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Ghana Must Go: Modernity, Memory and Material Culture in Post-Independence West Africa

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates the capacity for objects and material culture to embody opposing or multiple versions of the past, focusing on the post-independence upheavals of Ghana. The work combines historical research – examination of historical documents, news media, and objects themselves, as well as personal interviews and fieldwork – with a theoretical investigation of how we understand history to be constituted in material culture. One of the intentions of this investigation is to examine the ways in which national identities are formed in direct relation to material culture. Obliterated or nearly forgotten histories are traced and articulated through everyday things; the built environment; and structures both found and made. Some of the artefacts examined in this thesis include a plastic bag; early through late 20th century architectural forms, such as colonial and post-independence monuments; and items within the landscape and environment. These artefacts help to underscore the genesis of contemporary Ghana as a nation. The country’s cultural and political history are used to explain how identity and identifications are constructed in relation to ideas of modernity. Many of the artefacts under review are linked to Ghana’s complicated history as a slave trading nation; therefore a part of this dissertation includes an analysis of existing scholarship relating to a slave monument in the Volta Region. This part of the analysis shows how artefacts can easily produce polyvalent readings that can undermine the reliability of source materials in the field of research. The dissertation’s central themes are framed by ideas drawn from a number of important thinkers, including Paul Gilroy, whose notion of the *The Black Atlantic* (1993) examines links between the cultures within the so-called ‘Black Triangle’ (the USA, Europe and Africa) in the context of the legacy of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-----------|--|
| ADF | Atorkor Development Foundation |
| AMA | Accra Municipal Authority |
| ANT | Actor Network Theory |
| ATL | Akosombo Textiles Ghana Limited |
| AWRRTC | Afrikan Reparation and Repatriation Truth Commission |
| CODESERIA | Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa |
| CPP | Convention People's Party |
| ECOWAS | Economic Community of West African States |
| GBC | Ghana Broadcasting Company |
| GNI | Gross national income |
| HIPIC | Heavily indebted poor country |
| IMF | International Monetary Fund |
| IOM | International Organization for Migration |
| MUSIGA | Musicians Union of Ghana |
| NDC | National Democratic Congress |
| NGO | Non-governmental organization |
| NIC | National Investigations Commission |
| NLC | National Liberation Council |
| NPP | New Patriotic Party |
| NRC | National Redemption Council |
| OFY | Operation Feed Yourself |

| | |
|--------|--|
| OOO | Object oriented ontology |
| OUA | Organization for African Unity |
| PNDC | Provisional National Defense Council |
| SMC | Supreme Military Council |
| SMC II | Supreme Military Council II |
| UGCC | United Gold Coast Convention |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| UNRISD | United Nations Research Institute for Social Development |
| USD | United States dollar |
| VRA | Volta River Authority |
| WTO | World Trade Organization |

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INTRODUCTION

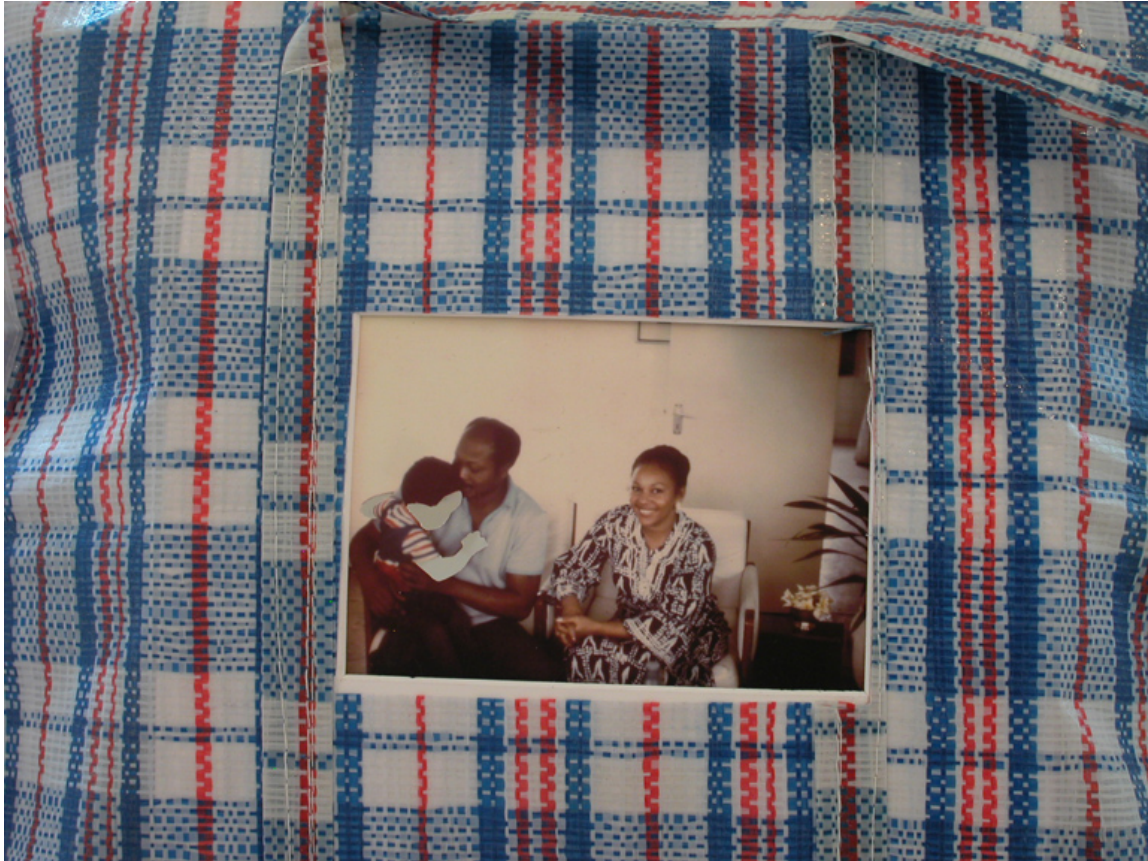


Figure 1. *Ghana Must Go, Lagos*, detail (2005). Senam Okudzeto. Plastic bag, laser print, mylar. Dimensions: approx. 34cm x 20cm x 37cm. Photo: Senam Okudzeto

The title ‘Ghana Must Go’ is taken from contemporary West African slang. An arguably derogatory term, it is now used throughout English speaking countries on the African continent and beyond, to denote a mass-produced sturdy plastic bag, recognised as globally ubiquitous. These bags most frequently come in blue or red gingham patterns in a wide range of sizes and house notoriously faulty zips. They are so named because they were once associated with Ghanaian refugees forcibly expelled from Nigeria in a period of economic turmoil during the early 1980s. Although the linguistic origins of the bag are rarely discussed or interrogated, research and many

informal conversations have revealed that this form of bag has several idiomatic names across different cultures, with the one common thread being that they are always associated with minority groups (often with refugees), and always with impoverished people in transit. For many years, I mistakenly believed that my own family had been expelled from Nigeria and then Ghana at the same period of time. During the process of researching this dissertation I learned that the circumstances that led to our departure were linked, but not entirely concurrent with the historic expulsions.

This dissertation explores the capacity for objects in material culture to embody varying and sometimes oppositional versions of the past, focusing on events relating to the pre- and post-independence upheavals in Ghana, and asking if national identities are formed in direct relation to material culture. My research seeks out obliterated or forgotten histories that might be traced and articulated through everyday things; the built environment and structures both found and made; or evidenced in the spectral functioning of contemporary global capitalism. How might the analysis of these objects, their circulation and histories be used to confront Ghana's relationship to the complex inter- and intranational exchanges that inform national and international black identities? It is of urgent importance to present new narratives of history, modernity and globalisation centred in Africa that resist both the nationalist desire to edit African realities, and the humbug of a West that laments Africa as "a scar on the conscience of the world."¹

The experience of realising a ubiquitous plastic bag held answers to questions that haunted me through the formative years of childhood to my early thirties and opened my eyes to the idea that

¹ Tony Blair's speech presented at the annual Labour Party conference, Tuesday October 2nd 2001. The full text is posted online at the Independent newspaper website: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/tony-blairs-speech-full-text-630031.html> (last accessed 5th June, 2013).

material culture everywhere had the ability to house latent forms of cultural memory, and that these memories might form counter-narratives to officially sanctioned histories. With these basic thoughts in mind, I began this investigation in an attempt to piece together an alternative history of Ghana through the archives of mundane material culture.

The methods used combine historical research (the examination of historical documents; academic research; news media; personal interviews; and the newly created documentation of objects themselves), with a theoretical investigation of how we understand history to be constituted in material culture. What alternative history might objects form? How are they read? And how might they be made to speak more loudly? Marxian paradigms of ‘commodity fetishism’—that is, the idea that objects and their exchange may both reveal and conceal social relations, are engaged through many chapters of this dissertation.²

A number of important scholars have asserted the unusual importance of material culture in Ghana – in particular, non-essential commodities such as alcohol and cocoa – as major factors for instigating change in Ghanaian socio-political structures. For instance, Emmanuel Akyeampong (1996) has examined the symbolic importance of Dutch schnapps and its duality both as a symbol of chiefly and spiritual power and social demise. Similarly, Polly Hill’s (1964) much cited study of cocoa farming in Ghana underscores the value of a crop whose revenue has often been equal to that of gold production. Hill’s work also illustrates how cocoa farming allowed for a new form of social agency, whereby a class of indentured slaves, free and freedmen were able to pawn themselves in exchange for land to farm the lucrative crop, leading to the demise of feudal power

² Karl Marx: *Capital*. Edited by Friedrich Engels reprinted in Adler, Mortimer, J. (ed.) *Great Books of the Western World*. 50. *MARX*, pub. Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., University of Chicago, Second Edition 1990, p.31; Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things; Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, 1986. p.5

through the establishment of a farming middle class.³ These two scholars illustrate how two completely different forms of commodity, both initially imported and non-native to Ghana have become enmeshed in the fabric of national identity.

Remembering studies such as these, I would like to assert that a number of key revolutionary events relating to Ghana's nationhood are linked to a series of revolts and riots born out of a disgruntled population who felt in some way manipulated unfairly in market exchange. For instance, one recalls the cocoa farmers holding up their crops in 1930/31 and 1937/38 when European firms attempted to lower trading prices, or instances when the population felt deprived of imported goods. Riots and the ransacking of commodity trading stores preceded the independence of Ghana, whereby citizens who were fed up of a British colonially sanctioned monopoly of imported goods by foreign merchants were driven to revolt. A case in point was the revolt that followed the unfair murder of peacefully demonstrating ex-World War Two servicemen whose pension rights had been unfairly denied. Following the incident, the major cities of Ghana—Accra, Kumasi and Sekondi, erupted in looting and riots that the colonial authorities struggled to contain. After an investigation was conducted, it was decided the best solution was to grant independence. The next significant revolt involving non-essential commodities was closely linked to the 1979 coup led by Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings, after which Accra's central market was bombed and, in a period of economic scarcity, market women were falsely accused of hoarding, publicly stripped naked, flogged or – most horrifically – set on fire as punishment.⁴

³ Emmanuel Akyeampong, *Drink, Power and Cultural Change: A Social History of Alcohol in Ghana, c. 1800 to Recent Times*, Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1996; Polly Hill, *The Migrant Cocoa-farmers of Southern Ghana: A Study in Rural Capitalism*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1964.

⁴ See Barbara Harrell-Bond, 'Women and the 1979 Ghana Revolution', *American Universities Field Staff Reports*, 1980/No.4, Africa, [last accessed 9/11/2020]: <http://www.icwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/BHB-13.pdf>

Dramatic historic events such as the aforementioned, underscore the importance of consumption and access to commodities in Ghana's past, but they are perhaps also indicative of a need for consistency and economic stability first and foremost, rather than a lack of access to non-essential goods. The regional name for the area of contemporary Ghana prior to the establishment of post-independence nationhood was the *Gold Coast*; a clear indication of its trading past and association with wealth. Theories of desire argue that desire and consumption are rooted in a psychological understanding of being. Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan have underscored the importance of the regular rhythms of consumption, remembering that the links between desire and labour create "human signification into food". 'Hunger' can be thought of as a 'generic' quality shared by human kind, that when sufficiently evolved, results in "the most highly developed forms of the production of consumable goods".⁵ The rhythms of consumption form a discipline of time and regulation that emerge as foundational to the development of the human psyche. These rhythms of essential consumption for survival are largely taken for granted, but hunger is followed by consumption and defecation with quotidian expectations; and departure from established norms are a source of discontent. As observed by Appadurai, "[t]he techniques of the body, however peculiar, innovative and antisocial, need to become social disciplines".⁶

In 2001, the African historian Frederick Cooper penned an angry criticism of the then recent discourse surrounding globalisation entitled 'What is the Concept of Globalization Good For? An African Historian's Perspective'. His essay rounded on a number of "deeply misleading" themes popular in globalisation debates, such as the implied fact that "a single system of connection – notably through capital and commodities markets, information flows, and imagined landscapes –

⁵ Jacques Lacan, (trans. Bruce Fink) 'The Freudian Thing' in *Écrits, A Selection*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, London, 2002, p.134.

⁶ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, p.67.

has penetrated the entire globe; and the implication of the second is that it is doing so now, that this is the global age”.⁷ Cooper also took umbrage with globalisation debates’ “presentist periodization” and ideas of “flows of capital, people, ideas, and symbols” moving separately in an unbounded globalised space as reducing the field of African history. Specifically, Cooper lamented the modern overwriting of complex historical trade relations and routes, and forms of exchange and systems of economy that precede contemporary understandings of transnational corporations, communications and the market system of capital. Cooper argues for a greater consideration of the longer history of social movements and his thoughts are evidenced in Africa’s millenia-old Islamic pilgrimages and trade routes, and concepts such as “The Atlantic”. Such considerations inform an understanding of the many forms of mass movement engendered by the Intercontinental, Saharan and Trans-Atlantic slave trades and European Colonialism. As Cooper states, “Historical analysis does not present a contrast of a past territorial boundedness with a present of interconnection and fragmentation, but a more back-and-forth, varied combination of territorializing and deterritorializing tendencies.”⁸ Cooper’s complaints have been directly addressed through the work of Arjun Appadurai (1986, 1996, 2000) and David Harvey (2000), who share Cooper’s urge to better ground debates of globalisation within the context of changing historical processes that determine “the capitalist production of space”.⁹

It is precisely this tension that informs the objects of this study, for the artefacts discussed in the following chapters continue to exist in the ‘present’ and are linked and informed by a variety of international exchanges and flows. Nonetheless, as with the Ghana Must Go bag, their exchanges

⁷ Frederick Cooper, ‘What is the Concept of Globalization Good For? An African Historian’s Perspective’, *African Affairs*. Vol. 100, 399 (April, 2001), p.189.

⁸ Ibid, p.191.

⁹ David Harvey’s chapter ‘Contemporary Globalization’ in *Spaces of Hope*, University of California Press, 2000, p.54, pp.53–72.

relate and refer to a longer set of historical narratives that see the past firmly encoded in the social actions of the present. As Edward Said (1994) and Paul Gilroy (1993) have cautioned, the study of African cultures remains fraught with tendencies towards essentialism—in particular, with views towards visual culture and music.¹⁰ An underlying aim of this project is to confront what Gilroy refers to as the “tragic popularity of ideas about the integrity and purity of cultures”.¹¹ For the purposes of this dissertation project, which seeks to recover histories encoded in material culture, as well as my presence during, memory of, and participation in historical events, the insertion of my own biographical narrative occurs where necessary. A degree of subjectivity is, therefore, implied in this work.

This subjectivity is most evident in the events surrounding the Nigerian expulsions and genesis of the Ghana Must Go bag; they are presented here in the form of a prologue, since they contain the motivation for this dissertation. This prologue brings together little known archival material in combination with existing scholarship and material from social and news media archives. Through the latter, I have attempted to engage with material culture in the digital realm via the internet, thereby creating a historical framework that triangulates existing forms of digital source material as much as possible. In essence, the prologue attempts to illustrate how there are cultural processes at work in the interaction between capitalism, migration and material culture, by revealing that historic events that create profound social rupture, also produce cultural residue in material form. This residue illustrates how material culture can house latent forms of historic memory.

Chapter I presents a brief national history of Ghana, followed by an experimental history of the

¹⁰ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, Vintage Press, 1994, p.60; Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic, Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p.15.

¹¹ Ibid. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, p.7.

capital city of Accra, which tests the hypothesis of this thesis by reading the city as an archive of material culture that embeds new perspectives of national history within its structures. This chapter includes a short discussion of changing economic circumstances, in precolonial, colonial and post-independence Ghana, in order to locate material culture and commodity culture in the context of the country's changing leadership and economic policies—particularly given the popular rejection of its first socialist leader Kwame Nkrumah, an avowed Marxist who liked to be referred to as 'the Lenin of Africa'.¹²

Chapter II is entitled *Nyimpa Na O Ma Edan Ahom: 'Modernity', 'Memory and Material Culture'*. This chapter reviews the literature relating to the themes of this thesis, examining concepts and contexts for the terms 'modernity' and 'memory and material culture'.

Chapter III, *Materials, Monuments, Mourning*, investigates the ways that social history is constructed through a number of artefacts that are arguably imported to Ghanaian culture. It begins with artefacts that are seemingly 'traditional' and ends with an examination of public monuments. This chapter presents the idea that public memory and monuments are in many ways tied to mourning rituals in Ghanaian culture, and these processes are heavily reliant on material culture.

Chapter IV presents *Material Legacies of the Transatlantic Slave Trade*, exploring public memory and the commerce and commodification of history. It examines how identity, culture and economics influence the production of meaning in historic events and follows the discourse of existing scholarship to question the nature of evidence and official narratives of 'truth'.

¹² Tony Killick. *Development Economics in Action; A Study of Economic Policies in Ghana*, 2nd Edition, Routledge 2010 p.45.

Ghana Must Go

Until January 1982 I lived in Lagos, Nigeria with my African-American mother, Ghanaian father and then five-year old brother. I was nine years old at that time. My father ran a construction company that built roads and highways across West Africa, and most famously, the new Ware Military Barracks for the Nigerian Army. At the time, the awarding of the contract to my father was a source of national discontent as he used 1,000 skilled Ghanaian labourers and not Nigerians. During 1981 and 1982 there were almost daily newspaper articles denouncing him for taking jobs away from Nigerians. I was unaware of these facts until recent years; they were discovered during the research done for this dissertation. My only memory of the period is of a rushed attempt to board a plane to London with my father and brother. We were traveling without my mother, who was in the hospital at the time with an eye infection. Shortly before take-off, soldiers boarded the plane and arrested my father and we children alongside him. We were marched off the plane and taken to a detention centre at Lagos Special Branch where my father was interrogated, and then eventually beaten, stripped and imprisoned as we sat in the same room. My father disappeared for three months. My brother and I were sent to an empty home and then quickly taken to Ghana by a relative. There we lived alone and were taken care of by a nanny, unaware if our parents were alive. My father was eventually released, aided by my mother and the U.S. Embassy. We were reunited in Ghana, but after six months it became unsafe there too; my father once again landed in trouble, this time with the then military dictator Jerry Rawlings for helping dissident journalists to escape. After receiving a message that there was a bullet reserved for his head, we hurriedly moved to London where we granted asylum as political refugees. My father told us to forget everything that happened and never mention these events again. It was strictly forbidden to speak of the events

leading to our exile. Our Lagos trauma never prejudiced our father's affection for Nigerian friends and culture. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s our increasingly smaller homes were a constant flow of also-exiled Nigerian and Ghanaian friends. I eventually returned to Nigeria for work and when visiting a friend from university in Lagos, heard her describe a plastic bag as *Ghana Must Go*. It took several years for me to discover that the bag was so-called because it was associated with the events leading to our exile and that we were somehow contingent to a larger exodus of several million Ghanaian refugees.

In total, three million foreigners were forcibly expelled from Nigeria in 1983. Estimates say that as many as one to two millions may have been Ghanaians. There is surprisingly scant research material available from academic sources on the expulsions. The most valuable documentation I found appeared in two articles in *Time* and *Newsweek* and some rare television footage found with great difficulty in the Vanderbilt Television archives in Nashville, Tennessee. The aerial images and video footage contained therein provides testimony to the scale of events and the many claims of violence at the hands of police and the military.¹³

The 1983 expulsions occurred during an election year when Nigeria was sliding into a state of crisis under the leadership of President Shehu Shagari (1979–1983). Shagari's two-term presidency was fragile, marked by allegations of corruption, stark economic decline and social unrest. At its peak, Nigerian oil revenues in the 1970s totalled a staggering \$1.3 billion (USD) per month.¹⁴ In 1979 Nigeria was producing an average of 2.3 million barrels of crude oil per day; by

¹³ See CBS evening news 5:47pm 31/1/1983, NBC evening news 5:50pm 31/1/1983, ABC evening news 5:53pm 1/2/1983, ABC evening news 5:49pm 2/3/1983, NBC evening news 5:50 3/3/1983. CBS evening news 5:38pm 4/3/1983, 'Nigeria's Outcasts: The Cruel Exodus', *Newsweek* 14/2/1983, pp.12–15, 'Homecoming to Misery', *Time*, 21/2/1983, pp.48–51.

¹⁴ See Roger Grivil, 'The Nigerian Alien Expulsions order of 1983,' *African Affairs* No. 84, (1985), p.535. CBS evening news 5:43pm 7/2/1983.

the penultimate year of Shagari's reign in 1982, the boom was clearly over and production dropped to an average of 400,000 barrels per day.¹⁵ This boom decade of the 1970s was originally initiated by the increased oil trade following the Arab members of OPEC staging an oil embargo in 1973. By 1981, however, world oil prices declined sharply and Nigerian government income, which owed 80% of its funds to oil revenue, plummeted. Shagari, whose government came to power through an obvious act of electoral fraud (he was eventually deposed by the Buhari coup of December 1983), struggled to maintain popular support as the country sank towards recession. In the run up to the 1983 presidential elections, it was clear that the government needed a scapegoat to unify national interests.

