from making derogatory remarks about each other's beliefs and practices.

"Religious bodies and the traditional authorities must show respect for one another and restrain their followers from making derogatory and inflammatory remarks about the beliefs and practices of one another. Other guidelines by the Ga Traditional Council (GTC) include a ban on funeral rites and their related activities," the statement added.

It may be temporary but the quiet is quite nice. In four weeks it is back to headphones but for now weekdays are at normal volume and Sunday mornings are as they should be. . . a time for quiet contemplation.