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'Appealing for Grace': The Guinea Corn Festival of the Nawuris of Northern Ghana¹

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Introduction

Festivals are recurrent celebrations and often with ritual events and meanings. Festivals reveal something of the identity, values and world views of the community or ethnic group that celebrates them (Szabó, 2015). Festive occasions involve local residents and visitors. In Ghana, there are several festivals celebrated by different ethnic groups. For example the people of Accra, the capital of Ghana, celebrate the *Homowo* festival, which is a festival that literally 'hoots at hunger'. The festival was initiated following a bumper harvest after years of famine and hunger. The people of Akropong, Akwapim in the eastern region of Ghana celebrate the *Odwira* festival. It is a festival that enables the people to purify ancestral stools² and spiritually cleanse the towns and villages in and around Akropong. In the same way the people of Cape Coast also celebrate the *Fetu Afahye* festival, which is a multi-purpose festival that marks cleansing of the people of Cape Coast from a plague in pre-colonial times. The festival also celebrates an abundant harvest of fish from the sea and offers the opportunity for the people in the area to thank the seventy-seven deities of the Cape Coast for their protection over the years (Opoku 1970).

The Ewe people of Anlo, in the Volta Region of Ghana, celebrate a festival called *Hogbetsotso*. It is a migration festival that tells the story of the escape of a group of Ewes from one of their tyrannical rulers, King Agokoli. The Dagomba people of the Northern Region celebrate the *Bugum* or fire festival. Local traditions provide two explanations for the festival. The first credits the origin of the festival to the Prophet Noah whose Ark docked on Mount Ararat. Local historians claim that after the floods the occupants of the Ark came out with torches to find their way out and around. The second version indicates that at a point in the history of the Dagomba people a king lost his son. The king assembled his warriors who composed a search party. They finally found the son in the night sleeping under a tree. Because they managed to find him using torches made from grass, the king decreed that every year the event should be celebrated with torches made from grass.