On 17 January 1983, Alhaji Ali Baba, the Nigerian Federal Minister of Internal Affairs issued the *1983 Expulsion Order* demanding that all illegal immigrants leave the country within 14 days. In addition, the order prohibited non-Nigerians from private sector employment under the 1963 Immigration Act unless they had written permission from the Director of Immigration. The same order also demanded that all legal aliens re-register with the regional immigration headquarters by the February 14 of that year.¹⁶ This last edict is said to have created bureaucratic chaos in many government departments who, like many businesses, relied on skilled labour from Ghana as Nigeria's nearest anglophone neighbour in an otherwise francophone region. In 1983, Nigerian bureaucracy was not renowned for the reliability of its data collection and the government was clearly under-resourced and unprepared for the registration of legal migrants, although it was famous for its ability to extort bribes from applicants. The impossibility of the required work

¹⁵ Leann M. Brown, "Nigeria and the Ecowas Protocol on Free Movement and Residence." *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 27, no. 2, Jun. 1989, p.261

¹⁶ Brown, *Ecowas Protocol*, p.252; Grivil, *Nigerian Expulsions* pp.524–526.

permits and residency papers undoubtedly contributed to the scale of the migrations.¹⁷ In trying to identify those expelled, there are frustrating discrepancies in source material. For instance, M. Leann Brown (1989) states that the Government of Lagos fired “2,600 Ghanaian teachers” who were skilled government employees, but gives no source for her information.¹⁸ Roger Gravil (1985), quoting an editorial column in *New Nigeria* from 23 January 1983, also states that the “Lagos State Government alone had at least 2,600 illegal immigrants performing indispensable service in the city’s chronically understaffed schools”, but adds that “7,000 dock workers proved impossible to replace in Lagos’ already over-stretched port”.¹⁹ Aderanti Adepaju (1984) admits that “the precise number of aliens affected by the order may not be known” and gives a low estimate of 700,000 Ghanaians amongst a total figure of 1.5 million aliens expelled, which is in contrast to the figure of 3 million posited by U.S. American news sources.²⁰ Even Alhaji Ali Baba, the minister who issued the *Alien Expulsion Order* seemed completely unsure of the number of migrant workers in the country, despite stating that,

*“(It is) ... the prerogative of the government of the country to know how many foreigners are within the territory, how many of them are working legally or illegally and how many are just roaming about the streets without any feasible means of livelihood.”*²¹

What is known is that the government order for unregistered migrant workers and illegal aliens to leave was reissued on 14 February 1983 and that the order was in direct violation of the 1975 and 1979 ECOWAS treaties, which encouraged circular migration from poorer neighbouring countries and allowed workers from member states the right to stay in Nigeria for up to ninety days without

¹⁷ Ibid. Gravil, p.530.

¹⁸ Brown, p.253.

¹⁹ Gravil, p.527.

²⁰ Aderanti Adepaju, ‘Illegals and Expulsions in Africa; The Nigerian Experience’. *International Migration Review*, Vol. 18, No. 3, Special Issue: Irregular Migration: An International Perspective. Autumn 1984, pp.432. For American news sources see footnote 9.

²¹ Gravil, p.525.

visa or documentation.²² It is said that none of the Nigerian authorities actually expected migrant workers to leave, and Brown quotes a police statement issued a week after the *Expulsion Order* and published January 23 in the *Sunday Punch* that claims the police only learnt of the order through the national media. This statement insisted that “the police are yet to receive a directive from the federal government on enforcement”.²³ Images from the NBC Evening News of January 31 show uniformed men (either soldiers or police) beating crowds of migrants as they try to leave (Fig.3), and several eye witnesses claimed extortion at the hands of corrupt enforcement officials, taxi and lorry drivers.²⁴ Gravil notes that “demands for bribes exceeding the immigrants’ annual income were widely reported”.²⁵ Many of those expelled were forcibly displaced, often in violent, traumatising circumstances. Although undocumented, it is thought that thousands of returnees from West African countries such as Benin, Cameroon, Ghana, Mali and Togo died on the journey home.

The dramatic exodus of so many millions caused chaos at the borders of several West African countries, many of which were closed. In Ghana the border was shut for twelve days because the recently installed president Rawlings, who seized power in an illegal coup, believed the returnees were, in fact, Sudanese mercenaries sent by the Nigerian authorities to topple his government.²⁶ Rawlings’ actions at that time probably contributed to the number of deaths of Ghanaian citizens from exposure.

²² The Economic Union of West African States (ECOWAS) was founded in 1975 to foster economic integration and exchange between member states comprising Nigeria, Benin, Ghana, Cape Verde, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Upper Volta, Niger, Liberia, Mali, Senegal, Mauritania, Sierra Leone and Togo. ECOWAS also created to provide judicial services and military interventions in times of need.

²³ Brown, p.254.

²⁴ NBC, Evening News, 5:51pm, 31/1/1983; ABC Evening News, 5:50 pm, 2/2/1983; Brown, p.254.

²⁵ Gravil, p.530.

²⁶ Olajide Aluko, ‘The Expulsion of Illegal Aliens from Nigeria’, *African Affairs* No. 84, (1985) pp.542–543.

Surprisingly, a large mass of the migrant returnees were smoothly absorbed back into their home communities and, more surprising still, a great majority chose to return to Nigeria when xenophobic sentiments subsided. Grivil wryly reports that working for “the immigration service must have been among the year’s most profitable occupations in Nigeria”, as bureaucratically inept officials efficiently took bribes from undocumented aliens as they were both leaving and returning.²⁷

It seems likely that the expulsions were in part a response to Ghana’s *Alien Compliance Act* of 18 November 1969, whereby then President Dr K. A. Busia ordered Ghana’s immigrants to obtain work permits within two weeks or risk deportation. On this occasion, 250,000 ethnic Nigerians were displaced from Ghana.²⁸ Until the events of 1983, this was considered the largest scale deportation the region had ever seen. A great many of these Nigerians were actually entitled to Ghanaian citizenship, having lived in Ghana since the turn of the century and more than fulfilled the postcolonial edict that all those resident in Ghana at the time of independence were eligible for citizenship.²⁹

²⁷ Margaret Peil, *Ghana’s Aliens*, p.367; Grivil, p.530.

²⁸ These were Hausa and Fulani traders many of whom were born in Ghana generations before independence. Peil, ‘Ghana’s Aliens’, pp.368–370; Brydon ‘Ghanaian Responses’, p.563.

²⁹ Private interview with Nini Akiwumi, representative for UN Refugee Commission, Accra, Ghana. January 2004.

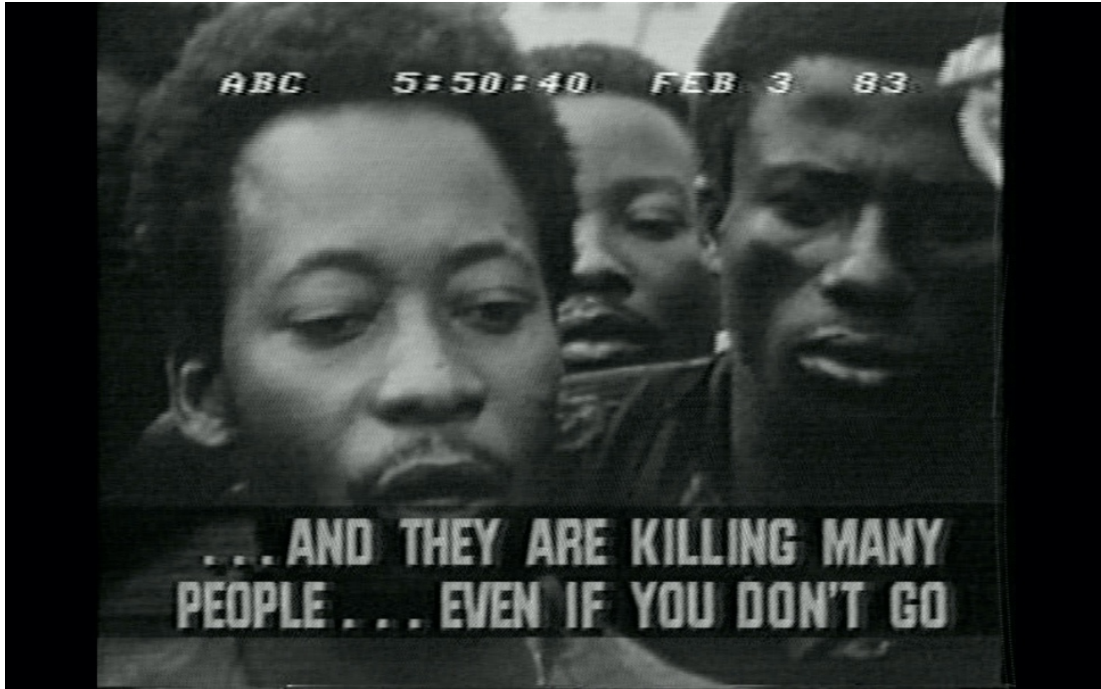


Figure 2. ABC Evening News 5:50pm, 2/3/1983, screen grab

While the scale of the 1969 and 1983 deportations was unprecedented, a regional culture of expulsions was to mark the decades following 1960. Elliot Skinner (1963), Margaret Peil (1974) and Grivil (1985) have considered the frequency of West African deportations as symptomatic of newly independent post-colonial nations. As Peil has stated,

*Ghanaian fisherman have been deported from Guinea, Ivory Coast and Nigeria; Nigerian traders have had to leave Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Ghana and Zaire; Dahomean civil servants have been deported from Ivory Coast and Niger; Togolese farmers and workmen have been expelled from Ghana and Ivory Coast. Work permits are increasingly used increasingly to limit scarce employment to nationals.*³⁰

Given the significance and periodically incendiary effects of circular migration in post-independence nations, there are remarkably few detailed studies on migratory labour movements from this period in West African history. It is unclear, but likely, that the Nigerian expulsions

³⁰ Peil, *Ghana's Aliens*, p.367.

influenced the *International Organization for Migration* (IOM) founded in 1951, to extend its *Migration for Development Program* “to qualified nationals from African countries” for the first time in 1983. This programme focused on the repatriation and resource management of highly skilled workers (many of whom Ghana lost to Nigeria during its recession years in the form of teachers, doctors and nurses). Nonetheless, it was only in 2009 that the IOM began a programme for the study of *Labour Migration*, illustrating just how recently policy makers have turned their attention towards the question of migration.³¹

The most renowned anthropologists and historians who have attempted to address the topic of economic migration are A.G. Hopkins (1975), who provides a broad history of West African circulatory regional trade routes from the 10th century onwards (see *An Economic History of West Africa*); Margaret Peil (1971, 1995); and Jean Rouch (1955, 1958). Both Peil and Rouch have explored migration and tropes of alienation in pre- and post-independence West African states and at regional borders.³² It is only in very recent years that more thorough research on West African migratory patterns has emerged. Of special note are the works of Aderanti Adepaju (1984, 2007, 2008, 2012) and Peter Quartey (2006, 2008).³³

³¹ The IOM was mandated by the Organization for African Unity (OAU) “to continue to help African countries to encourage and facilitate the return of their qualified expatriate nationals and promote the initiated Migration for Development in Africa”, <http://www.iom.int/cms/mida> [last accessed 5/1/2013]. The Program for the Study of Labour Migration has yet to produce any material on West Africa; <http://www.iom.int/cms/en/sites/iom/home/what-we-do/labour-migration.html> [last accessed 5/1/2013].

³² See Margaret Peil, ‘Ghanaians Abroad’, *African Affairs*, Vol. 94, No. 376 (July, 1995). Oxford University Press, p.345 and Jean Rouch’s highly problematic works *Les Maitres Fous* (1955), *Jaguar* (1955), and *Moi, un noir* (1958). Most of Rouch’s film narratives are geared between migrant worker and colonial authority with superficial reference to unwelcoming African host communities. Rouch’s portraits also tend to obfuscate the plurality of kinds of historical migrant worker in West Africa, ignoring the more socially integrated histories of circular trade routes and migratory fishermen.

³³ See Aderanti Adepaju, Arie van der Wiel; *Seeking Greener Pastures Abroad; A Migration Profile of Nigeria*, Safari Books, Nigeria 2012, Aderanti Adepaju (ed.) *International Migration within, to and from Africa in a Globalised World*, Sub-Saharan publishers, Ghana, 2009; Aderanti Adepaju, ‘Migration and Social Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa’, draft paper prepared for the UNRISD–IOM–IFS project on *Social Policy and Migration in Developing Countries* (2008); [http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/\(httpAuxPages\)/AC96A6E2D6C0FF9CC125751200354DDB/\\$file/dra](http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/(httpAuxPages)/AC96A6E2D6C0FF9CC125751200354DDB/$file/dra)

Estimates that only 3 million African immigrants lived in Nigeria seem conservative when taking into consideration the country's historical role throughout the 1970s as a regional economic hub, where dock workers, teachers, fishermen and lorry drivers moved continually up and down the coast and across its borders.³⁴

In the words of Adepaju,

*The formation of sub-regional economic unions to some extent simulated the kind of homogenous societies that once existed in the sub-regions. In all cases, economic unions are often dominated by the economies of a single country to which movements of persons have been directed. Many countries are concurrently experiencing challenges and opportunities with respect to the emigration of skilled professionals, the diasporas links with country-of-origin, and migrants remittances from within and outside of the region. At present most countries lack synchronised migration policies and programmes, as well as appropriate data to inform such policies.*³⁵

Nigeria's 1983 population was figured to be in excess of 110 million.³⁶ The 1.2 million Ghanaians who were expelled that year represented over 10% of the 12 million Ghanaians who had, by then, migrated to Nigeria—their migration closely tied to their own nation's 17-year-old economic recession under military rule.³⁷ These numbers ought to serve as a clear indicator of how closely national economic decline and regional West African economic stability were interrelated.

[ft_adeipoju.pdf](#) [last accessed 18/5/2014]; Aderanti Adepaju. 'Illegals and Expulsions in Africa; The Nigerian Experience'. *International Migration Review*, Vol. 18, No. 3, Special Issue: Irregular Migration: An International Perspective. Autumn 1984, pp.426–436.

Peter Quartey and F. Prah, 'Financial Development and Economic Growth in Ghana: Is there a causal Link?' *African Finance Journal*, Vol 10, (1), Africa Growth Institute, 2008, pp.28–54; Peter Quartey, *The Effect of Migrant Remittances on Household Welfare in Ghana*: African Economic Research Consortium (AERC), Research Paper No. 158, Nairobi Kenya, 2006.

³⁴ In fact, this culture of circular migration is considerably more ancient. A.G. Hopkins describes late 19th century caravans of up to 30,000 camels departing bi-annually from Timbuctu, and regular migratory routes between Sokoto in Northern Nigeria and the former Ashanti Empire in Ghana comprising 1000–2000 people. Traders moved slowly like small mobile towns and would take six months to one year to complete the circuit. A.G Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa*, Longman, 1977, p.48, p.63.

³⁵ Adepaju, *UNRISD Migration and Social Policy*, p.3.

³⁶ Lynne Brydon 'Ghanaian responses to the Nigerian expulsions of 1983' *African Affairs* No. 84, (1985), p.570, p.576.

³⁷ See Ghana Population Statistics 1984 census report listing 12,296,081 inhabitants in Ghana: <http://www.geohive.com/cntry/ghana.aspx> [last accessed January 25 2014].

Investigations into the 1983 expulsions ultimately raised more questions than answers. Gravil (1985) and Olajide Aluko (1985) consider the possibility that its genesis lay in a religious revolt that took place in northern Nigeria in 1980, whereby 6,000 Nigerians were said to have killed 60 policemen and injured at least 1,000 others under the leadership of Muhammad “Maitasine” Marwa, a charismatic leader of Cameroonian origins. Amongst other things, Maitasine had managed to convince his followers that the Prophet Muhammad was a fake and that he instead was indeed the true prophet.³⁸



Figure 3. NBC Evening News, 5:51, 31/1/1983

There was a second uprising a year later, approaching the anniversary of Maitasine’s death. The Minister for Foreign Affairs Alhaji Ali Baba cited these events as a clear justification of the need for the expulsion order. In his words: “Maitatsine was an alien. No responsible government can

³⁸ Aluko, *Expulsion Study*, p.547; Gravil ‘Expulsions Order’, p.535.

allow such unwholesome developments to plague the nation, hence the decision to require illegal aliens to leave the country within 14 days”.³⁹ Gravil remarks on the strangeness of this statement in the context of the events that followed:

*If alien guilt for these outrages was so obvious to the Nigerian authorities – the Panel of Inquiry reported in 1981 – why did they give the rabble-rousers two years to entrench themselves? Why expel Ghanaians when all but a score of Maitatsine’s non-Nigerian followers came from Niger Republic? Why deport two million Christians in a measure to get rid of Muslim zealots?*⁴⁰

Aluko’s text, published in the same 1985 issue of the peer review journal *African Affairs* as Gravil’s, supports the significance of the northern revolts, but ultimately lays more blame on the recent change of power that had occurred in Ghana following the two Rawlings coups of 1979 and 1982—and the economic refugees that were produced as a consequence. As Aluko writes:

*The Shagari Government did not like the coup d’état against the Limann regime with which it had some ideological affinity. Secondly, the Rawlings Government started a quasi-Soviet system of government which was anathema to the Nigerian Government.*⁴¹

Aluko goes on to present a plausible series of complaints about Ghanaian corruption in the economically devastated post-coup nation. The Ghanaian authorities are accused of repeated arrest and harassment of Nigerian community members in Ghana throughout the year 1982, which are explained as retaliatory measures for the Shagari Government’s refusal to supply Ghana with crude oil following the 1981 coup.⁴² Aluko also supplies an increasingly less credulous list of criminal activities committed by Ghanaians who were resident in Nigeria in the period leading up to the *Expulsion Order*, including by an unnamed group involved in an alleged armed robbery attempt on the Vice President in early January. Aluko writes:

³⁹ Address 14 February 1983, quoted in Gravil, ‘Expulsions Order’, p.534.

⁴⁰ Gravil, ‘Expulsions Order’, p.535.

⁴¹ Aluko *Expulsions Order*, p.548.

⁴² *Ibid.* p.549.

*The identity cards and documents found amongst those captured in the attack on the official residence of the then Vice President, Dr Alex Ekwueme with a view to breaking into the house early in January 1983, were those of Ghanaians. This was crucial to the expulsion order as will be shown later in this study.*⁴³

Aluko's source for this material is listed in his footnotes only as "Private Interviews, March 1983". No other articles or newspaper reports make mention of the remarkably convenient attempted robbery on the home of the Vice President, foiled just days before the January 17 announcement of the *1983 Expulsion Order*. As my eyes drifted across the continuing list of malfeasants in Aluko's record, I saw my father's name appear.

*...more important measures were taken to control and deport Ghanaians that had been found to be fraudulent and guilty of crimes. Only a few of these will be mentioned. On 19 July 1982, the Federal Government deported two Ghanaians with a criminal record. They were Raymond Kodzo Okudzed, accused of defrauding some state governments of 1 million naira and the Reverend Victor Sackey who admitted that he was sent by the Rawlings Government as a spy to Nigeria.*⁴⁴

The source for this information is once again listed as "Private Interviews, February 1983", which would have been during the period of the expulsions. The shock from reading this was enough to have me call my father immediately. He had me fax him the article, but before it arrived he provided me with a free and easy account of events. It was the first and last time he spoke of our Lagos story. I scribbled notes furiously as he spoke on the phone. It was February 2006, 23 years after our departure.

As my father explained things for the first time, discrepancies in my timeline of events started to make sense. He began by stating that the accusations against him were false, pointing out that he was not deported and that he left Lagos in April 1982, not July. He told me for the first time about

⁴³ Ibid. p.549.

⁴⁴ My father's name is Raymond Kodzo Okudzeto, the last part of our surname is misspelt in the text. Aluko, *Expulsions Order*, p.549.

the vitriolic newspaper articles written in 1981 and 1982 denouncing him for using 1,000 Ghanaian workers to construct the military barracks at Ware. He also told me about a very grave mistake he made as the holder of a major military construction contract that led to the events of our arrest. At some point in 1981, Kojo Tsikata, a retired army captain, suspected mercenary and close political accomplice of Rawlings, was arrested on suspicion of espionage upon entering Nigeria. Tsikata was later Special Advisor to the PNDC (the name given to the post-coup government of the Rawlings regime), and Head of National Security.⁴⁵ Kojo Tsikata and my father were not friends—they did not even like each other. But they were cousins.

On his arrest, Tsikata called my father and begged for assistance in gaining his release. My father was repeatedly warned by his Nigerian friends that Tsikata was an extremely dangerous man and to have nothing to do with him. But family ties in West Africa are stronger than can be imagined, especially when a kinsman is in need in a foreign country. A sense of duty won out and my father had Tsikata released into his custody to be placed under house arrest until his deportation. These actions proved to be a huge mistake. From that moment onwards my father became *persona non grata*. The government and military authorities placed him under constant surveillance. Instantly, the events surrounding our arrest only weeks after the 31 December Rawlings coup, were illuminated. While my father had been incorrectly accused of being “Jerry Rawlings’ brother”, he was indeed Kojo Tsikata’s “brother”, for in most West African cultures and languages there are

⁴⁵ At the time of Tsikata’s Nigerian arrest, Rawlings had recently handed over power to the 1981 civilian Limann Government, but there continued political unrest in Ghana and it was unclear if there would be another coup. He has long been suspected of being instrumental in the murder of three judges who were kidnapped from their homes, executed and then burnt in June of 1982. The judges were killed for having released dissidents arrested during the first Rawlings coup of 1979. See statement of Captain Kojo Tsikata to the NRC, 10/2/2004 <http://www.modernghana.com/news/49093/1/statement-of-captain-kojo-tsikata-rtd-to-the-nrc.html> [last accessed June 2009].

no separate words to denote cousins; they are effectively siblings.⁴⁶ The revelation was not without irony. The knock-on effect of rescuing Kojo Tsikata in Nigeria was over 25 years of exile for us from West Africa. We were only in Ghana a few short months before the warning came that Rawlings “had a bullet” for my father’s head and we were forced to move to London. Perhaps Tsikata, sent this message as one last favour?

The revelations of the Tsikata story placed us squarely in the events leading up to the *Expulsion Order*. My father could not be discounted from responsibility in the preceding chain of events. While I felt I had uncovered something critical to the history of the *Expulsion Order*, it remained a taboo subject. On reflection, I also wondered if Aluko’s research had not confused the allegations of my father being a spy with allegations of defrauding the Nigerian government, but here the channels for investigation had closed. Having denied all financial wrongdoing, my father was once again mute on the topic and asking again would have seemed hugely disrespectful.

My research for this dissertation began with the intention to use the Ghana Must Go bag as a foundation for a study in the political events and social relations that underpinned the construction of Ghanaian national identities in the context of post-independence upheavals. I assumed the ability of objects to house or trigger memory through their use and exchange. I initially planned field-work, in the hope of finding Ghanaian veterans of the expulsions, but it proved difficult to find people willing to talk of their experiences on record; worse still, every attempt made to present extant research material was met with outrage in both Ghana and Nigeria.

⁴⁶ In Ghana, even when speaking fluent English, it is common for distant cousins to refer in relation to each other as ‘brother’ or ‘sister’. A qualifying question might ask “is she your *direct* sister?” The answer “no, indirect” would then indicate a cousin.

By way of example, in 2008, I participated in a conference organised in collaboration with the New York University (NYU) study abroad campus in Accra and the Art Department at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) on the theme of visual culture in relation to nationhood. I made a short presentation of recent research and related art works. When I screened the previously unseen 1983 American news footage, the audience of professors and students erupted in unexpected anger. There was shouting for several minutes. A Nigerian colleague sitting next to me was visibly concerned for his safety, as someone screamed “Nigerians must be made to pay for this!” It took some time to calm the audience down and I was cautioned to take care with this incendiary material. It was particularly difficult for the pan-Africanist intellectuals present, whose principles were unable to ameliorate this clear example of the historical love-hate relationship between Nigerians and Ghanaians.



Figure 4. “Nigeria’s Outcasts: The Cruel Exodus”, Newsweek, 14/2/1983, p.32

In 2010, I screened the same footage at a week-long workshop I gave at CCA Lagos in Nigeria to an audience that ranged from teenagers through to veteran artists in their seventies. As the footage

unfolded of people marching in their millions and being beaten by police, the room exploded. People rose from their seats to shout at me. Everyone was visibly distressed. I was accused of not doing my research “properly” and told never to show the footage again, especially to Westerners who no doubt use the material to perpetuate African stereotypes. For thirty minutes there was sheer calamity in the room. The shock and fury the screening produced was unexpected. It seemed that no one had ever seen visual records of these events. My Nigerian audience were horrified to have been passive partners in events they had never witnessed. The days’ teaching ended in a horrible gloom.

The next day, to my surprise, when I returned to resume teaching at 9 A.M. the entire audience from the previous day was already assembled. The eldest artist in the room issued a touching apology on behalf of everyone in the room. He told me that they had never believed the stories of the scale of the expulsions and that they seemed like exaggerated anti-Nigerian propaganda. No one had ever seen visual evidence of what had happened; seeing the unearthed television footage for the first time sent everyone into shock. He thanked me for the chance to learn the truth about the past and once again, like his Ghanaian colleagues two years before, told me that I held dangerous material that should be hidden from Westerners. I did not let the experience deter me from trying to unearth more documentation. There are no public news archives in Nigeria, but while in Lagos through the generous help of several family friends I gained access to the archives of *The Times*, which are not normally open to the public. However, upon mistakenly telling the archivist I was Ghanaian, he politely responded that all the records prior to 1984 had been destroyed in a fire.

Without visual documentation, the events surrounding the Ghanaian expulsion from Nigeria remain latent, even if a memory of the expulsion lives on through the slang terminology used for

the bag. Freud once observed that “forgetting is often intentional and desired”.⁴⁷ The ambivalent ability of the Ghana Must Go bag to record historical events underscored the corollary functions of remembering and forgetting; in order to remember one must have forgotten, in order to forget one must first have remembered.

Both Adrian Forty (1999) and Paul Connerton (2006), have bemoaned the disproportionately small amount of research dedicated to the subject of “forgetting” in contrast to the dense field of memory work, exploring the idea that perhaps “collective memory does not dwell in material objects”.⁴⁸ Duly, Connerton has proposed 5 “preliminary discriminations” in the culture of forgetting:

1. Forgetting as *structural amnesia* – remembering only what is considered most valuable, like ancestors of importance, be they aristocrats or male predecessors in a patriarchal society. Yet also the idea that prosthetic memory devices such as cookbooks inhibit the passing of cultural memory from one generation to another.
2. The concept of forgetting as being *constitutive in the formation of a new identity* – for instance, in the case of the escaped war criminal or the decision not to discuss or disclose the true number of previous partners in a marriage.
3. Forgetting as *repressive erasure* – most obviously in the case of a totalitarian regime, but also in more benign ways in which history is constructed to benefit the writer.
4. *Politically expedient forgetting* – i.e., as an act of amelioration or political compromise to aid peace or conflict resolution.
5. *Humiliated silence* – Connerton identifies this through the absence of documentation charting

⁴⁷ Adrian Forty quoted in ‘Introduction’ to *The Art of Forgetting*, reproduced in ed. Victor Buchli, *Material Culture Critical Concepts*, Vol., Part 1, p.184.

⁴⁸ Forty, *Art of Forgetting* p.184, see also Connerton, ‘Cultural Memory’ in *The Handbook of Material Culture*, (ed). Chris Tilley, et al. Sage, p.320.

the trauma of the 7.5 million Germans rendered homeless by aerial bombing in the Second World War, or the estimated 10 million overlooked mutilated soldiers of the German, Austro-Hungarian, British and French armies following the First World War. While memorialisation for the dead was strictly observed, care of the disabled was overlooked.⁴⁹

Attempts to unpack the Ghana Must Go bag brought an engagement of all five approaches to the concept of ‘forgetting’. Prior to delving into each of these approaches, it is worth remembering that Ghana’s departure from decades of civil and fiscal unrest into to a respected African democracy began when Rawlings transitioned from being dictator to democratically elected president in 1996. Thereafter, the country experienced steady growth leading it to be seen by many as Africa’s model nation. With this historical bifurcation of the country’s political fate, it is perhaps no wonder that remembering and forgetting are contested issues when it comes to Ghana.

Back to the bag, its first act of forgetting comes in the form of ‘structural amnesia’ – in the failure of the bag’s ability to function as a fixed prosthetic device; secondly, in its changing use-association and altered meaning in relation to its ‘representation, identity, consumption and regulation’ that overrides the coded history embodied in its name;⁵⁰ thirdly and fourthly, the hostility of Ghanaians towards investigating the bag and its relation to the *1983 Expulsion Order*, like my own repressed memories of events, is symptomatic of forgetting as “constitutive in the formation of a new identity” and forgetting as ‘repressive erasure’— these forms of forgetting in

⁴⁹ ‘Paul Connerton, ‘Cultural Memory’ in *The Handbook of Material Culture*, (ed). Chris Tilley, et al. Sage, pp.319–322.

⁵⁰ See Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay, *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman*, (Culture, Media and Identities), SAGE Publications: London 2013., p.3.

N.B. I met a Ghanaian academic who had been resident at the unaffected University of Nsukka in the middle of Nigeria at the time of the expulsions (predominantly a coastal event), he explained to me that he had taken in many Ghanaians escaping the violence of the South but suggested I would have difficulty finding testimonials and himself declined to be a formal a part of this study.

turn contribute to demands for “politically expedient forgetting” levied by Ghanaians and Nigerians in relation to the footage of the expulsions (as I so unwittingly discovered). As an aside, both Ghanaians and Nigerians repeatedly stressed the importance of breaking stereotypes of Africa as a continent of perpetual war and famine—to the degree that it was considered less important to censor the material from other Africans than from (white) Westerners who would (presumably) not be sufficiently culturally equipped to take an unbiased or non-reductive approach to the material. Finally, there is the ‘humiliated silence’ embodied by the refusal of eye-witnesses to partake in this study.⁵¹

The articles and news footage uncovered relating to the expulsions invariably engendered discomfort and hostility. In 2005 I made a series of collages using the bags and photos from the period of childhood spent in Lagos (Figure 1.) These associated “Ghana Must Go/Odd Girl Out” artworks were surprisingly well received in both Nigeria and Ghana and were publicly exhibited and reviewed.⁵² Perhaps the images of bourgeois 1970s Africa and sentimental nostalgia housed in the cheap plastic bags were considered resistant enough to the feared recurrent stereotypes of dystopian Africa. For Nigerian audiences, there were added references to a bygone cultural renaissance when the music of Fela Kuti and King Sunny Ade were the soundtrack of everyday life; the Lagos Lagoon was clean and the city was lined with palm trees. There was also the veiled allusion that the comfortable life depicted in the images might have been bought through the unspoken political dealings the bags had become associated with. Given the repeated calls for discretion in dealing with the history of the expulsions, how then was one to investigate the bag without causing offence or, worse still, engendering a second exile through the social rejection that

⁵² See Appendix 13, *Koranteng's Toli*, 2007.

threatened to follow on the heels of further investigation? There was only one popular form of discourse permitted concerning the bags, and that was enacted through narratives of political and social satire mostly related to Nigerian political fraud. During the first two years of my doctoral research, between 2006 and 2007, the narrative of the 1983 expulsions encoded in the bag remained a forgotten history that was almost completely unknown for the majority of West Africans born in the years following 1980. It was only through satire and the rapid-fire communication of internet social media that the taboo of silence surrounding the bag could eventually be broken.

In late 2006 the luxury goods fashion label Louis Vuitton launched a high-end simulacrum of the bag for its Spring 2007 collections. In the months that followed, Nigerian and Ghanaian internet communities, both inside and outside West Africa, produced an explosion of satirical articles, circular e-mails, blog entries and radio commentaries in response to the absurdity of this new designer bag. The overarching theme of most responses bemoaned yet another ‘theft’ by Europeans of a hitherto overlooked cultural artefact.⁵³ On the *Nairaland* blog, a user called ‘BlueNubian’ exclaimed “Louis is a thief!” Later down the thread ‘2fine4u’ responds, “The deal is done, Louis Vuitton has exploited us”.⁵⁴

⁵³ D. Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997. p.174.

⁵⁴ See *Nairaland* blog, Appendix 10.

"Ghana-Must-Go" Bags On The Runway!

Nairaland Forum | Entertainment | Fashion | 'Ghana-Must-Go' Bags On The Runway! Pages: (1) (2)



Author
Topic: 'Ghana Must-Go' Bags On The Runway! (Read 2472 views)

Figure 5. See Appendix 10 for full text, Nairaland Forum, 28/2/2007.

These ironic, yet impassioned missives echoed the continued demands for the return of stolen West African cultural artefacts, such the Queen Idia mask now housed in the British Museum (but originally plundered by British soldiers during the Benin invasion).⁵⁵ The potential loss of the bag to ‘Europeans’ engendered a new populist discourse, demanding conscious resistance of neo-imperialist exploitation of African commodities. The hilarity of the mock public outcry was enough that several blog entries were reproduced in Ghanaian national newspapers. An article on the popular Ghanaweb news site complained, “having an idea stolen can be more difficult to deal with especially when the other party makes a bigger name and money off the idea than it was originally worth”.⁵⁶ The fact that the bags were made in China was overlooked in all commentaries; for both Nigerians and Ghanaians, the social relations and actions associated with the bag were

⁵⁵ The mask became a symbol for pan-Africanist unity and anti-imperialist activism due to the repeated refusals of the British Museum to return it to Nigeria for the second World Festival of Black Arts “FESTAC 77” held in Lagos in 1977. The argument put forth was that the mask would not survive being returned as it would not be housed in proper climate-controlled conditions on its return to Nigeria.

⁵⁶ Home Page GhanaWeb, 27/3/2007, see Appendix 14.

deemed enough to signify national ownership. Exchanges through internet fora and media sites continued well into 2008. I have collated a number of these and present them in the appendix.⁵⁷

Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay (1997) articulate the ‘circuit of culture’ and the interrelated functions of “production, regulation, consumption, identity and representation”, and through this lens it is possible to add another layer of understanding to the ironic public engagement with the Louis Vuitton bag. In 2006 the Nigerian Federal Government banned the importation of Ghana Must Go bags and other commodities as part of its policy of economic protectionism.⁵⁸ The ban on the bags was widely seen as an act of government incompetence, as they were an essential staple, heavily used by people from almost all social demographics in the country. Members of Nigerian trading communities continually petitioned the government for the lifting of the ban, which was repeatedly repealed and then reinstated between the years 2006 and 2010. Through the government regulation of the bag, Nigerians came to an understanding that the bag was an essential staple of everyday life; for them, ‘consumption’ of the bag clearly identified it as culturally Nigerian. Knowledge of the Nigerian Government ban was well known throughout West Africa and remarked upon throughout the region as something clearly absurd. So when, in February 2007, a blogger with the username ‘Blow’, said of the Louis Vuitton bag that “Nigerians should learn from this, we can make our simple products into internationally accepted commodities if we use and present them

⁵⁷ See Appendices 10–23 for copies and transcriptions of blog entries and news material from the internet.

⁵⁸ See Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay, *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman*, (Culture, Media and Identities), SAGE Publications: London 2013.

The Nigerian Government regularly bans imported items deemed to have adequate local substitutes. See NBF news, ‘Policy Inconsistency on Imported Goods’, *The Nigerian Voice*, 21/2/2011, <http://www.thenigerianvoice.com/news/46595/1/policy-inconsistency-on-imported-goods.html> [last accessed 10/6/2014].

appropriately”, he was in fact making a satirical commentary on the flaws of recent government economic policy making.⁵⁹

The popular assessment that the bag imported from China was indisputably African underscored the prescience of Marx’s concept of the commodity fetish. That is, the conditions of the bag’s original manufacture were so obfuscated that ownership could be ascribed purely through acts of use and exchange as related to inter-African social relations. This highlights the importance Appadurai places on following the trajectory of things in order to understand the ways in which they enact and influence culture. According to Appadurai,

*Even though from a theoretical point of view human actors encode things with significance, from a methodological point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context.*⁶⁰

When not used to denote political corruption in Nigeria, the ordinary association of the bag was with market traders and lower income travellers hauling around their worldly belongings, or with housewives transporting heavy loads of “elubo, melon, stockfish” from one (possibly international) location to another.

One blogger put forth a little-known Ghanaian name for the bag: “Efiewura Sua Me”, meaning “help me carry my bag”—a reminder that in common use the bags are often stuffed well beyond capacity.⁶¹ The supposed theft of the bag by Louis Vuitton allowed the discourse engendered by the bag to simultaneously incorporate both recent nationalist histories and allusions to colonial resistance struggles into popular critical narratives. Many satirical commentaries rounded on accusations that the bag was worthless until appropriated by a European (company). Another

⁵⁹ The Nigerian Government ban singled out products that had ‘adequate local substitutes’ (see footnote 57), Nairaland Forum, Appendix 10.

⁶⁰ Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things; Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, 1986.

⁶¹ See *Toli*, Appendix 13.

blogger pointed out that “LV seems to have merely capitalized on something Ghanaians have totally refused to give any recognition to”.⁶² In another blog ‘Toshman’ complained that “you only value what you have when some capitalist says so”.⁶³ The humour of the blogs repeatedly centred around the perceived ability of Louis Vuitton’s ‘appropriation’ to transfer value to an object of former derision. This narrative informs M. Thompson’s position that it is people with “power and status” that have ability to make things durable or valuable.⁶⁴ Slater (1997) has remarked upon a change in post-Fordist consumerism where it is “the design consultants, the retailers and the producers of ‘concepts’” who are now in the driving seat of capitalism, but while the bag circulated the digital world of the West African blogging community far past the Spring 2007 season, in the analogue world of physical exchanges it appeared to be a commercial failure.⁶⁵ The idea that someone who was wealthy would pay exorbitant sums to look poor drove the gist of all Ghanaian and Nigerian satirical narratives and perhaps also contributed to the lack of consumer interest in the Louis Vuitton bag. As many bloggers pointed out, the bag was invariably associated with low-income travellers and refugees. For bloggers of Nigerian and Ghanaian descent, the true success of the Louis Vuitton Ghana Must Go bag was really a celebration of its failure as a ‘concept’ and by extension, the implied failure of European neocolonialism in Africa. At this point, the words of anthropologist Michael Rowlands are apposite:

In the act of repetition or replication, the original occasion of its usage is in some way evoked so that the unfolding progress of the tradition promises a future of further imitation, of renewed simulacra. Structurally, logically and axiomatically, an original form can only be repeated, and with each act of replication, the illusion of the original value of the object, its genius, becomes the indisputable ground beyond which there is no further model, referent

⁶² See Appendix 14.

⁶³ Appendix 10.

⁶⁴ Thompson cites the difference between a vase sold as ‘antique’ or ‘second-hand’, its value being related to the socio-economic groupings of its exchange and being predicated on perceived rarity. See M. Thompson, ‘The Filth in The Way’, reproduced in (ed) Buchli, *Material Culture Critical Concepts*, pp. 292–293, p.295, p.299.

⁶⁵ Slater, *Consumer Culture*, p.172. I managed to speak to a representative from the accessory department of Louis Vuitton in Paris, but once it was disclosed which item was to be discussed, my e-mails were left unreplied.

*or text.*⁶⁶

For West African blogging communities, it was the perceived ‘theft’ as enacted by Luis Vuitton’s “act of repetition or replication” that finally allowed the bag’s history in relation to the *1983 Expulsion Order* to surface. For, once turned into a luxury item and then decontextualised from its ‘original occasion of usage’, discomfort with its incongruous form brought demands for it to be returned to its (perceived) ‘original form’. As bloggers sought the true providence of the bag, which they perceived to be West Africa, they naturally began to comment on, or question the derisive Ghana Must Go moniker. The resultant replies were a fascinating indication of how murky the events of recent history had become, for when it was eventually understood that the deportations had taken place, there was no true sense of scale, socio-political context or, in many instances, even which decade or under which political regime the events had taken place.

In one blog, a user named ‘Bolani’ starts with the question “Why is it called *Ghana Must Go*?”.

‘Kikis Muffin’ provides the answer:

*Those bags were commonly used by deportee Ghanaians leaving Nigerian to pack their belongings, when some military ruler (I think Buhari) had one brainstorm to deport illegal immigrants in the mid-late 80s.*⁶⁷

A website called ‘Black Looks’, run by a blogger with the Nigerian name ‘Sokari’ complains of the bag’s “horrible name”, and receives a reply from Koranteng Ofusu Amah (a name of Ghanaian origin), who explains that the bag is associated with “various refugee expulsions that Ghana and Nigeria engaged in during the 1970s.”⁶⁸ The discussion between Sokari and Koranteng has a chatty

⁶⁶ Michael Rowlands, ‘The Role of Memory in the Transmission of Culture’, in *World Archeology*, Vol. 25 (2), Conceptions of Time and Ancient Society, 1993. Taylor and Francis, p.146.

⁶⁷ See Appendix 21.

⁶⁸ See Appendix 19.

tone with overtones of camaraderie, while their exchange seems generally objective and distanced. Sokari then posted a photo of the Ghana Must Go bags she is storing; a small radiator heater poking out behind the pile. Is she in Europe or America? She says further down the thread that she has just moved into a ‘new apartment’, which sounds more North American than British in tone. Even further down the thread a user called ‘Aba Boy’ says “The bags are now so popular here in the UK. I even saw them on a recent episode of East Enders”. A few lines later ‘Georgia/Caribbean Free Radio’ says “Here in Trinidad I’ve heard those bags called ‘Guayanese Samsonite’”.⁶⁹

The recent school of ‘object oriented ontology’ or ‘speculative realism’ attempts the creation of a ‘flat ontology’, arguing for equal values to be attributed to the analysis of real and fictional objects. As Ian Bogost puts it, “flat ontology suggests that there is no hierarchy of being”.⁷⁰ The justification for this approach is the idea that objects are always ‘receding’ and by taking into account overlooked factors, such as unseen surfaces, cathode rays and sub-atomic particles, we come to the understanding that the greater part of the properties of objects are always far beyond our reach and, in fact, rather than analysing objects, we are always analysing human/object relations. The Ghana Must Go bloggers employ a flat ontology in their discussions of the bag, making no distinction between the overpriced designer Louis Vuitton bag, a screenshot of press photos of the bag and the everyday plastic bag in the analogue world. No distinction was ever made between the values of the bags’ materials in relation to their respective constructions, even though one was made out of expensive printed leather and the other interwoven cheap plastic fibres.

⁶⁹ See Black Looks’ blog, Appendix 19.

⁷⁰ See Ian Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology or What it’s Like to Be a Thing*, Minnesota Press, 2012, p.22, also Graham Harman, *Tool Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*, Open Court, Chicago and La Salle, Illinois, 2002; Graham Harman, *Towards Speculative Realism*, Zero Books, Winchester, 2010, pp.146–147; Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature; Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, Harvard University Press, 2007.

Metaphysically speaking, for the bloggers all versions of the bag were interchangeable and the same. The only distinction made between the bags was to discern in which contexts value was increased in the bag through its marketing and exchange. In the case of Louis Vuitton, inflated value was given to the bag not through use, but the intention of non-use, or reduced use in its new status as a luxury item.

Unpicking the Ghana Must Go bag from a perspective informed by object orientated ontology, we might wonder what meaning is ascribed through the different forms of internet code used to programme the blogs. Programming code is a scientific discourse—and a withdrawn one at that. It is so sophisticated and pervasive in our everyday lives that we usually take its operations for granted. How might the Ghana Must Go blog entries be analysed in this context? How could we access the data to allow us to know the exact IP addresses, number of visits to sites and locations of bloggers? What are the markers of complexity for blogging programmes? Are these better indicators of the technical savvy of the website owners, their interest in using current software or the bandwidth available to them being contingent on physical location and local infrastructure rather than personal financial status? The sometimes-strange date and time logs that are listed besides blog entries in ‘EST time’, indicate that at least some correspondents were in locations in the North America, using American software and perhaps being themselves North American citizens of African origin.⁷¹ Other entries clearly locate users in West Africa.

These speculations are only derivative of object orientated ontology. To create a truly flat ontology we would have to refocus our analysis away from human actors, towards that which recedes away from the human subject/object relationship. We would, instead, have to examine the hidden

⁷¹ Eastern Standard Time (EST) used in the USA and Canada.

communications that happen between digital entities such as server relays and computer hard-drives, or “silicon microprocessors and data transmission ribbons”, eventually taking into account even the sub-atomic particles that comprise the invisible world that allows transmission of the virtual object.⁷² The internet implies a sense of permanence and continuity, but in past years all of the blogs originally archived have ceased to exist. The archive itself is a fragile testimony to an early phase of discovery in a trans-local African digital community.

In its dematerialised form (i.e., as a concept discussed through internet blogs), the bag hints at an African community that is not necessarily located in Africa. Many blog entries mentioned the embarrassment of having to travel to a foreign destination with a friend or relative carrying one of the bags.⁷³ In the delocalised space of the internet, there are repeated references of travel out of African locations with the bag, but it remains unclear as to whether bloggers are Ghanaian or Nigerian, based in the UK, USA or West Africa. With this understanding, the identity and national identifications of bloggers become social constructions that have to be enacted or performed in order to be realised.

Slater (1997) has referred to the increased dematerialisation of consumer goods in society, whereby objects become separated from their use value and increasingly associated with their representations in “mediated encounters”, producing incongruities that encourage social rupture.⁷⁴ These mediations are evidenced through “portrayals of lifestyle in films, TV, magazine” or – for

⁷² Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology*, p.10.

⁷³ On the ‘Nairaland Forum’, 2Fine4u(f) states, “I am coming back to Nigeria to tell my grandmother to gather all her ghana-must-go bags” (Appendix 10). On ‘Reflections of Me’ blogspot a user named ‘Discombulated Diva’ bemoans her mother’s use of the bag causing extra harassment at non-African airports, “when I was younger I would travel with my momsy, she would ALWAYS pack things in that Ghana-Must-Go bag, which yelled AFRICAN all over and wasn’t it always a coincidence that we got that extra search at the airport once they saw that bag in our hands...” (see Appendix 12).

⁷⁴ Slater, *Consumer Culture*, p.190–192.

the Ghana Must Go bag – the culture of internet blogging.⁷⁵ The sense of social rupture created amongst West African bloggers by the perceived incongruity of the Louis Vuitton bag, provoked an idiomatic discourse that nonetheless contained an encoded critique of “the difference between representation and reality, sign and material good, culture and economy” both inside and outside African locales.⁷⁶ Adrian Forty in *The Art of Forgetting* (1999) has argued that “objects are the enemy of memory, they are what tie it down and lead to forgetfulness”.⁷⁷ While the bag carries traces of the events that led to its naming, its ability to house collective memory has been shown to be contentious. It is more reflective of a series of ongoing and ever changing social relations; its meaning being constantly constructed through the processes and cultural practices of its exchange.⁷⁸

Arjun Appadurai (1986, 1996), draws inspiration from Marx’s concept of the commodity fetish, but moves emphasis away from the means of production and towards meaning produced through the processes of exchange. Examining the trajectories of artefacts reveals new perspectives on social and political environments. Appadurai’s work helps to theorise questions of diaspora in relation to the social ruptures of modernity and the nation state. Within this is a discourse of consumerism and factors such as globalisation, capital flows and the media’s role in the increasingly translocal, transnational nature of culture. His writing argues for the ubiquity of these concerns—decentralising narratives of modernity and yet creating a central place for narratives of the global south in the discourse of modernity. Within the trajectory of the Ghana Must Go bag, we see an artefact removed from its origins in China to be disseminated globally. Its association

⁷⁵ Ibid. p.192.

⁷⁶ Ibid. p.192.

⁷⁷ Forty, *The Art of Forgetting*, p.186.

⁷⁸ Du Gay, *Cultural Studies*, p.14.

with migrant and refugee communities illustrate how use, a subset of consumption and labour, denotes ownership. It reminds us that there is a cultural dimension to globalisation, analysis of its artefacts reveal new perspectives of history and its processes, illustrating through one of its most mass produced, widely distributed items that its applications, effects and cultural products, are never evenly distributed.⁷⁹ The Ghana Must Go bag illustrates how ‘localising processes’ effect new culturally specific associations and readings of the bag, which underscore the ways in which the major tropes of modernity are experienced in different ways by different peoples.⁸⁰

These localising processes will create new narratives unique to the socio-political environments that house them. They reveal the ways in which the meaning of an object is contingent on varying processes that are articulated in an object, even though this articulation is never fixed; exemplified by the manner in which the associations of the bag have changed in contemporary Nigeria. Ghana Must Go is now slang for *political corruption*, so-called because the sturdy bags are most commonly associated with absurd amounts of stolen cash used for bribes by politicians. Corrupt ministers are described as ‘Ghana Must Go Politicians’, illustrating how contemporary acts of ‘consumption, representation, regulation and identity’ overwrite older associations and meanings inscribed in the bag.⁸¹

The traditional social ruptures associated with modernity, such as population explosions, urbanisation, mass migration and industrialisation have entered a new phase through globalisation, and this phase combines the experience of media and migration—in particular because (at the time of writing) “it is only in the past two decades that media and migration have become so massively

⁷⁹ Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, p.11.

⁸⁰ Ibid. p.17.

⁸¹ Paul du Gay, Stuart Hall, et al., *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman*, (Culture, Media and Identities), SAGE Publications: London 2013, p.3.

See Appendices 16,18, and 23 for blog entries referring to Ghana Must Go corruption and politicians.

globalized” and “imagination in the post-electronic world plays a newly significant role”.⁸² Access to mass media, especially amongst less formally educated groups is radical in its ability to create new imaginary landscapes for future and possible selves, although this can also indicate a new precariousness in terms of identity and identification within state structures. What other important landmarks have been ignored or missed? Specifically, what landmarks that may relate to historic tensions of intranational exchange, economic relations and trade routes within the African continent? These exchanges are important, and inform understandings of the impetus for extra-continental migration. Yet such associations are rarely made or investigated. The forty-year history of the Ghana Must Go bag, while short and poorly documented, gives a clear indication of how the parameters of study for post-independence West Africa might be extended beyond conventional expectations to better inform the present and recent past. James G. Carrier (2006) has called for increased parameters in the study of exchanges extending “far beyond the conventional focus on time and place of exchange”.⁸³ The title of the bag is, itself, a form of cultural expression, while the internet conversations show how cultural processes are constantly at work, responding to both the most mundane and most traumatic events to produce new forms of discourse where location is secondary to identity and national identification. At present, this discourse still remains predominantly authored by popular culture and interactions on social media, rather than academia, which makes it remarkable that such a monumental series of events in recent history remain fragile in public memory.

The Ghana Must Go bag helps to illustrate the ways in which history and material culture can be read as informing and producing each other, and the requirement for human agency to tend to

⁸² Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, p.5.

⁸³ Carrier, *Exchange*, p.381.

memory, since memory requires the active performance of recall; without this, an archive is static and encoded. The discussion of these events has been left as an introductory biographical and theoretical framing device that is used to explain the motivation for which this dissertation project has been undertaken.

CHAPTER I.

This chapter provides a general economic and social history for the territory encompassing contemporary Ghana. It outlines important historic events that inform understandings of contemporary political and social structures in Ghana that live in cultural memory, but which may not be clearly identified as doing so in written historical accounts of the nation. These events underline the contemporary foundations of identity in Ghana and underscore in subtle ways the importance of both material culture and commodity culture in a country that is arguably founded on tensions informed by periods of economic conquest and/or instability, whose existential crises are informed by a history of both intra *and* international trade that is several hundred years old.

Ghana, Country and People

The Ghana 2021 Population and Housing Census lists the total population of the nation as approaching 31 million people.⁸⁴ The territory that houses contemporary Ghana is thought to have been settled around 50,000 BCE. Stone age culture is estimated as appearing around 10,000 BCE, followed by an iron age developed around 100 CE.⁸⁵ Ethnically, Ghana divides itself into 4 main

⁸⁴ The current population in 2021 is said to be 30, 832, 019, which is five times that of 1960 (6,726, 815). See Ghana 2021 Population and Housing Census; General Report, Volume 3A, [last accessed 7/11/2021]: https://statsghana.gov.gh/gssmain/fileUpload/pressrelease/2021%20PHC%20General%20Report%20Vol%203A_Population%20of%20Regions%20and%20Districts_181121.pdf.

⁸⁵ Architectural evidence sites Ghanaian communities as early as 10,000 BCE, but the Ga-Adangbe and the Akan speaking tribes, are thought to have migrated to the region around the 10th century from modern day Benin and Northern Sudan respectively. The Mole, Dagbani and Gonjas have similar language structures and social networks, they distinguish themselves from southern Ghanaians being predominantly Muslim and speaking a dialect that shares common roots with Hausa. They came to northern Ghana as invaders from the ancient Mali Empire around the 13th century. The Ewe along the eastern coast were amongst the last to arrive through a series of migrations from modern day Benin that began in the 16th century; although there are four main language groups, Ghana recognises over seventy languages and hundreds of dialects. The majority religion is Christianity, followed by Islam, traditional, and animist religious beliefs. See Roger Gocking, *The History of Ghana*, pp.xxv, 1–25, and Anne C. Bailey, ‘African Voices of the Atlantic Slave Trade’ Beacon Press, pp.28–29, 2005.

language groups: the Ga-Adangbe; Akan; Ewe; and Mole-Dagbani-Gonja. Each language grouping houses a diverse set of cultures and subdivisions, meaning that several thousand dialects are spoken in the region, and each group arrived in the territory through a series of migrations. The first to arrive were the Akan and Ga-Adangbe in the 10th century, who settled in the forests and on the coasts of Ghana. They were later followed by the Mole, Dagbani and Gonja, who migrated from the regions later known as the Songhai empire in Mali and the southern Sahel to occupy the Northern Region of Ghana, establishing a distinct Islamic culture in the region that spread to establish communities throughout the country. Later migrations of subsequent groups occurred, the most significant of whom were the Ewes, who arrived in the early 17th century.



Figure 6. Map of Ghana and surrounding West African countries. Senam Okudzeto

Amongst the various language groupings at the time of writing, the Akans make up roughly 45.7% of the population, followed by the Mole-Dagbani who represent about 18.5% of the population

and the Ewe, who represent roughly 12.8% of the population. Lastly, the Ga-Adangbe constitute around 7.1%.⁸⁶ Within Ghana's population, Akan cultures are distinct for being matrilineal, whilst the other cultures claim a patrilineal system, but there is a great deal of cultural overlapping. For instance, inhabitants on the border of Akan states, such as northern Eweland have been known to adopt matrilineal culture. In general, it is common for Ghanaians to marry across religious, tribal and regional divides, and there is no strict enforcement of tribal identity in contemporary Ghana.

The next chapter of this dissertation will address the ways in which contemporary religious belief is read in relation to West African ideas of modernity. Christianity is strongly identified with modernity and, by extension, education—perhaps explaining why indigenous religions are described in the 2021 census report under the heading 'Traditionalist' rather than 'Animist' and are listed as a mere 0.8% of urban populations and 6.5% of rural areas. Christianity comprises 74.7% of the population of urban areas and 66.9% of rural areas. Islam is the next most populous religion, comprising 20.4% of urban areas and 19.2% of rural areas.⁸⁷ Religious observance in Ghana is highly important, but families may contain both Christian and Muslim members of different denominations without any sense of contradiction. Traditional animist religions are practiced more discreetly and may be viewed disdainfully by contemporary born-again Christian communities. All religious forms of practice are recognised and observed. It is quite common practice in university classrooms to begin a lecture with a Christian prayer and conclude with an Islamic prayer, perhaps led by students in the class. Culturally mixed communities often engage

⁸⁶ *Ghana 2021 Population and Housing Census; General Report, Volume 3c*
https://statsghana.gov.gh/gssmain/fileUpload/pressrelease/2021%20PHC%20General%20Report%20Vol%203C_Background%20Characteristics_181121.pdf [last accessed 7/11/2021].

⁸⁷ Surprisingly 'No Religion' accounts for 0.9 % of urban populations and 1.2 % of rural areas. 'Other Religions' account for 3.3 % of urban and 6.1 % of rural populations. See *Ghana 2021 Population and Housing Census; General Report, Volume 3C. Background Characteristics*;
https://statsghana.gov.gh/gssmain/fileUpload/pressrelease/2021%20PHC%20General%20Report%20Vol%203C_Background%20Characteristics_181121.pdf [last accessed 7/11/2021].

in shared celebration of important regional or tribal festivals, which may be observed locally or nationally. For instance, the Ga Harvest Festival, *Homowo*, is celebrated locally in the capital city of Accra, but Christmas, Easter, Eid-UI-Fitr and Eid-UI-Adha (the festivals to mark the end of Ramadan fasting and Hajj, respectively) are national government holidays.

Terrain and Resources

Ghana's geographical makeup contains a variety of climates, ranging from dry sub-Saharan savannah grassland in the far north, through wooded savannah travelling south, which eventually turns to deep hilly rainforest in its interior. The rainforests contain evergreen and semideciduous trees, housing over 300 varieties of commercial timber producing species ranging from mahogany through lesser-known hardwoods such as odium and sapele. The rainforest stretches down to a wide coastal plain of coastal scrub and grassland. Due to the wide range of climates, Ghana contains a variety of agricultural produce, including shea nut and millet in the far north; through to rice, yam, corn and cassava. In terms of mineral resources, the country has large gold and bauxite reserves, industrial diamonds and, most recently, oil—which began production in January 2011.

Political and Economic History

Ghana's conventional history of economic exchange is commonly understood through its early position within the triangle trade as a source for slaves, ivory and gold (c.1500). Local traders along the coast dealt first with the Portuguese, who arrived in 1471, and then later with a range of other European trading nations—in particular the Dutch, Danes, Swedish and British, but also through lesser known 19th century links, with France, Brandenburg and Switzerland. The northern regions of Ghana were the first areas of economic dominance through their activities in the monumental trans-Saharan trade routes from as early as 1000 BCE onwards. A.G. Hopkins'

Economic History of West Africa (1977) provides a detailed explanation of these routes, underscoring their importance by providing illustrated descriptions to show how state necessities such as gold and slaves were sent north, while cowries, salt and weapons journeyed south. As Hopkins notes, “these items played an essential part in maintaining the economic and political structures of the states which purchased them, whether in Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, or West Africa”.⁸⁸ Hopkins remains noted for the breadth of his study, but it makes for difficult reading considering it represents one of the fields’ greatest ‘allies’ from the period. Readers must wade through statements such as “it would be wrong to conclude that Africans suffer from a special disability, chronic lethargy”, and “the lazy African is in reality usually debilitated or without a market for his labour or both”.⁸⁹ It has been noted by Polly Hill that Hopkins’ study neglects a study of domestic and farm slavery regionally, although he does make the important observation that during the period of slavery “those who exercised authority were man-owners rather than landowners. For, in traditional *Gold Coast* societies there was no land ownership per se, it was rather a system of rotating custodians”. The more recent work of Akosua Perbi, *History of Indigenous Slavery in Ghana from the 15th to 19th Centuries* (2004), is a helpful study richly informed by its author’s fluent access to Ghanaian languages and culture.⁹⁰

The Saharan trade was dominant until the 16th century, when it began to be displaced by the newly developing transatlantic sea trade. Nonetheless, it continued up until the 20th century in a lesser form, including not only slaves, gold and salt, but also luxury items such as cloth, pepper, ivory,

⁸⁸ A.G.Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa*, 6th ed., Harlow: Longman, (1977), p.79.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* p.17.

⁹⁰ See Polly Hill, “Problems with A. G. Hopkins’ Economic History of West Africa.” *African Economic History*, No. 6 (1978): 127–33.

Akosua Adomi Perbi, *A History of Indigenous Slavery in Ghana from the 15th to 19th Centuries* (Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2004).

kola nuts, leather goods and, in the 19th century, ostrich feathers (which were carried north), and textiles (especially those coloured with dyes not available locally), copper, preserved foodstuffs, glassware, beads and miscellaneous ‘fancy goods’, which were sent south. These trade routes continue to exist in a contemporary form, albeit much smaller, led by the Hausa Fulani traders who cross the territories of North and West Africa along northern routes, bringing luxury goods in the form of leather goods, fabrics, glass beads and silver to southern markets. A display of these wares in contemporary Ghana might be found at the weekly bead market held at Koforidua in Ghana’s eastern region.

The historic significance of the northern trade routes is not to be underestimated; the trading caravans were akin to small cities moving through the Sahel. A.G. Hopkins suggests that trans-Saharan trade reached its peak in the 15th century. Nonetheless, he describes records listing typical Hausa trading caravans of the 19th century as comprising “1-2,000 people, most of whom were armed and an equal number of donkeys”.⁵ There are few records for this period of trade, but the sheer size of these later caravans would give credence to the larger figures put forward for the trans-Saharan slave trade; the lower range estimates 10,000 slaves per annum and the upper range posits 15 million slaves being traded along the Saharan routes through Cairo in the 16th century.⁹¹

While the terrible business of slave trading in Ghana expanded in both northern and southern directions, the records for coastal trading have been better preserved. A partial reason for the expansion of the slave trade correlates with increased military conquest within West Africa. The Ashanti group formed the beginnings of empire in 1671, when their leader Osei Tutu annexed

⁹¹ Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa*, p.83.

power from the kingdom of Akwamu. This empire would continue to expand and incorporate neighbouring tribes, including the Dagbanis and Gonjas of the North, until their eventual defeat by the British in 1874, who succeeded in invading their state. The final Asante rebellion in 1901 brought the region under British control, essentially annexing the empire as the Asante had with the Akwamu centuries before. Prior to the 1874 defeat, the British and Asante state had been allies in the slave trade for several hundred years. The expansion of the Asante up until that point had followed the supreme Asante King or Asantehene, Osei Tutu's, overtaking of the Akwamu empire and subsequently conquering substantial neighbouring territories in the period 1700–1715. Asante expansion continued through the early 1800s, consisting of several successful raids of coastal Fante lands up until the period of 1814. At the peak of its power, Asante controlled territory was very similar in size to that of modern Ghana, which is approximately 92,000 square miles; a mass of land large enough to house the UK.⁹²

Prisoners of war during this period were traded for weapons, creating a vicious cycle that led to more trade. The sheer number of captives was such that selling them off became the only way to assure dominance. The Ghanaian historian Albert Adu Boahen recounts that at the time of the British abolition of slavery in 1807, the Asantehene had twenty thousand prisoners of war in captivity that he had hopes to sell, recording his complaints that “unless I kill or sell them, they will grow strong and kill my people”.⁹³ The Asante were defeated by the British for the first time in 1826 at the battle of Dodowa. Although they signed a peace treaty, they remained unconquered and launched several attacks against the British and their coastal allies. The conflict between

⁹² Gocking, *History of Ghana*, p.1.

⁹³ A. Adu Boahen, ‘Politics in Ghana, 1800-1874’ in *The Adu Boahen Reader*, ed. Toyin Falola (Eritrea: Africa World Press), 2004, p.49.

Britain and Asante lasted just under 100 years. The British lost the Third Asante War in 1863, but sacked and burnt Kumasi, the Asante capital in 1873. By 1874, the British settlements on the coast had formally become a colony and a series of treaties that exacted penurious fines from Asante had been agreed. Nonetheless, Asante remained an unrecognised independent state and continued to resist the increasing pressure to formally submit to the British administration. The last great revolt occurred in 1900, spurred by then Governor Sir Frederic Hodgson's demand that Asante surrender the Golden Stool, a sacred throne within which the very soul of the nation was said to reside. At this point the Asantehene, Prempeh I, was already under arrest for breach of payment under the terms of the last peace treaty, so the armies of Ashanti were led into battle by the legendary warrior queen Yaa Asantewaa. After several months Asante were once again defeated, and the immediate royal court of Prempeh I and Yaa Asantewaa were sent into exile in the Seychelles.

Prior to the period of British colonialism, each ethnic group had a different relationship with one another and with the Europeans present in their territory—and the Fante and Ga-Dangme were often at war with the Asante in a bid to control access to the lucrative coastal trade centres. The Asante held absolute control over their empire for several centuries, allowing very few Europeans to enter the interior, whilst the Ga and Ewe had more complex relations with coastal visitors, swinging from collaborators to competitors and open enemies. Europeans took sides with warring factions, expecting the slaves captured as prisoners of war in exchange.

Before the Asante's emergence as a primary slave trading power, its wealth was based on trade with its neighbours of gold and kola nuts. In fact, the entire *Gold Coast* was notorious for its immense supplies of precious metal. The early Portuguese traders who arrived on the coast in 1471

named the place they landed ‘the mine’. In 1481 the Portuguese began construction of São Jorge da Mina, now known as Elmina Castle. It is said that the Portuguese trade on the *Gold Coast* was responsible for 10% of all gold circulating in the world during the early 16th century.⁹⁴

European traders began to frequent the coastal area of the *Gold Coast* in search for gold from the 1600s onwards, but even this trade was supplanted by the transatlantic slave trade, which peaked in the 18th century. The Dutch West-Indian Company Director Rademacher recorded this shift in trade in a 1730 dispatch to Holland:

*The Gold Coast is now virtually changed into a pure Slave Coast. The great quantity of guns and gunpowder which the Europeans have brought there has given cause to terrible wars among the kings, princes and caboceers of those lands who made their prisoners of war slaves. These slaves are bought at steadily increasing prices. Consequently, there is now very little trade among the coast negroes except in slaves. The English send every year hundreds of shops and the French, Danes and Portuguese send many too.*⁹⁵

Economic Phases, Pre- and Post-independence

This thesis argues that contemporary Ghanaian identity hinges on a relationship with material culture that is shaped through its history as a regional hub for trade—meaning that a precedence was set from an early period along its historic trade routes for imported goods, and that these goods form the basis of a national identity that is elusively hybrid and complex. There are several distinct phases in Ghana’s economic history that are important for understanding contemporary national identities. The first significant shift occurred when economic organisations that focused on internal exchanges within the continent, as epitomised by the sub-Saharan trade routes that dominated West

⁹⁴ Kwesi Anquandah, *Castles and Forts of Ghana*, Ghana Museums and Monuments Board/Atalante: Paris, 1990. p.14.

⁹⁵ Ibid. p.146.

Africa until the 15th century, lost dominance to newly opened transatlantic trade routes along the coast. This shift produced a new economic drive towards external trans-continental exchanges; a change that has carried through to the present day. The coastal trade was first focused on the region's mineral wealth, hence the *Gold Coast* moniker enduring until independence. However, the establishment of the coastal trade routes soon led to a dramatic change in social and economic organisations—the most obvious being the creation of the transatlantic slave trade, which through its convenient disposal of prisoners of war, created a culture of conquest and empire-building that overshadowed regional events throughout the 15th to the 18th century.

The next economic shift came with the British abolition of the transatlantic slave trade in 1808. By 1874, the British had gained control of the coastal settlements of the *Gold Coast* and established a formal colony, and by 1900 the unrecognised, yet independent, state of Asante was brought under colonial control. This change in political administration and the ban on slaving brought the rise of different forms of trading, which focused more on agricultural exports such as palm nuts and oil, and of mineral wealth. Colonialism brought an increased European presence in controlling economic organisations and a gradual, but determined ousting of Africans from the administrative political and economic structures of the territory. This period marks a point where “pre-capitalist formations were gradually dissolved and transformed as they became subject to increasing external capitalist penetration”.⁹⁶

Under colonialism, not just the *Gold Coast*, but West Africa and West Africans, became major producers of raw materials for foreign export in economies increasingly dominated by foreign

⁹⁶ Jerker Carlsson, *The Limits to Structural Change; A comparative study of foreign direct investments in Liberia and Ghana 1950–1971*. Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, Uppsala in cooperation with Department of Economic History, University of Gothenburg. Sweden, Uddevalla 1981, p.17.

capital and the removal of surpluses went to foreign investors. The British colonial administration, while focusing mainly on the nation's gold production, maintained interests in trade, timber, palm oil and rubber production. Cocoa was brought to Ghana in the early 1800s but was not farmed commercially until the late 1890s. Remarkably, by 1901 cocoa amounted to one third of the colony's exports and by 1920 it constituted almost half of all export earnings.⁹⁷ At this time, wholesale commerce and exports began to be dominated by large European firms as well as Indians, Syrians and Lebanese who formed a new mercantile presence on the coast. Africans struggled to enter the market and found themselves underfunded and discriminated against by the colonial authorities.⁹⁸

Authorities tried to force the extant agricultural culture of subsistence farming towards commercial production in cocoa, rubber, palm oil and palm nuts. This move launched cocoa as a significant economic producer in Ghana; a dominance that was to carry over to the present day. The following thirty years of British rule continued to see Ghana develop as an export-orientated economy, with infrastructure such as roads and railways being developed to facilitate the transport of goods out of the country. Under colonial rule, there were few initiatives towards industrialisation, although as early as 1915 several surveys were undertaken to establish the possibilities for the potentially lucrative bauxite production of the country's vast reserves.⁹⁹ The colonial economy suffered a massive slump in 1929 due to the advent of the Great Depression and this, in combination with poor working conditions, galvanised the workers unions, which had formed in the early twenties.¹⁰⁰ Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, a series of workers actions ensued, including the

⁹⁷ See Gocking, *History of Ghana*, p.46 and Killick, *Development Economics in Action*, p.190.

⁹⁸ Jon Kraus, Capital, Power and Business Associations in the African Political Economy: A tale of two countries, Ghana and Nigeria. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol 40, No.3, (Sept 2002), Cambridge University Press. p.398.

⁹⁹ James Moxon, *Volta: Man's Greatest Lake. The Story of Ghana's Akosombo Dam. Andre Deutsch*, 1984 p.49

¹⁰⁰ Gocking, *History of Ghana*.

two famous cocoa holdups of 1930 and 1937, which were successful enough to mark the beginnings of nationalist activism in the colony and directly influenced the drive towards independence.

A fair amount of political activity was tied to a refusal to comply with the unjust economic exploitation being meted out by the colonial authorities and their foreign agents, who comprised a trade monopoly bent on exploiting the citizens of the colony. The last straw for the population was triggered by the events of 28 February 1948 when three decommissioned servicemen from the *Gold Coast* Regiment of the Royal African Frontier Force were gunned down by officers of the then British colonial authority during a peaceful demonstration.¹⁰¹ The soldiers, Sergeant Adjetey, Corporal Attipoe and Private Odartey Lamptey, were veterans of the Second World War and members of the Ex-Servicemen's Union, and were en route to present a petition to the British Governor at Christianborg Castle. Their protest concerned unpaid pensions and housing promised to them for their service during the war. In addition to those murdered, several soldiers were badly injured. Civil tensions already appeared to be at their peak at the time of the shooting and a national boycott of goods had been organised in protest of increasingly high prices levelled by European and Lebanese merchants, whose trade monopoly and profiteering appeared to be supported by the colonial authority.¹⁰² As the news spread, incensed citizens of the capital quickly erupted into riots that soon spread throughout the urban centres of the nation. These events marked the permanent destabilisation of British power in the colony. Kwame Nkrumah and other members of the UGCC leadership were immediately imprisoned, and after several days of rioting the colonial authority

¹⁰¹ See Crinson p.154 and *Ghana News Agency* online record 28/02/2011: <http://www.ghananewsagency.org/details/Politics/Ghana-remembers-the-28th-February-Crossroads-Shooting-incident/?ci=2&ai=26013> [last accessed 14/01/2019].

¹⁰² Gocking, *History of Ghana*, p.83 and *Ghana News Agency* online record [last accessed 28/02/2011]: <http://www.ghananewsagency.org/details/Politics/Ghana-remembers-the-28th-February-Crossroads-Shooting-incident/?ci=2&ai=26013> [last accessed 14/01/2019].

was forced to admit it had lost control. A state of emergency was announced and soldiers from Nigeria were brought in to quell the angry mob.¹⁰³ The British authority ordered an investigation into the shootings and riots. Surprisingly, the concluding report recommended self-government for the colony, making the shooting of the ex-servicemen one of the most critical events in the move towards independence.¹⁰⁴

The period of the 1950s and 1960s saw national independence and a return to African administration of economic organisations, but by this point Ghana's identity as an export-orientated economy was set and it continued to rely heavily on foreign investments.¹⁰⁵ Ghana's first president following independence, Kwame Nkrumah, was a staunch socialist and avowed Marxist, but his early government mixed sometimes contradictory socialist and capitalist agendas to undertake ambitious programmes geared towards rapid modernisation. This duality was characterised by the country seeking Western foreign investment for large-scale development projects like the Akosombo dam, while simultaneously trying to reduce the influence of big business in trade.¹⁰⁶ Ghana's first years leading up to independence were marked by a boom in international trade export, which provided funding for the government's ambitious development programmes through (increasingly unpopular) heavy taxation. However, 1957 marked a massive drop in cocoa prices, and Ghana's economy, still essentially a one-crop agricultural producer, suffered immensely.¹⁰⁷ The period following 1960 saw Nkrumah's policies change, from being

¹⁰³ Gocking, *History of Ghana* p.84.

¹⁰⁴ *Ghana News Agency* online record 28/02/2011: <http://www.ghananewsagency.org/details/Politics/Ghana-remembers-the-28th-February-Crossroads-Shooting-incident/?ci=2&ai=26013>

¹⁰⁵ James Moxon, *Volta: Man's Greatest Lake. The Story of Ghana's Akosombo Dam. Andre Deutsch*, 1984, p.32.

¹⁰⁶ Nkrumah consciously tried to reduce power amongst Ghanaian trading elites while encouraging small businesses amongst Ghana's emerging middle class.

¹⁰⁷ Gocking, *History of Ghana*, p.118.

originally supportive of small businesses, to become markedly more socialist and hostile towards capitalist infrastructures.

In efforts to reduce foreign investments in the country and regulate the economic elites, major industries such trade, construction, mining and banking were nationalised and socialist style drives towards mechanisation in agriculture and industry; and state-owned import substitution were implemented.¹⁰⁸ The government aimed to control all aspects of the economy, meaning operators in key industries that escaped nationalisation, such as fishing and cocoa farming found themselves strong-armed by a sinister government monopoly. Ghana essentially became a one-party state under a dictatorship whose economy was increasingly in question. During the years 1958–1965 the world cocoa price dropped from \$603 (USD) a ton to \$243 (USD) a ton and the national debt mounted.¹⁰⁹ Commodities became scarce, food prices escalated, government institutions were mismanaged and corruption became rife. Nkrumah's later years in power saw an increased interest in pan-African politics that led to him extending military and financial aid across the continent, which many Ghanaians felt the country was too bankrupt to afford. This, in combination with his extreme economic policies and a government rumoured to be rife with corruption, alienated him further from the general public and, in 1966, he was ousted from power by a military coup.

Following a three-year transitional period of military rule under the National Liberation Council (NLC), the Busia Government took control during 1969–1972. For some, this period marked a reestablishment of the ousted educated elite. In terms of economic policy, the government aimed to liberalise trade and devalue the economy in order to promote stability and increase export

¹⁰⁸ A. Adu Boahen, 'Ghana: Conflict Reorientated' in *The Adu Boahen Reader*, ed. Toyin Falola (Eritrea: Africa World Press, 2004), p.475.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

potential while still exercising a large amount of control over financial activity. During this period the state retained “majority shares in major foreign banks, insurance companies and timber firms”.¹¹⁰ Then finance minister J.H. Mensah pursued a policy that would allow “publicly owned capital to function as one of the major engines for economic development”.¹¹¹ The Busia government also favoured indigenisation programmes and deportation policies in order to get rid of detractors and promote a stronger national presence in commerce.¹¹² Under the Ghana Business (Promotion) Act, several types of business were reserved for Ghanaian nationals, but in many cases the state had to step in due to lack of capacity and educated manpower. In 1979, 150,000 ethnic Nigerians were deported from Ghana under Busia’s Alien Compliance Order—an edict that gave foreigners two weeks to gain a work permit or face deportation.¹¹³ In spite of all these factors, the great economic handicap of the Busia Government was that it agreed to honour all the debts of the previous regime, at a point where unemployment was 50% and the nation’s debts were greater than its foreign aid payments. These factors added to a series of forced devaluations of the cedi (the national currency) and made the government vulnerable to attack. At a point when the government announced a further proposed devaluation of 40%, in January 1972, Colonel Ignatius Acheampong, seized power in a military coup.¹¹⁴

Acheampong’s first move after becoming head of state was to announce himself head of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning and the Ministry of Defence. His new government,

¹¹⁰ Jon Kraus, ‘Capital, Power and Business Associations in the African Political Economy: A tale of two countries, Ghana and Nigeria’. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol 40, No.3, (Sept 2002), Cambridge University Press, p.401.

¹¹¹ Killick, *Development Economics in Action*, p.350.

¹¹² Jon Kraus, ‘Capital, Power and Business Associations in the African Political Economy: A tale of two countries, Ghana and Nigeria’. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol 40, No.3, (Sept 2002), Cambridge University Press, p.399.

¹¹³ Gocking, *History of Ghana*, p.157.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* pp.158–161.

the National Redemption Council (NRC), was comprised mainly of military men who had been key players in the coup and together they launched a “war on the economy”.¹¹⁵ This economic war involved revaluing the cedi and disavowing \$94.4 million USD of the country’s estimated \$268 million USD foreign debt accrued during the Nkrumah regime.¹¹⁶ The NRC then seized a controlling interest in Ashanti Goldfields and the major foreign investment companies operating in the country. A temporary ban was put on all staple food imports and, once lifted, such commodities and their pricing came under government control in a centralised distribution system. Lastly, the NRC launched a self-reliance campaign dubbed “Operation Feed Yourself” (OFY), which encouraged citizens in both rural and urban settings to begin small- and large-scale farming with gifts of free seed, fertilizer and a programme of large-scale irrigation projects. Launched during the period 1972–73, which enjoyed good rainfall, OFY was initially a great success. Rice exports were begun, and having started with a trade deficit of \$56 million USD in 1971, the country achieved a trade surplus of \$204 million in 1973.¹¹⁷

The initial economic strategies of the Acheampong regime seemed to be working OFY was followed by “Operation Haul your Food to Markets”, and finally the 1975 programme, “Operation Feed your Industries”, which encouraged the production of cash crops. Buoyed by favourable trade conditions in world markets, the Ghanaian economy appeared to be making a recovery, although the productivity of the cocoa industry was greatly reduced due to the focus on more profitable cash crops. There was also a fair amount of smuggling across the border to Togo and Ivory Coast, where farmers could get a higher return on the heavily taxed government fixed price for cocoa.

¹¹⁵ Gocking, *History of Ghana*, p.167.

¹¹⁶ A. Adu Boahen, ‘Ghana: Conflict Reorientated’ in *The Adu Boahen Reader*, ed. Toyin Falola (Eritrea: Africa World Press, 2004), p.484.

¹¹⁷ Gocking, *History of Ghana*, pp.167–168.

After an initial honeymoon period of two years, in 1974 the country started to experience rapid decline due to the effects of severe drought, and agricultural self-reliance became an impossibility. By 1975, due to bad accounting, over-subsidisation and lack of foreign investment, the country was again bankrupt. Between 1970 and 1972 inflation jumped from 3.0% to 10.1%.¹¹⁸ This, and continued drought affected the cocoa industry immensely, which saw a huge drop in productivity in the years 1974–1979.¹¹⁹ Because of the dependence on the government's self-reliance programmes, there was very little food in circulation other than what the country produced. A huge black-market economy emerged and the few commodities available from government-run trading depots were hoarded and resold for outrageous prices. From 1975 through to the 1980s, industrial development declined and this, combined with the country's heavy export economy reliant mostly on mineral wealth and cocoa, led to an imbalance that underscored an economic crisis that was to last the best part of a decade. The average inflation rate for the period 1970–81 became 35.4% and people left the country in droves in search of better prospects abroad.¹²⁰

Ghana's businesses were starved of forex and imports for years. Drastic disinvestment occurred as state and private companies were unable to import spare parts, capital equipment and raw materials. Road and rail infrastructure disintegrated. Private sector employment shrank in Ghana and rose in Nigeria, triggering the emigration of a million Ghanaians who left looking for jobs.¹²¹

The Acheampong regime became increasingly draconian, reforming itself in 1975 as the notably more combat driven Supreme Military Council (SMC). The power of the armed forces in

¹¹⁸ A. Adu Boahen, Ghana: Conflict Reorientated' in The Adu Boahen Reader, ed. Toyin Falola (Eritrea: Africa World Press, 2004), p.484.

¹¹⁹ Gocking, *History of Ghana*, p.173.

¹²⁰ Jon Kraus, 'Capital, Power and Business Associations in the African Political Economy: A tale of two countries, Ghana and Nigeria'. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol 40. No.3, (Sept 2002), Cambridge University Press. p.399.

¹²¹ Ibid.

government was increased and became rife with corruption. As public dissent grew, educated professionals and university students organised a series of public demonstrations and strikes. These demonstrators met harsh punishment at the hands of the military, leading Ghanaian historian A. Adu Boahen to describe this period as “the most turbulent, violent, and conflict-ridden period in the history of the country”.¹²²

The civil injustice and severe economic crisis of the period paved the way for a succession of military coups, which were punctuated by flawed and brief returns to civilian governments. In 1977 Acheampong was ousted by a coup led by Lieutenant Fred Akuffo, who set up a new military government known as SMC II (Supreme Military Council II). While Akuffo attempted moderate reform, he failed to punish corrupt members of the military and allowed Acheampong a peaceful retirement. This lax treatment of a regime that had been robbing the national coffers for years, combined with continued poverty and hardship, led Flight Lieutenant J.J. Rawlings to stage a successful counter coup in 1979. Following the coup all the military leaders were executed by firing squad. There was a certain amount of public hysteria at the relief of the regime change, which led to extreme actions on the part of the soldiers who supported the coup. Most famously, they arrested, stripped naked and publicly beat market women accused of hoarding and later blew up the capital’s central market. However, elections were quickly held following the coup, and Rawlings handed over power to the civilian government of Dr Hilal Limann in that same year. The new government was unable to bring order to the nation’s spiralling economic disaster. Industry came to a virtual halt, struggling to maintain an operational capacity that hovered between 10–

¹²² A. Adu Boahen, ‘Ghana: Conflict Reorientated’ in *The Adu Boahen Reader*, ed. Toyin Falola (Eritrea: Africa World Press, 2004), p.483.

15%.¹²³ Inflation also more than doubled in one year, ballooning from 50% in 1980 to 116% in 1981.¹²⁴

Public dissatisfaction with Limann's performance and continued governance prompted Rawlings to stage a second military coup in 1981. He then became the head of a socialist military regime called the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC), which introduced a series of harsh laws and austerity measures. A moral crusade on corruption was launched and initially gained immense popular support. Some of the regime's more extreme initial actions saw the kidnap and murder of three judges. During this period, several hundred people were arrested and killed without trial.

During the revolutionary years of 1982–1983, businessmen among others, were subject to intensive interrogation, searches, precipitate arrest and denial of rule of law. Many businessmen fled Ghana. Under Decree 42 the PNDC formed a National Investigations Commission (NIC) and a Citizens Vetting Committee, which could (and did) freeze the accounts of individuals whom they suspected of tax avoidance, which was widespread. The PNDC established public tribunals to try Ghanaians for various offences, on the grounds that established courts used too many tricky technicalities to let the guilty escape punishment.¹²⁵

To the surprise of many, in 1983 socialist Rawlings, having failed to gain support from the Soviet Union, initiated an economic recovery programme in collaboration with the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) that led to a partial recovery and increased financial stability. The currency was devalued and financial reforms put in place in line with IMF guidelines.

¹²³ Gocking, *History of Ghana*, p.183–186.

¹²⁴ A. Adu Boahen, 'Ghana: Conflict Reorientated' in *The Adu Boahen Reader*, ed. Toyin Falola (Eritrea: Africa World Press, 2004), p.489.

¹²⁵ Jon Kraus, 'Capital, Power and Business Associations in the African Political Economy: A tale of two countries, Ghana and Nigeria'. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol 40. No.3, (Sept 2002), Cambridge University Press. p.402.

Rawlings eventually allowed transition into a democratically elected republic in 1992. His party won the first election and he served two terms as president representing the National Democratic Congress (NDC) during the period 1993–2001.

The mid-1980s through 1990s saw the liberalisation of the Ghanaian political system and economy with new legislation geared towards increasing foreign investment. This meant major industries such as timber and gold mining made spectacular recoveries as foreign investments grew. By 1985 inflation had fallen 10.4%—a spectacular recovery from its 1983 high of 120%, but by 1987 it seemed the new economic programmes were again in danger of failing.¹²⁶ The national debt was growing exponentially and the still primarily export economy was badly hit when the price of cocoa dropped first to \$1500 USD a ton in 1987, and then again in 1989 to \$600 USD a ton. The first five years of the Rawlings presidency following 1992 saw the economy begin to falter as the nation failed to meet IMF conditions for debt repayments. Inflation began to rise alongside food and petrol prices once again and foreign debts, which included a massive petrol debt to Nigeria, increased to \$5 billion USD.¹²⁷ The vulnerabilities of Ghana's export economy continued to plague its economic stability through the 1990s, particularly as the price of gold began to drop and the cocoa market remained volatile. By 1997 the cedi had depreciated so much that the exchange rate was 2000 cedis to the dollar, in contrast to its previous rate of 30 cedis to the dollar in 1983. A period of increased economic stagnation followed and by the end of 2000 the cedi was exchanging at a rate of 7000 to the dollar.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Gocking, *History of Ghana*, p.195, p.201.

¹²⁷ Ibid. p.221.

¹²⁸ Ibid. p.194 and p.238.

In 2001 John Agyekum Kufour, the candidate of the New Patriotic Party (NPP), was elected president and set to task repairing an inflated economy. One of his first actions was to sign onto the World Bank/IMF HIPIC initiative that allowed the country \$200 USD million per annum funding for debt relief. Nonetheless, while easing the pressure on the country's flailing economy, it proved highly unpopular with the general public for reasons of morale.¹²⁹ Kufuor's administration was characterised by a strong drive towards liberal market policies, a sharp increase in imports of consumer goods, modernisation in agriculture and partial privatisation of key industries in the public sector such as water, telecommunications and the national airline carrier—moves that tallied with a popular desire for a more modern nation. 'HIPIC' stands for 'heavily indebted poor country' and the Ghanaian press reflected the national disappointment with a label that seemed to erase the country's successful advances with a series of angry headlines.¹³⁰

The Kufour administration then launched what amounted to an international public relations campaign, essentially selling Ghana as a regional hub for stability, free trade and good governance. These aims were pursued through a methodology that was dubbed 'economic diplomacy', described by the then foreign minister Nana Akufo-Addo as "the central pivot on which the country's foreign policy was anchored" that aimed to make "trade, aid and investment the bridge between foreign and domestic policy". Kufour also held prominent regional diplomatic positions as Chairman of ECOWAS in 2003 and 2004. Critics of the government were sternly reminded "never to ignore the link between the new and growing enthusiasm towards Ghana and the

¹²⁹ See 'Akufo-Addo Explains Presidential Travels', the article begins with the subheading "ITS ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY". From The Statesman newspaper, 5/11/2005.

<http://www.modernghana.com/news/89585/1/akufo-addo-explains-presidential-travels.html>

¹³⁰ The junction leading to then President Kufuor's house became known as 'HIPIC Junction'.

conscious steps taken by this government, through economic diplomacy initiatives, to market the country and the efforts of the people to the world”.¹³¹

The marked shift in policy paid off to a certain extent, and the Kufour administration is noted for having received a record amount of foreign aid, including securing the previously unprecedented \$500 Millennium Challenge Account development grant from the US government. During his terms of office, foreign investments flourished and business reflected a new relationship with the international private sector as multinational telecommunications companies such as Vodafone and MTN began to operate in Ghana. However, the administration’s increasingly neo-liberal policies began to widen the gap between rich and poor, and the foreign aid secured by the government was called into question, particularly with the suspicions that Kufour was allowing the then American government of George W. Bush to build a secret military base in Ghana.¹³²

Though initial years of the Kufour government were marked by increased optimism and a push towards improved government infrastructure, increased foreign investments and general influx of wealth into the economy; its second term in office saw growing public dissatisfaction with an increasingly inflated economy. In spite of the dynamism of the private sector, a startling percentage of the nation’s GDP remained in the form of remittances from migrant workers abroad and donor contributions (such as the World Bank, French Development Agency, etc.) amounting to \$1.8 billion USD in 2008 alone.¹³³ The high imports in combination with the large amounts of

¹³¹ See ‘Akufo-Addo Explains Presidential Travels’, the article begins with the subheading ‘ITS ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY’. From the Statesman newspaper, 5/11/2005.

<http://www.modernghana.com/news/89585/1/akufo-addo-explains-presidential-travels.html>

¹³² Rumors of a US American secret military base continued to plague the Kufour administration. See the article ‘Is Kufour Helping the USA to Recolonize Ghana?’ in the Mail newspaper, 20/1/2007. Online records; <http://www.modernghana.com/news/122081/1/is-kufuor-helping-the-usa-recolonize-ghana.html>

¹³³ See Peter Quartey’s essay entitled ‘Ghana’ in (eds.) Sanket Mohapatra, Dilip Ratha, *Remittance Markets in Africa; Directions in Development*. World Bank, 2011, p.133.

foreign exchange made the cost of living extremely high and the remittance figures were much debated in the national press and as it appeared that in spite of Ghana's growing middle class, the large amounts of foreign currency in the country were not making an impact on the average citizens' quality of life.

The final and most dramatic shift in Ghana's economic history arrived in 2007 when one of the largest reserves of oil to be discovered regionally was reported off of Ghana's coast.¹³⁴ Although the oil revenues were not due to appear for several years, the Kufour Government began to face accusations of corruption in the light of deals struck on the basis of advance projection on oil revenue and unaccountable checks and balances. In 2009, after serving two terms under Kufour, the NPP government narrowly lost the election to the NDC, who took over power under the leadership of former Vice-President to Rawlings, Prof. John Atta Mills.¹³⁵ The Mills Government suffered initial hardships, after finding the nation's projected oil revenues had been spent several years in advance, extracted in prepayments and spent by those who cut the deals in previous administrations.

Significantly, a revised 2009 study of Ghanaian incomes published in 2010 found the gross national income (GNI) to be 70% higher than expected, rising from an earlier projection of \$650 USD to \$1100 USD per capita head. These adjusted figures led to the 2010 declaration that Ghana was a middle-income country but it is difficult to tell if this represented a genuine reflection of

During the Kufour administration the remittance figures were heavily scrutinised in the national press, see 'Economic Importance of Foreign Remittances' in The Daily Graphic, 4/1/2008. online record; <http://www.modernghana.com/news/152296/1/economic-importance-of-foreign-remittances.html> (last accessed 15/08/2015).

¹³⁴ See 'UK's Tullow Discovers Oil in Ghana' BBC News online, 18/6/2007 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/6764549.stm>

¹³⁵ In fact, the initial results of the election were a virtual tie with neither party managing to secure a majority. The elections were subsequently repeated and John Atta Mills won with a clear majority.

conditions for the ordinary citizen, as this GNI figure was averaged out for an economy that has just realised a disproportionate amount of wealth in one sector alone (the projected figures for GDP per capita for 2011 were expected to be \$1400 USD in anticipation of the oil revenues, allowing Ghana to announce its first trade surplus in twenty years).¹³⁶

The first barrels of oil were only produced in January 2011, and with the subsequent years corresponding to a period of global financial crisis it remains too soon to gauge just how much the oil economy will affect the nation long-term. For that reason, the major part of this timeline for the economic periods discussed for this dissertation ends with the exiting Kufour administration in 2009 (although more recent history and statistics leading up to present day are used if the circumstances appear relatively constant). The indicators are that the country is about to undergo a dramatic change, not only in terms of economic dynamics, but also through accelerated population growth and migration (remembering that the population has increased from approximately 6 million to 31 million in the years since independence). At present, Ghanaians are concerned that oil wealth is not distributed equally through the country, but during 2011 oil and gas regulations were still being drawn up by government. The lack of finalised regulations made the nation vulnerable to exploitation, as epitomised by the Kosmos oil company's toxic waste spills of 2010, whereby the company refused to pay the imposed \$35 million USD fine, insisting that the ministerial committee set up to investigate the spills "had no power under the Ghanaian

¹³⁶ See World Bank, 'Ghana Country Brief', Political Overview. Online report: <http://go.worldbank.org/QAKWTY7640> and Prof. Ewusi, "Ghana to record trade surplus first time in 20 years", in *Ghana Business News* (online), 21/9/2011. <http://www.ghanabusinessnews.com/2011/09/21/ghana-to-record-trade-surplus-first-time-in-20-years-prof-ewusi/>

constitution or any other law of the country to impose a fine”. Their representative called the fine “totally unlawful, unconstitutional, ultra vires and without basis”.¹³⁷

Subsequent years have seen dramatic fluctuations in oil prices, with global oil prices being assigned negative valuations in April 2020.¹³⁸ Undoubtedly there will be major shifts in the patterns of Ghana’s cultural economy and consumption patterns. Ebenezir Obiri Addo (1994) and Obed Yao Asamoah (2014) suggest that the unexpected political marker to most pay attention to in Ghana’s historical timeline, is the region’s relationship to trade and non-essential commodities, remembering that major events throughout the nation’s history have been tied to the actual, or perceived lack of – or lack of access to – imported goods.¹³⁹

Accra; the Capital as Archive

Having produced a conventional general history of Ghana in the preceding pages, this next section attempts to produce a historical narrative of Ghana by reading the material culture of its capital. The city of Accra is the capital of contemporary Ghana, which grew from a series of 17th century Afro-European trading posts dotted along the coastline. Following these early coastal trading points, the city could be seen to expand like a fan, with later additions being added to a perimeter that retains its central core, although this once wealthy central core is in many parts mis-identified

¹³⁷ See ‘Kosmos refuses to pay fine for oil spill off Ghana’ in the General News of Wednesday, 22 September 2010, Ghanaweb: <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/artikel.php?ID=190803>

¹³⁸ See Andrew Walker, ‘US Oil Prices Turn Negative as Demand Dries Up’, BBC News, 21/4/2020, [last accessed 3/6/2020]: <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-52350082>

¹³⁹ “One problem is that what government after government, from Dr. Nkrumah until PNDC, spent considerable energy on, was satisfying the people’s craving for so-called essential commodities – milk, sugar, corned beef, sardines, flour and the like” – See Obed Yao Asamoah, *The Political History of Ghana 1950-2013*, Authorhouse UK, 2014. p.612, and “the main complaints of urbanized elites centered around ‘essential commodities’, that is, imported luxuries such as sugar, sardines, soap, cars, etc.”, Ebenezer Obiri Addo, *Kwame Nkrumah: A Case Study of Religion and Politics in Ghana*, University Press of America, 1994. p.188.

as an urban slum.¹⁴⁰ The Accra Municipal Authority (AMA) lists its current size as 173 square kilometres with a population of 5.4 million people, making the city the most populous region in Ghana.¹⁴¹ Its present size is larger than Ghana's entire population at the time of independence in 1957, which was thought to be 4 million, at most.¹⁴² The city's present size is a far cry from its pre-20th century existence as a series of overlapping villages and trading towns. Traditionally, Accra is the territory of the Ga people whose folklore records the importance of their settlements there from the 15th century onwards.

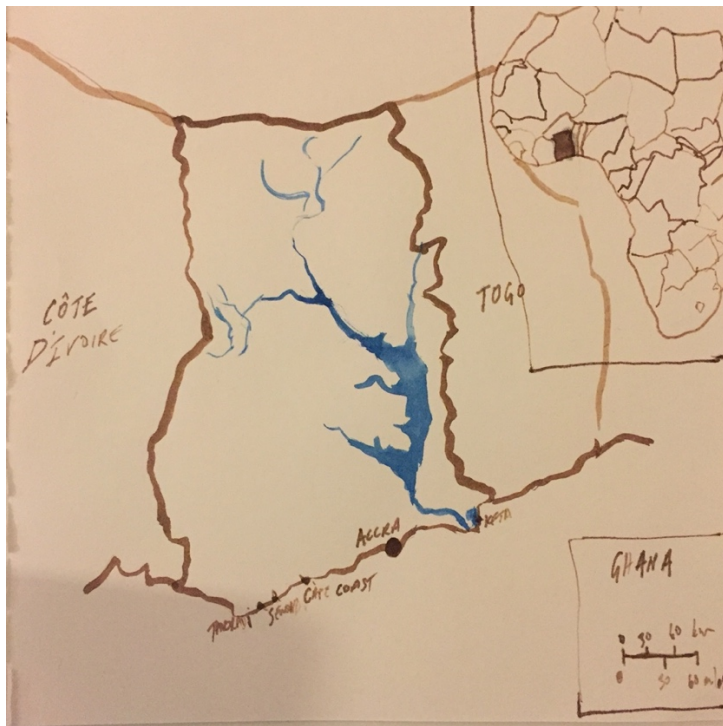


Figure 6.1 Map of Ghana showing the capital city Accra and surrounding West African countries. (Lake Volta is shown in blue), Senam Okudzeto.

¹⁴⁰ What is seen as a slum is still considered a culturally rich urban centre, its inhabitants represent the ancestral homes of local aristocracy, although lack of plumbing and modern urban utilities mark this ancient community as a site of disrepair in urgent need of upgrading.

¹⁴¹ Accra Municipal Authority website: <http://ama.ghanadistricts.gov.gh/>
Ghana Statistical Service 2021 Population and Housing Census, Press Release on Provisional Results, <https://statsghana.gov.gh/gssmain/storage/img/infobank/2021%20PHC%20Provisional%20Results%20Press%20Release.pdf> [last accessed 30/12/2021]

¹⁴² Gocking, *History of Ghana*, p.75.

Due to its role as middleman to the lucrative gold industry of southern Akan, the city rose to prominence in the 17th century as a trading centre.¹⁴³ As this trade developed, its citizens exchanged Ga-produced salt, fish, and corn, as well as European goods like firearms, textiles, metal goods, and alcohol for commodities like gold, slaves, ivory, foodstuffs and livestock obtained from people from the hinterland. An indication of how important this trade was to the Europeans can be seen in the infrastructure they left behind: the 17th century saw Dutch (1642), Danish (1661), and English companies (1672) all build forts on the coast.¹⁴⁴

Nonetheless, for several hundred years Accra was the poorer cousin of the city-states Cape Coast and Elmina. Accra was originally a group of separate but cosmopolitan settlements along the coast, with areas such as Kinka and Nleshi and Osu being the dominant historical towns.¹⁴⁵ These settlements were constantly under attack from the powerful empires of the territory's interior nations, as they marked the gateway to the lucrative transatlantic slave trade. Urban inhabitants tended to heavily tax traders from the interior, and subsequently suffered huge casualties during the Awkamu wars of 1677–1681, and during the 1680s and 1820s when the Akyem, Ashanti, and Akwamu kingdoms claimed the lucrative trade routes and territory of the Ga as conquests of war.¹⁴⁶ John Parker, in his detailed history of Accra *Making the Town* (2000), argues that these series of defeats caused the vulnerable post-war Ga townships to reorganise themselves around the (sometimes rivalling) Danish, Dutch, and British holdings, leading to the formation of quarters that would eventually result in the creation of a colonial city. During this time of defensive rebuilding, the Ga towns of Kinka and Nleshi were incorporated into what was known as Dutch

¹⁴³ Ibid. p.25.

¹⁴⁴ Gocking, *History of Ghana*, p.25.

¹⁴⁵ For a detailed history of Accra see Parker, *Making the Town*, pp.12–13.

¹⁴⁶ Parker, *Making the Town*, p.10.

Accra. They were eventually passed to the British in 1868 when the Dutch withdrew from the coast. Historically, Osu comprised a large Afro-Danish community, which formed around the trade at Christianborg fort, but it too, passed into British control in 1850 when the Danish withdrew from the coast.¹⁴⁷ By the late 1800s, Jamestown and Osu remained as two distinct municipalities and incorporated almost 30 distinct sub-towns between them. These towns, with their close clan and trade affiliations were often in political conflict.¹⁴⁸ At the turn of the 20th century, as the British administration began to monopolise holdings along the coast, these separate Ga townships eventually merged to form an urban metropolis that, by and large, hugged the coastline. Curiously enough, both the African and English nomenclatures for these districts still survive today, so that the part of Kinka surrounding Usher fort is also referred to as ‘Ushertown’ and the area of Nleshi, surrounding James fort, when referred to in English, is called Jamestown.



Figure 7. View of traditional adobe thatched houses alongside European style houses in Jamestown c.1880. Images: British National Archive: “Africa through a lens; Ghana”.

Before the enforced racial separation brought by the British, when the European population was more weighted towards the Dutch, Danish, and Swedes, both European and African cultures

¹⁴⁷ Kwesi J. Anquandah, *Castles and Forts of Ghana*, Atlante: Paris, 1999, p.28.

¹⁴⁸ Parker, *Making the Town*, pp.7–20.

mingled—and indeed, often intermarried. The forts and castles and their surrounds were visibly populated by the mixed children of locals and Europeans, who were recognised with varying degrees of legitimacy by the European authorities.¹⁴⁹



Figure 7.1. View of traditional adobe thatched houses alongside European style houses in Jamestown c.1880. Images: British National Archive: “Africa through a lens; Ghana”.

This cultural mixing was particularly characteristic of coastal settlements in Ghana, dating back to the first European contact with Ghanaian culture.¹⁵⁰ Nonetheless, despite cosmopolitan settings, the African culture dominated, and this is most apparent in the legacy of Osu and Jamestown’s African and Euro-African houses. Within the historical Ga culture of Accra, the home also functioned as a shrine to the family, meaning that the umbilical cords of new born babies were always buried in the central courtyards of homes, and the practice of intramural sepulture – the burying the dead within the walls of the house – was ubiquitous.¹⁵¹ It is still possible to visit historic houses such as Wulff House in Accra, where the Afro-Danish ancestors of the present occupants

¹⁴⁹ “The natural offspring of Danish citizens and local women were as a rule not recognized as entitled to inherit from their fathers/having a right to be paid a smaller sustenance out of the special pension fund for Mulattos and widows”. There were of course many exceptions to this rule. Ole Justesen, ‘Henrich Richter 1785–1849: Trader and Politician in the Danish Settlements on the Gold Coast’. *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana, New Series, No. 7*. University of Legon. 2003. p. 110. See also (MOT), pp.32–33.

¹⁵⁰ There are many books and articles on this subject. See J. Lever ‘Mulatto influence on the Gold Coast in the early nineteenth century: Jan Nieser of Elmina’; *African Historical Studies*, 3, (2) 1970.

¹⁵¹ See MOT on the house as shrine, p.27, and burying of the dead within, p.27.

are buried vertically and horizontally in the bedrooms of the house.¹⁵² While the German, Swiss, Dutch, and Danish settlers who preceded the British seemed to assimilate reasonably well with the local culture and often followed local burial practices after intermarrying with Africans, the officers of the British Colonial administration were horrified by the practice of intramural sepulture, finding it particularly unsanitary and outlawing it in 1888.¹⁵³ However, the Swiss/Ga historian Karl Reindorf reported in 1889 that the local citizenry of Accra continued to flout the ruling at great personal risk. The majority of citizens were fearful enough of public cemeteries to believe that to end there was no better than being “cast unburied into the bush”.¹⁵⁴ They also imagined public cemeteries to engender “potentially hazardous supernatural environments”, a logic also found in European cultures, as evidenced by the use of images of graveyards in the iconography of many 20th century horror movies. Somehow it makes sense to believe that the spirits of one’s ancestors, when cared for within the walls of the home, are benevolent, but turn malicious when neglected.¹⁵⁵

Intramural sepulture was but one aspect of local culture that kept the British colonial administration deeply dissatisfied with the sanitation in Accra. They were also uncomfortable with

¹⁵² Vertical burial was a common practice to preserve space and allow for multiple internments in a space, as was witnessed in the aforementioned ‘Architectural Heritage in Accra’ conference and tour taking place on March 30th–31st, 2009. The event concluded by taking journalists and scholars on a tour of several historically significant homes in Jamestown and Afro-Danish Osu. The tour was led by Professor Nii Adziri Wellington. On the tour we remarked several instances of intra-mural sepulture, including the curious instance of Josef Wulff, a Danish Jew living in Ghana through the early 1800s, who had worked at Christiansborg Castle, but due to anti-Semitism broke with the habit of living in quarters, and chose to set up a home with an African wife. He died in 1840 and asked to be buried in the traditional way, vertically under the stones of one of the bedroom floors. His family have kept extensive records of his life, and we were privileged to be given a tour of the house and records by his great-great-great-grandson. This event was documented by a radio programme on the BBC World Service Focus on Africa, broadcast Friday April 2nd 2009 (produced and reported by David Amanor) and also in the Ghanaian newspaper *The Mail*, Harunah Attah’s editorial of Friday April 9th, ‘Accra’s Hidden Treasures in Public Spaces’.
http://www.artinsocialstructures.org/images/pressRoom/clippingPDFs/2010-04-09_MailGhana.pdf

¹⁵³ See Selena Axelrod Winses, *A Danish Jew in West Africa: Wulf. Joseph Wulf Biography and Letters 1836 – 1842*. Sub-Sahran Publishers, Ghana, 2013.

¹⁵⁴ Parker, *Making the Town*, p.173.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p.173.

local population density and the lack of a conventional sewage system and running water. The solution to their discomfort came in the unlikely guise of an endemic of bubonic plague, which allowed them their first chance to prohibit Africans and Europeans from living alongside each other. In 1908, at the time of the outbreak, Europeans and Africans still lived alongside each other in communities such as Jamestown, Usher Fort, and Osu.¹⁵⁶ The vast majority of Africans lived in simple rural-style adobe housing, and these buildings were merged comfortably alongside the walled two-storey houses of the mercantile and administrative classes of wealthy African and Afro-European traders that bore architectural similarity to European building conventions. When the bubonic plague broke out, however, the British were fearful that their entire staff would be wiped out, so they enlisted Dr W. J. Simpson from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine to devise a plan to secure the survival of the British colonial administration. Simpson's first response upon seeing the European and Africans living alongside one another was to destroy the entire community. He first displaced the coastal community of fishermen, removing their structures wherever possible, with the exception of sparing the ancient ancestral graves in the area. At the time there was still some misunderstanding as to the cause of malaria (literally translated as 'bad-air'), and Simpson's report "became effectively a blueprint for racial segregation and strengthened the hands of the Sanitary and Medical Departments in determining the shape of the colonial city".¹⁵⁷ Simpson insisted that the African's were harbingers of disease, and that clean air and sunlight were the secret of European good health. Against the wishes of the community, he segregated Europeans from Africans, authorising the government purchase of the territories of Ridge and Cantonments in Accra, to which the European citizens of the colonial administration were relocated. The segregation also enforced a new colonial policy of removing Africans from

¹⁵⁶ Parker, *Making the Town* p.173 and Amarteifio private interview.

¹⁵⁷ Parker, *Ibid.* pp.199–201.

the proximity of, and participation in colonial administration.¹⁵⁸ The houses of Ridge were painted white to encourage sunlight and often built on stilts to ensure the circulation of ‘healthy’ fresh air. The Africans, being suspected of carrying disease, were subject to a curfew at dusk so that, as articulated by Ghanaian architectural historian Nat Amarteifo, “any mosquito that fed on a black would not infect a white.”¹⁵⁹

Unlike the previous Dutch and Danish authorities, who appeared neutral on the matter, the British Colonial administration discouraged the intermixing of Africans and Europeans. During the high colonial period of the early 1910s until the African liberation movements of the 1950s and 1960s, Ghana’s white British expatriate administration lived predominantly in two racially segregated areas of Accra, known as ‘Cantonments’ and ‘Ridge’ (Figure 9). The land was acquired by the British Colonial Authority in the years following 1908, which created a series of settlements in the area. Prior to the colonial building programmes, the landscape of these areas was little more than a sparse and hilly savannah near the increasingly urban sprawl of Accra’s coastal plain. The settlement programmes were ambitious, and several hundred houses were built during this period.

¹⁵⁸ Prior to this it was common for Euro-Africans to work within the colonial administration. Heinrich Richter was a particularly good example, a wealthy trader of Danish and Ghanaian descent, he became an important diplomatic envoy for the Danish crown (see Heinrich Richter 1785–1849: Trader and Politician in the Danish settlements on the Gold Coast, by Ole Justesen in *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana New Series*, No 7 (2003), pp.93–192). Gocking, in the *History of Ghana* outlines the 1902 closing of the medical profession to African doctors and several other moves to exclude professional African from positions previously held in the colonial administration (*History of Ghana* pp.50–74). As early as 1886, King Taki Taiwia noted the decline of interaction between black and white in Accra, “first and foremost interracial marriage declined dramatically”, followed by rising racial discrimination, which found the western educated elite of Accra barred for the first time from taking official posts on racial grounds, a move that pushed the educated towards careers in law, and conversely catalysed early nationalist sentiments amongst a coastal African elite who were hitherto Eurocentric in their values (see Parker, *Making the Town*, p.136).

¹⁵⁹ Source: interview with Nat Amarteifo (see also Parker: “The established residential pattern had survived the late 19th century hardening of imperial racial ideology. It was challenged by the newly discovered theory of malaria and the influence of Dr. W. J. Simpson of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, who was rushed to Accra in 1908 to combat the plague epidemic.” Parker, *Making of the Town*, p.199.

Their establishment also led to the expansion of bourgeois African communities into the surrounding areas of Adabraka, Nima and Asylum Down.

Today, fragments of the more famous colonial structures remain; mostly government buildings, but many houses have been demolished. As a result the architectural appearance of Cantonments and Ridge has undergone stark changes during the decades following initial settlement. As buildings are demolished, it is, in fact in the foliage and not in the architecture where the most enduring legacy of colonialism is most visually evident. Contemporary Accra as a city is unusually green, and areas of the (former) colonial developments following 1908 are particularly verdant—boasting hundreds of mature trees, most which are non-indigenous and were brought over during the lesser-known period of (ecological) speculation that accompanied British Empire building.



Figure 9. The first building programmes in the new European settlement 1915. Captioned Accra – New Bungalows on the Ridge. Source National Archives UK, Africa Through a Lens collection.

Horticulture and Empire

The role of horticulture and, in particular, botanical gardens in rationalising British colonial economic interests is documented by scholars such as Anthony King (1976), Matthew Edeny (1997) and W.J.T. Mitchell (2002).¹⁶⁰ Gail Ching-Liang Low (1993) presents the less considered space of domestic colonial environments, highlighting the importance of cultivating colonial English gardens for psychological needs and for providing a set of references “which helped secure the community’s links to its cultural origins”.¹⁶¹ Matthew Edeny’s study of British colonial efforts in India documents the great push to establish botanical gardens throughout the Indian subcontinent for economic gain in the late 1700s onwards.¹⁶² This was a popular policy that was later introduced to West African colonial holdings, as documented in the 1891 *Bulletin* of the Royal Gardens, Kew, which published the correspondence from then *Gold Coast* Governor W. Brandford Griffith in his efforts to set up a botanical garden in Aburi (Ghana), an area just north of the capital city Accra:

*If once the Natives inhabiting magnificent lands in this Colony were taught to cultivate economic plants in a systematic manner for purposes of export, the material wealth of the Gold Coast might be enormously increased.*¹⁶³

The Governor also requests that in addition to the “staple products of this colony palm oil and palm kernels additional plants should be introduced”. In his letter of April 5, 1890, he reports having written to:

¹⁶⁰ Anthony King, *Colonial Urban Development: Culture Social Power and Environment*, Routledge, London. 1976. Matthew Edeny, *Mapping an Empire; The Geographical Construction of India*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press. W.J.T. Mitchell, (ed.) *Landscape and Power*, 2nd Edition, Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2002.

¹⁶¹ Gail Ching-Liang Low, ‘White Skins/Black Masks: The Pleasure and Politics of Imperialism’ in *Space and Place: Theories of Identity and Location*, eds. Erica Carter, James Donald and Judith Squires, pub. Laurence and Wishart: London 1993, p.243.

¹⁶² “The botanical gardens at Calcutta were established in 1787 for the specific purpose of cultivating teak trees for shipbuilding” and “other Botanical Gardens at Bangalore, Madras and Bombay were all primarily concerned with the introduction of cash crops into India in 1765–1843”. See Matthew Edeny, *Mapping an Empire; The Geographical Construction of India*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997, p.295

¹⁶³ Gold Coast Botanical Station, *Bulletin of Miscellaneous Information (Royal Gardens, Kew)*, Vol. 1891, No. 55. p.170.

*The Governors of Trinidad, British Guiana, and Jamaica, requesting their kind offices in aiding my work by sending me plants and seedlings in accordance with a long list transmitted to them.*¹⁶⁴

There follows a list of non-indigenous plants already introduced to the colony, including Egyptian cotton, coffee and cocoa, eucalyptus, palm and mahogany. He adds that “The plants received from Kew are all growing satisfactorily, and seem to be adapting themselves to the climate”.¹⁶⁵ As correspondence would suggest, the British colonial office wholeheartedly approved the governor’s intention to establish British interests in agriculture, indicating their particular approval of the site’s location:

...it is always desirable to place such a site as near as possible to the seat of the Government, and easily accessible to a large section of the population.

Perhaps as a consequence, contemporary Accra boasts a disproportionate number of foreign species of flora, and the areas inhabited by the former colonial administration are populated by gardens with plants whose size (when corresponding to age), indicates they were introduced during the time of British colonialism.¹⁶⁶ Not all plants were brought for commercial reasons; decorative plants from South America, such as frangipani and bougainvillea flourish in the city and the latter has long been favoured as a decorative disguise for the barbwire-topped fences of the city’s elite. The mangos are said to have been brought by Afro-Brazilians; the route to their 19th century plantations in the area is still marked as ‘Tabon Street’.¹⁶⁷ A high proportion of trees and shrubs

¹⁶⁴ Gold Coast Botanical Station, *Bulletin of Miscellaneous Information (Royal Gardens, Kew)*, Vol. 1891, no 55. p.173.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ One need only compare the 1915 British Colonial Archives photographs of settlements of Accra with the experience of driving through the contemporary city to understand the relatively recent history of much of its vegetation. See earlier image of colonial house and garden in Cantonments.

¹⁶⁷ The Tabon are a subdivision of the Ga ethnic group who trace their lineage back to a group of Afro-Brazilian slaves who relocated to Ghana after a slave rebellion in 1863. See Parker, *Making the Town*, p.14.

were brought from India, ranging from some species of mango and turkey berry shrubs to the endless avenues of neem trees that dominate private and public spaces.

The presence of trees and shrubs dating back to the period of British colonisation in Accra is read in various ways by its citizens. The neem trees are invariably associated with the British—in part due to the British lack of access to local herbal antidotes to malaria, but also because of the manner in which they were planted to create tree lined avenues in strategic places. Shade, it seems, was essential to colonial conquest. Or perhaps shade was most essential to European survival in the tropics, a possibility underscored by the impossibly verdant approaches to 37 Military Hospital and Ridge Hospital: serene with sweeping boughs, a last solace for the many Europeans who were terminally challenged by the local climate?

The introduction of neem is highly significant, brought over primarily for its medicinal properties, its boiled bark and leaves are still used as a folk remedy and early antidote to malaria by those in the city who cannot afford, or do not wish to take conventional medications. Neem oil is used as a non-toxic mosquito repellent and in scented candles, and the young tree shoots, which are popularly boiled as a malaria prophylaxis, are said not only to cure, but even to prevent malaria if taken daily. Having the advantage being proliferate in the city centre and considerably easier to access than traditional local cures found in the bush; their leaves are used by the very poor who cannot afford over-the-counter medications, as well as many health-conscious members of all social classes who wish to avoid repeated use of expensive conventional medicines. If you were to take a stroll at dusk in the greener streets of Accra or any other metropolitan centre, the last rays of sun would inevitably reveal a wide range of Ghanaians picking the young plants along the roadside before heading home to boil up their bitter tonic. The wide-ranging integration of neem

into local culture and particularly into medicinal practice, may eventually fade its association with the memory of the Europeans who were responsible for their original plantings.

The easy incorporation of once-foreign plant life indicates how easily markers of previous political regimes, power dynamics and cultural relations can be subsumed into contemporary culture and become localised. The British colonial period is not the first foreign interaction to bring drastic changes to the vegetation of Ghana's landscape. The Ghana Tourist Board publication *The Castles and Forts of Ghana* (1990), details an earlier and similar influence with little remorse:

*Modern Ghana's food and nutrition cultural tradition is a great beneficiary of the European fort presence and trade. A variety of food plants from different parts of the world that were cultivated by Europeans in gardens in and outside the forts subsequently spread to other parts of the country – from the Mediterranean region came lemons, melons and oranges; from the New World came maize, cassava, sweet potato, groundnut, pineapple, paw paw, guava and tannia cocoyam. From Asia came oriental rice, water yam, taro, cocoyam, plantain, banana, tamarind, coconut, and sugar cane.*¹⁶⁸

Remarkably, this list of foods seems to contain almost every staple of the Ghanaian diet bar the large root yams grown in Northern Ghana. Essential foods such as *kenke* and *banku*, made with fermented maize, or *gari* (made by processing cassava) prove to have relatively recent and foreign origins. Bearing in mind the tomato was also introduced from South America during this time, it is arguable that Ghana's entire national cuisine represents a forgotten marker of its trading past. As has been written, the country's

*[landscape] naturalises a cultural and social construction, representing an artificial world as if it were simply given and inevitable, and it also makes that representation operational by interpellating its beholder in some more or less determinate relation to its givenness as sight and site. Thus landscape (whether urban, or rural, artificial or natural) always greets us as space, as environment, as that within which 'we' (figured as 'the figures' in the landscape) find – or lose – ourselves.*¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ Kwesi Anquandah, *Castles and Forts of Ghana*, Ghana Museums and Monuments Board/ Atalante: Paris, 1990. p.17.

¹⁶⁹ W.J.T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power*, p.2.

As Ghanaian cultural cuisine finds itself squarely located in the plants, which arrived through 500 years of transatlantic trade, it remains to be seen how the later additions of plant life corresponding to colonial period will perform. The trees and foliage of the tree lined avenues are still capable of evoking the history that brought them there, but 50 years into the nation's independence there seems little opposition to forgetting the origins of these plants. Not yet being seen to have displaced any vulnerable local flora, and therefore lacking any great narrative of ecological disaster, they quietly take root in the everyday, asserting nothing more sinister than the wealth of houses where they grow.

Anthropologist Barbara Bender (2001) has worked towards a theory of landscape, seeking to complicate the dominant understanding of landscape as something class-based, 'elitist' and static.¹⁷⁰ Bender asserts that landscapes are in fact dynamic and always 'tensioned', citing the clear but often overlooked historical linkage between landscapes of the plantation, country estates, stately homes and industry as examples of how landscapes are socially constructed. Her work highlights the social relations between different kinds of space and seeks to uncover the flows between the different types of labour put into the production of landscapes.¹⁷¹ In the context of Bender's work, the decorative plants of Accra introduced by British colonials may be read in relation to the commercial species such as cocoa, tobacco or rubber brought over to the region at the same time. The agricultural plantations of the far rural areas and the cityscape therefore share a relationship, as the two different kinds of vegetation may be seen to represent the same historical processes.

¹⁷⁰ Barbara Bender, (ed.), *Contested Landscapes: Movement, Exile and Place*, Oxford: Berg, 2001.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.* p.3.

This reading may not render itself so easily. As Bender herself reminds us, “the study of landscape is about the complexity of people’s lives, historical contingency, motion and change”.¹⁷² Ghana’s commercial agricultural landscape has been incorporated into the national identity in a way that overlooks its colonial past, particularly with respect to the farming of cocoa, which has dominated the economy since its introduction under British colonialism at the turn of the 20th century. The early strikes or ‘hold ups’ of Ghanaian cocoa farmers in the 1930s were a key moment in early nationalist activism.¹⁷³ Taken in combination with cocoa’s key role as one of Ghana’s major historical cash crops, the vicissitudes of cocoa farming have come to represent the successes and failures of the post-independent nation and much less a history of resistance to the political economic and agricultural policies under European colonialism. This last point is illustrated by the brief history posted on Ghana Cocoa Board website, which places the spread of cocoa farming firmly in the hands of Tetteh Quarshie, a Ghanaian. As the website copy reads:

*The available records indicate that Dutch missionaries planted cocoa in the coastal areas of the then Gold Coast as early as 1815, whilst in 1857 Basel missionaries also planted cocoa at Aburi.*¹⁷⁴

However, according to the Ghana Cocoa Board, the efforts of Europeans to cultivate cocoa did not result in the spread of cocoa cultivation until Tetteh Quarshie (a native of Osu, Accra, who had travelled to Fernando Po and worked there as a blacksmith), returned in 1879 with Amelonado cocoa pods and established a farm at Akwapim Mampong in the Eastern Region. Farmers bought pods from his farm to plant, and cultivation spread from the Akwapim area to other parts of the Eastern Region.

¹⁷² Barbara Bender, (ed.), *Contested Landscapes: Movement, Exile and Place*, Oxford: Berg, 2001, p.2.

¹⁷³ Gocking, *History of Ghana*, p.13.

¹⁷⁴ <https://cocobod.gh/cocoa-story> [last accessed 14/12/ 2021].

In 1886, Sir William Bradford Griffith, the governor, also arranged for cocoa pods to be brought in from Sao Tome, from which seedlings were raised at Aburi Botanical Garden and distributed to farmers.¹⁷⁵ While the Ghana Cocoa Board makes a brief mention of the British Governor of the Gold Coast and his distribution of seedlings to farmers, Tetteh Quarshie's role in cocoa farming is presented as paramount. The site does not mention the conditions under which seeds were distributed to Ghanaian farmers by the British Governor, nor does it mention that by 1945 cocoa constituted 50% of the colonial export economy, amounting to £7.5 million per annum.¹⁷⁶ Cocoa farming in Ghana today has little conscious relationship to its colonial past, but is rather more engaged in African-led modernity and its attempts to combat the fluctuations of the world economic market. As a once nationalised enterprise under Nkrumah, with prices of cocoa fixed by the government-controlled Ghana Cocoa Board, cocoa farming has evolved into a strong symbol of state power, its successes and failures from the time of independence until the present day remain the basis of many election campaigns.¹⁷⁷

In the context of the landscaped gardens of former colonial districts in Accra, there is a different, yet parallel set of representations at stake; the private garden, its high walls heavy with exotic flora, remains an enduring sign of power. However, this power is no longer a racialised colonial power; it is power in the nameless, faceless guise of capital. In a city of ever-growing proportions with increasing problems of water shortages, lush gardens are the ultimate sign of wealth: on one hand, because of the high cost of water and manual labour (in the form of gardeners), on the other hand, because large uncontrolled areas of vegetation represent additional health hazards.

¹⁷⁵ Ghana Cocoa Board website: <http://www.cocobod.gh/history.php> [last accessed 17/9/2009].

¹⁷⁶ Jerker Carlsson, *The Limits to Structural Change: A comparative study of foreign direct investments in Liberia and Ghana 1950–1971*. Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, Uppsala in cooperation with Department of Economic History, University of Gothenburg. Sweden, Uddevalla 1981, p.17.

¹⁷⁷ Killick, *Development Economics in Action*, p.127.

Contrary to popular belief, mosquito larvae flourish in fresh dew drops, not stagnant water, accumulating between plant leaves. This means that the more plants in a garden, the more mosquitos will abound (an unfortunate oversight on the part of the green-fingered colonials). Garden owners must spray their plants regularly with expensive and toxic chemicals to reduce the risk of malaria and other pests, which include the country's many poisonous grass and tree snakes.¹⁷⁸ While giving a tour of the gardens of the house in the photograph below, the residents casually pointed out the area where black mamba snakes were regularly seen jumping from the treetops. Due to the expense and discomfort of spraying, Ghanaians most commonly combat nature's health risks by paving their yards with concrete. This cultural habit spans all social demographics, and paved yards are practical, easier to keep clean, and much less expensive and problematic than large gardens. The juxtaposition of paved yards and cultivated gardens underscores the latter's grandeur and their encodings of social power and use of resources. While the codifications of power endure in the cultivated garden and tree-lined avenue, it is clear that the power represented is itself mutable. Over time, the plants have less cultural affiliations to the people that first ordered their planting, but remain indicative of the social standing of those that live within their proximity.

¹⁷⁸ A highly concentrated solution of N-N-diethyl-meta-toluamide, known popularly as DEET.

White Walls



Figure 10. Late British colonial villa built by Unilever circa 1945, Cantonments, Accra. Note the extensive gardens populated with mature non-indigenous trees, such as flamboyant (foreground), cacti, and neem (far background). Photo: Senam Okudzeto, 2008.

While the trees and plants found in Ridge and Cantonments are a quiet and not altogether unpleasant reminder of the colonial past, the populations of both districts have undergone many changes since the mid 2000s; the areas are now peppered with foreign embassies, diplomatic missions, modern US American style mansions and gated communities. Its contemporary residents comprise a more cosmopolitan mix of local elites, including one would-be-president and two ex-presidents from opposing parties living in close proximity.¹⁷⁹ The area also houses several NGO offices and government hospital staff houses scattered amongst a handful of wealthy expatriates

¹⁷⁹ 2008 CPP presidential candidate Dr. Papa Kwesi Nduom and former President Jerry Rawlings (in office 1983–2003), both live on the same street in North Ridge, while during the period of writing this dissertation until December 2011, the former Vice-president of Ghana, Alhaji Aliu Mahama (2000–2008) continued to occupy a grand colonial villa in Cantonments.

and foreign diplomatic missions. As property prices rise, Ridge is beginning to function less as a residential area and becoming more of a business area housing foreign missions, banks and hotels. Poorer traders have begun to line the pavements of heavier traffic routes, setting up small wooden shacks no more than a square meter or two wide, where they sell basic foodstuffs and telephone credit to the local workers and passers-by. Many of the traders are poor enough to have to sleep in their shacks—it is unclear where they get access to water and basic amenities.

Both districts possess a handful of British colonial villas whose grandeur is expressed less by the architecture and more by the vast acreage of sweeping gardens. These gardens and their fences present a clipped austerity, which recalls the areas' former administrative role. It is hard to imagine that up to the point of independence in 1957, black Africans were not allowed into these areas after the sunset curfew. While seeking buildings to photograph, a Ghanaian who lived in the area told me how urban myth has it that the British colonials deliberately chose to “paint the walls white so as to better identify the black silhouettes of unwanted natives attempting to scale their compounds”.¹⁸⁰

Rumours and anecdotes remain an integral part of how societies construct of themselves. For Frantz Fanon, in the face of oppression (particularly colonial oppression), the anecdote about white walls was a critical site for self-determination and expression, as outlined in *Black Skin, White Masks*:

...That it could be born and survive through the years is an indication: It is no fallacy. For the anecdote renews a conflict that, active or dormant, is always real. Its persistence attests to the black world's endorsement. To say it another way, when a story flourishes in the

¹⁸⁰ Mr. Nii Allotey Bruce Konuah, discussion, 2008.

*heart of a folklore, it is because in one way or another it expresses an aspect of 'the spirit of the group'.*¹⁸¹

Racial theory in architecture highlights the importance of 'vision'; the ability for the colonial master to have clear sights of the racialised other. Irene Cheng has argued that the understanding of racial hierarchy and divisions may be subliminally encoded in architectural forms, as evidenced by Thomas Jefferson's use of the octagonal form in slave plantation architecture that could be understood as a device for observance and control, not unlike the values embedded in Jeremy Bentham's designs for the 'Panopticon', in a strategic attempt to observe and organise enslaved populations.¹⁸² 'Vision and visibility' may be tools for either liberation or conquest of the colonial subject.¹⁸³ Urban mythology attributes the British fondness for whitewashed walls in the former colonial areas to a distasteful predilection of the British to use architecture to enforce a discriminatory regime. In this analysis, the very whiteness of the walls is a trigger for forgotten social trauma, implying that history lies encoded upon the painted surface of architectural structures. This reading of the built environment as an archive of political regimes allows Edward Said's (1993) claim that "nations are narrations" to illustrate the manner in which stories "become the method colonised people use to assert their own identity and the existence of their own history".¹⁸⁴

Locating the historical antecedents to the symbolism read into 'white walls' raises questions about the visual symbolism deliberately created through colonial architecture. Craig L. Wilkins (2000) and Daryl Wayne Fields (2007) have argued that Enlightenment thinkers such as Locke, Hegel

¹⁸¹ This particular passage is from the chapter entitled 'The Man of Colour and the White Woman' and refers directly to the psychological scars of colonialism and anecdotes. See Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, Pluto Press, 1986. p.64.

¹⁸² Irene Cheng, 'Race and Architectural Geometry: Thomas Jefferson's Octagons', J19 *The Journal of Nineteenth Century Americanists*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Vol. 3 No. 1, Spring 2015, p.121–122.

¹⁸³ See Lokko *White Papers*, pp.30–31.

¹⁸⁴ See Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, Vintage, London, 1993. p.xiii.

and Kant contributed to the subliminal encoding of racial superiority into architecture by defining “all things white as normative and anything non-white as the anomaly”.¹⁸⁵ It is not by coincidence that important texts on the topic of race and architecture are founded on the discourse of space; in particular the philosophical notion that defines language, space, and matter by the punctuation of silence, emptiness, and the space between. Juxtaposed against ‘whiteness’, the black body (and by extension intellect) could be read as a cultural void in an equally empty architectural landscape. Kant and Hegel extrapolated racist ideologies from this concept of emptiness, presenting Africa as “that unhistorical and undeveloped land which is still enmeshed in the natural spirit” and creating Africa as the cultural wasteland by which Europe defined its own presence.¹⁸⁶ Rendering Africa in terms of a ‘negative’ space absolved Europeans of the desire for conquest, who could then conceive of their invasion as a gift to Africa rather than the cause of its destructive erasure.¹⁸⁷ This invasion was enacted upon people, territory, landscape, and built environment, and it would eventually overshadow local vernacular architecture.

The architecture of British colonial buildings in Ghana belongs to what Foucault (1982, 1995) would term as the architecture of ‘surveillance’ and belongs to the ‘disciplinary techniques’ of a colonial power whose epistemological paradigm developed through a need to order societies urgently in response to health and security crises that emerged in the 18th century.¹⁸⁸ The authority that these buildings created was then easily adopted by the post-independence Ghanaian elites. In

¹⁸⁵ Craig L. Wilkins, *The Aesthetics of Equity; Notes on Race, Space, Architecture and Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 11. See also Daryl Wayne Fields, *Architecture in Black; Theory, Space, and Appearance* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000).

¹⁸⁶ Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 172–190, cited in Daryl Wayne Fields, *Architecture in Black; Theory, Space and Appearance* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000), p.25. Fields observes Hegel’s deliberate displacement of Egypt from Africa to Asia to reinforce this argument.

¹⁸⁷ See Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question; Theory, Knowledge and History*, University of California Press, Berkeley, (2005), pp.20–22; and on colonialism as a ‘civilising mission’, p.144.

¹⁸⁸ Michel Foucault, ‘Space Knowledge and Power’ in *Power*, (ed. James D. Faubion), Penguin: Galimard, 1994, pp.348–364.

the context of Ghanaian history, these same ‘white walls’ then transitioned from representing European colonial power to become a symbol of growing economic and class division, which rapidly expanded during the period of growing discontent with Ghana’s 2001–2009 NPP Government; a period that saw the country enter a phase of economic boom and international trade.¹⁸⁹ The government’s opponents not only took umbrage at the civil injustices of colonialism, but also reached forward to include a contemporary criticism of the balance of power, belying a recurring historical tension that underscores class dynamics in post-independence Ghana. The idea of ‘white walls’ could be said to contain a stronger criticism of contemporary African behaviour than it does of colonial racism, especially since colonial racism has been abolished, and Ghanaian class tensions still remain. To understand how these tensions are encoded within architectural structures, we must first look at the historical developments that led to the demise of colonialism and the subsequent social trends amongst the affluent in following generations.

¹⁸⁹ The New Patriotic Party (NPP) took over from the socialist National Democratic Congress (NDC) during the period 2001–2009 led by President John Agyekum Kufour. The party, although identified as a liberal democratic party is often accused of being considerably more orientated to the right than the displaced socialist democracy of the previously Rawlings Government. This is matter currently open for debate as under the NPP many socialist-style policies such as the free National Health Insurance Program and Student Policies were instigated under the NPP in contrast to the party’s policy of liberalising trade and encouraging free market policies.



Figure 11. The Optimist’s Club, Accra Branch; A club formed c.1909 in Sekondi, Ghana by affluent coastal Ghanaian elites. Its moniker reflected the essentially optimistic beliefs of its members that life in the then occupied British colonial *Gold Coast* was bound to improve. Source; *Ghana Photos Memories*, by J.K. Bruce Vanderpuije.¹⁹⁰

Pre-colonial Ghanaian coastal society contained many wealthy and powerful merchants and chiefs. The British attempted to support and control the local chieftaincy, but in the case of the usually more educated mercantile classes, theirs was a power that the colonial authority continually struggled to displace. In the process of removing the British colonials, a disproportionate number of upper-class Africans stood poised to take over their positions and maintained a kind of feudal economic supremacy that, in fact, predated colonialism.¹⁹¹ This fact was clear by the membership of the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) party, which was formed in 1947 by J.B. Danquah

¹⁹⁰ Photo taken by J.K. Bruce Vanderpuije, a member of two important elite Accra merchant families, the Bruce and Afro-Danish Vanderpuije families as mentioned in Parker’s *Making of the Town* p.91. For a rich source of images of Accra’s early 20th century social elite, see J.K. Bruce Vanderpuije, *Accra Photos Memories*, Filigranes Editions, Lec’h Geoffroy, France–22140 Trezelan: Africultures, Les Pilles, France–26110, Nyons, 2007.

¹⁹¹ In popular idiom, “colo”, is still a weighty insult. Coined in the period after independence, it is a nickname for one who is seen to be mentally and culturally colonised by aping the European.

to successfully oust the British. Needing a more populist representative in their ranks, they initially hired Kwame Nkrumah as their general secretary, and from this position he unexpectedly rose to power as the country's first prime minister, and subsequently its first president.

The members of the UGCC, described by B. Davidson as “inheritance elites”, in voicing their opposition to Nkrumah's socialist policies made it clear that “they had not become their country's first ministers in order to preside over the liquidation of their new domestic empires”.¹⁹² Nkrumah had, in turn, expressed reservation when first offered the position of general secretary feeling “it was quite useless to associate [himself] with a movement backed almost entirely by reactionaries, middle-class lawyers and merchants”.¹⁹³ This historical tension between the different political stakeholders is well framed by Bjorn Hettne (1980) in his description of Ghanaian politics prior to 1948 as being dominated by a social ‘cleavage’ between two sorts of Ghanaian elites: the highly educated mercantile coastal elites and the British-backed tribal chiefs who eventually, against the odds, joined interests to face off against the more popularist front of Nkrumah's socialist government and policies.¹⁹⁴ Nkrumah espoused socialism while encouraging a developing class of petit-bourgeois traders, clerks and workers. Hettne outlines the correlation between widening class margins, Ghana's economic decline internationally, the rise of an increasingly corrupt military in national politics and their role in the nation's numerous coups d'état, underscoring these key events as critical to the shaping of the contemporary political landscape. The urban myth of ‘white walls’, goes beyond remembering a history of colonial oppression, it also refers to the subsequent emergence of a class based African oppression of its own citizenry. In this manner the anecdote

¹⁹² See B. Davidson, *Africa in Modern History*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books. 1978. p.289.

¹⁹³ Gocking, *History of Ghana*, p.85.

¹⁹⁴ See Bjorn Hettne, ‘Soldiers and Politics: the case of Ghana’, *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol 2, Special Issue on Imperialism and Militarization (1980) pp.173–193.

can be seen to illustrate both ‘inter-modernist and intra-modernist landscapes’. The salient narrative content of the anecdote describing ‘black bodies outlined on the white walls of colonial architecture’ and its empowered rejection of this history is an example of an inter-modernist landscape, explained by Amkpa as...

*...landscape[s] on the margins of that [European] modernity, bounded by English constructions of race. Encircled by the African’s blackness, this ‘inter-modernist’ location marked moments of European intrusion into local civilisations and occasions of cultural fusion between European and African. Yet it was this very space, set up by colonial modernity to define the limits of assimilation that also became the theatre for confronting colonial domination within tropes of anti-colonial nationalism.*¹⁹⁵

However, the white walls also represent a cultural duality, suggesting that the bourgeois elite are just as concerned as the former colonials at excluding the (working class) black bodies that might scale their walls, an implication that underscores extant class tensions encoded in the location and landscape. The subliminal implications of internal cultural division construe an ‘inter-modernist landscape’, understood as a secondary construction of post-colonial modernities that is representative of the social divisions that can occur in the post-colonial struggle for power. Ampka again:

*[The] neocolonial context transformed the inter-modernist landscape from a site where anti-imperialist cultures were developed into a conduit through which the new imperialism accessed the nation. The elite class at the forefront of the inter-modernist landscape became as corrupt as the military dictators who ruled the land with an iron fist. On the other hand, the intra-modernist landscape became more chaotic as class and religious differences superseded ethnicities as the primary lines of division. Such changes meant that ideologies of decolonisation had to reform themselves substantially in order to maintain the anti-colonial culture developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.*¹⁹⁶

Simon Clark (2011) has argued for the immense importance for constructions of the “human imagination and emotions”, arguing that how people imagine the world to exist, is not entirely

¹⁹⁵ See Awam Ampka, *Theatre and Post-colonial Desires*. Routledge, London, 2004 p.5.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid. pp.8–9.

based on actual fact, but always an act of imagination. This imaginary construction of reality is central to the construction of identity and it may not matter if this construction is based on fiction; these imaginary constructions will always have “very real consequences for the world we live in”.¹⁹⁷ In this way, the throwaway comments that might otherwise be read as an absurdist urban myth reveal themselves to be rooted in the emotive residue of historical facts. This emotional accretion of historic tension underscores the way human imagination informs the way architecture and the built environment are capable of encoding class tensions that span decades. Ghana’s two most recent military coups and the subsequent socialist revolution led by Flight Lieutenant J.J. Rawlings in the 1980s produced an explosive response to the symbolic tyranny of architecture.¹⁹⁸ Several hundred plots of land and houses in wealthy areas such as Ridge were seized by the government, and it was decreed a criminal offence to own more than one home. At the point when national exasperation with the disparity between rich and poor reached a peak, then President Rawlings is said to have issued a further order which also criminalised the existence of more than one toilet in the home. Remembered as a moment in history when terror and absurdity were matched in equal portions, there are many unsubstantiated media reports claiming that people were shot for having more than one lavatory in their homes.¹⁹⁹ Stories such as these are frequently repeated by Rawlings detractors in public and private, and the fact that the now deceased former

¹⁹⁷ Simon Clark, ‘Culture and Identity’, SAGE publications. 8(8/2011);

<http://www.sagepub.com/healeyregc6e/study/chapter/encycarticles/ch01/CLARKE~1.PDF>

¹⁹⁸ Following its independence in 1957, Ghana experienced five military regimes and three republics prior to the 1992 elections.

¹⁹⁹ During 2010 and 2011, retired President Jerry Rawlings’ wife, Nana Konedu Rawlings sought the NDC party nomination to run for president. Opposition writers within the Ghanaian press had a field day reviving the harsher historical events of the early Rawlings regime, in particular reviving rumours of citizens being shot for the unforgivable crime of having more than one commode in-house. See the following online articles, *The Statesman* online record 15/01/2010: J.J. Rawlings: The Janus-faced Man of Delusions of Political Grandeur, by Akadu N. Mensema: http://www.thestatesmanonline.com/pages/news_detail.php?newsid=9375§ion=1 *CitiFM* online record 25/7/2011: ‘Our Political Leaders must seek intellectual wisdom from the electorate’, by Katakylie Kwame Opoku Agyemang, in *CitiFM* online, 25/7/2011; <http://www.citifmonline.com/index.php?id=1.290993.1.480905>

president was rumoured to have many private homes is often ridiculed in the opposition press. Ghanaian poet and academic, Akadu N. Mensema, revisits the more notorious events of the former president's political career and popular rumours of his wrongdoings in an excerpt from a 2010 poem published in *The Statesman*.²⁰⁰

JJ Rawlings has had numerous twisted mouths since 1979
When he imposed himself on Ghanaians
And became the hero of an ethnic group
Because he is their last ticket to the Slave Castle
JJ has dual-mouths
JJ has tripled-lips
Yet JJ craves for one Ghanaian one toilet
Though he releases more political dung than any Ghanaian
Crystal truth never emanates from either mouths or lips

Greased truths gush out of both watersheds of delusion
JJ said he was for TRANSPARENCY AND PROBITY
But his other mouth said JJ you are lying
Tell us how you paid for your kids' education
Tell us how you bought your fleet of posh cars
Tell us how you built your houses
Tell us how you are able to globe-trot
Tell us about your expensive lifestyle
Tell us why you wept on national TV in June 1982
When you well knew that you killed the judges
When you well knew that your 'tribesmen' had done it
Tell us how you financed the 'broke' NDC in 2008/09 elections
JJ said he is against CORRUPTION AND GRAFT
That Nkrumah was corrupt and only got a flag for Ghana
That Busia was corrupt and did nothing for Ghana
That Acheampong was corrupt
That Akuffo was corrupt
That Limann was useless and came to derail the RE-DELUSION
But his other mouth said JJ you are liar
You are more corrupt than all Ghanaians

²⁰⁰ *The Statesman* is a popular Ghanaian newspaper, and claims to be "Ghana's Oldest Mainstream Newspaper" (front-page byline). The paper was established in 1949 by Edward Akuffo Addo one of Ghana's original founding fathers known as 'The Big Six' and president from 1970–1972 until deposed in the Acheampong Military coup. The paper collapsed during Ghana's period of military rule and was eventually revived in 1992 by Akuffo Addo's son, Nana Akuffo-Addo who was then campaign manager of the New Patriotic Party (NPP), the opposing party to Rawling's then ruling NDC party. In 2004 Nana Akuffo-Addo became foreign minister under the Kufour Government and sold the paper to his cousin Ken Offoriatta. The paper, while respected, nonetheless remains a strong mouthpiece for the NPP party. See *The Statesman* online record 25/7/201: About the Statesman; http://www.thestatesmanonline.com/pages/about_us.php?id=1

You never accounted for the 50-cedi notes you seized from the poor
You never accounted for the sale of Nkrumah's corporations

Not even Nsawam cannery which you sold to your wife
You never accounted for the rags to riches of your followers
The coward partisan tribalists who are willing to die for you
Though they know that you are delusional
You never explained why you gave \$20,000 to a clueless woman
To plant rice in your paradoxically impoverished World Bank
You have said nothing about M & J, Scancem, CASHPRO
Before M & J that implicated your huge head-gearred wife
You went all over the world blaming corrupt Ghanaians
Now your bogus anti-corruption campaign has deserted you
Tell us more about M & J for it was under your watch
Tell us about the friends who have been so good to you
Tell us about the friends who bought you cars
Tell us about the friends who paid your kid's school fees
Tell us about the friends who paid for your mansions
Tell us about the mansion at Adjirigano with twenty-rooms
Four self-contained self-detached rooms for your four kids
Tell us about why you alone live in three large bungalows
Tell us why you killed people for having two toilets
But today you have 15 toilets in one compound-home.²⁰¹

Mensema's poem is typical of a popular style of punditry in the Ghanaian press. Its lines are reflections on publicly debated events generally accepted as fact by Rawlings detractors and recall unpopular actions attributed to the former president and his coterie during his time in office (like the questionable sale of a state cannery to his wife and his rumoured ownership of multiple properties, despite having criminalised such offences during his early years of rule).²⁰² The late President Rawlings for several years lived in luxurious North Ridge.²⁰³ His residency in the area, although comparatively modest, made his past tyranny of the area's wealthy residents seem absurd,

²⁰¹ *The Statesman* online record 15/01/2010: JJ Rawlings: The Janus-Faced Man of Delusions of Political Grandeur, by Akadu N. Mensema; http://www.thestatesmanonline.com/pages/news_detail.php?newsid=9375§ion=1

²⁰² See Justice Sarpong's satirical article on *Ghanaweb* online archive 17/2/2010; Rawlings House Fire, Yaa Beauty Saved Valentine: <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/features/artikel.php?ID=176778>

²⁰³ On 14 February 2010, former President Rawlings' house in North Ridge was burnt to the ground in an electrical fire. His family had lived in this home for almost 30 years. See *Ghanaweb* online archive, *General news* of 14/2/2010: <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/artikel.php?ID=176690>

and enforced readings of the area as synonymous with political power. Of the various accusations levelled at Rawlings by Mensema, the murder of Ghanaians “having two toilets”, is stark in his litany of complaints, underlining its significance in the popular imagination. This story, although corresponding to events over 30 years ago, is so often repeated that it is hard to determine if it constitutes truth or urban myth, since although the alleged victims remain nameless, Ghanaian newspapers regularly report these events as fact. Occurring during a period of extreme military violence and public blood-letting; when market women accused of hoarding were stripped naked, beaten and dragged through the street and outspoken detractors to the violence were imprisoned without trial indefinitely, the stories of these events could mark a moment where rumour and historical fact coincide.²⁰⁴

The initial phases of the Rawlings’ regime corresponded to a moment of deep financial crisis in Ghana’s economy; standards of living were extremely low, and inflation was hovering around 116%.²⁰⁵ At a time when basic amenities such as water and electricity were in short supply, any form of luxury was seen as a gross indecency. The homes Rawlings seized were located, for the most part, in wealthy areas (a disproportionate number of these belonged to areas that housed former colonial settlements).²⁰⁶ The seizure of such homes and the criminalisation of toilets could

²⁰⁴ See Mike Adjei, *Rawlings Death and Pain; The Inside Story*, London: Blackline Ltd.1994. pp.6–7. Journalist Elizabeth Ohene, former head of the BBC Africa Desk and Minister of Education under the Kufour administration, was forced into exile in London having publicly criticised the violence in her newspaper column in the Daily Graphic. Her articles from this period have been serialised in a book entitled *Stand Up and Be Counted: A Collection of Editorials That Redefined the June 4, 1979 Revolution*. Accra, Ghana: Blue Savannah, 2006.

²⁰⁵ A. Adu Boahen, ‘Ghana: Conflict Reorientated’, in *The Adu Boahen Reader*, ed. Toyin Falola (Eritrea: Africa World Press, 2004), p.489.

²⁰⁶ After Rawlings’ retirement, the succeeding government made questionable attempts to return the land to its proper owners. While the general public remembers how the land was acquired, through time the original ownership has been blurred. In a recent political scandal dating back to 2006, the government was forced to confess that they had ‘lost’ or misplaced the proper titles to the land. The confiscated lands at Ridge have been subject to recent investigations, as the Kufour regime appropriated the land to build luxury homes for visiting presidents during the nation’s 50th anniversary celebrations. Following the celebrations, the homes were auctioned, but the Ghana Social Security and National Insurance Trust (SSNIT) recently confessed that “they were not sure they had title to [the

be read as a dramatic symbol of the nation's demands for equality during the early stages of a socialist revolution. For a population that had suffered two decades of economic hardship and whose majority were used to shared latrines and bathing facilities, a private bathroom located in, and not outside the home, must have seemed the most decadent form of elitism; several toilets would have seemed profligate beyond reason. Considering how often these events are revisited in the Ghanaian press, it seems strange that no victims of the toilet laws are ever named. Perhaps being murdered for having access to more than one privy in-house is already too humiliating a tragedy to have undergone, and the silence in naming victims is a mark of respect.

Treating Rawlings' alleged criminalisation of the ownership of multiple toilets in-house as a rumour, how might the symbolic contents of this story be read? How did the humble commode become a symbol of psychic and social assault? Where would the 'truth' of the matter lie, and what is the social framework that would allow such an occurrence to be viewed as a legitimate and reasonable offence? On closer examination of the historical context surrounding these events, Rawlings' actions, while extreme, might not seem entirely without reason. Outside of Ghana's large middle class, most of the nation's poorer inhabitants then (as now) used shared facilities or public latrines, Nkrumah had a large building programme of 'compound houses for the middle classes where shared kitchen and bathing facilities were in central courtyards, although many of these were demolished under instructions of the IMF during Ghana's debt restructuring programmes of the 1980s.²⁰⁷

land]". It remains unclear who owns the deeds and the properties are presently under investigation by the Mills Government. Daily Graphic online record, 4/9/2009: "Ghana@50 probe stalls sales of houses, cars"
<http://www.modernghana.com/news/236384/1/ghana50-probe-stalls-sale-of-houses-cars.html>

²⁰⁷ Compound houses were urban dwellings where individual family units were clustered around communal kitchens and bathrooms, a layout which reflected a more traditional African arrangement of domestic space. Well remembered in the popular imagination, their construction died out with Nkrumah's regime. Journalist Elizabeth Ohene spoke of the IMF forcing Ghana to abandon compound house and social housing programmes in the 1980s at

Although educated middle-class Ghanaians might decry the practice, in reality there are no social taboos surrounding public bathing in poor areas, and at dusk and dawn in both rural and urban historic civic centres like Jamestown and Osu, it is not uncommon to see children and the elderly bathing outside of their homes in the streets. Then as now, public latrines remain, for the most part, drop boxes set over septic tanks with no plumbing or running water. In this context, the toilet – with its copious use of water and flushing mechanism – combined with the architecture of its location within the house, becomes an object, which serves as an immediate marker of social division and economic privilege for a large part of the nation’s population, in particular the urban poor.²⁰⁸

the Art in Social Structures Architectural Heritage conference in Accra, September 2007.

<http://artinsocialstructures.org/pressRoom>. For details of the effects of IMF Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) on debtor nations, imposing a “shrinkage of government programs and often, privatization of housing markets”. See Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums*, pp.62–63.

²⁰⁸ I attended the conference ‘Land, Services and Citizenship for the Urban Poor Initiative’, organised by the Cities Alliance Mission and CHF International, 6th–19th June, 2010 at the British High Commission, Accra. This information from the unpublished Back to Office Report that outlines the current state of sanitation and solid waste management as a critical development issue, although there have been a number of important studies undertaken by municipal authorities and foreign aid donor organisations, due to the lack of census report all figures remain estimates.



Figure12. British Monument to Pipe Born Water, Accra, Jamestown (1914). In the background the Sagrenti War memorial. The commemorative plaque has fallen off. Photo: Senam Okudzeto, 2010

The divisive discourse of plumbing stretches back to the period of British colonialism. Plumbing may, in fact, have been a colonial imposition on an urban population habituated to private wells and the morning practice of walking the short distance to the seafront, which still functions as a public latrine facility for Accra's urban fishing community. An ambivalent reception to this new colonial infrastructure is evidenced by the virtually unknown British monument to 'Pipe Born Water', which stands crumbling and neglected along Accra's central coastal road. It is placed strategically next to the ruins of the Sagrenti War Memorial; a commemoration which, alone, might cause offense, but taken together with its neighbour forms a deliberate condescension, as the latter memorial celebrates the British 1874 'sacking of Kumasi'—a date that unofficially marks the beginning of the period of British high colonialism in Ghana.

The placement of the two monuments together enforces the patronising rhetoric of colonialism as a development. Both monuments are wilfully forgotten and in disrepair. The monument to pipe born water is, in itself, strange as the Jamestown community must have had a good supply of water to thrive—it marks the introduction of potable water and not indoor plumbing for sewage. This remains alien to many of the traditional houses of Jamestown. Nonetheless, aside from being a colonial imposition, indoor plumbing was not necessarily anything that the coastal citizens wanted—preferring, as they did, to use the sea as a natural place for daily habits and morning ablutions, a habit that continues for many of the citizens of Jamestown’s fishing communities.

Contemporary politicians have a delicate challenge to negotiate these infrastructure challenges, as questioning them risks seeming like an attack on the dignity of voting populations. Access to water and adequate sanitation facilities remains one of the biggest challenges for Ghana’s urban poor and middle classes. These monuments suggest a century long conversation of failed promises undertaken by a lineage of both colonial and postcolonial political regimes. They illustrate the way that material culture and the built environment are reflective of social life; they are an archive of its history, its struggles and its mundane interactions. The city, its architecture and the built environment can be read as an ambient library of political and social histories, alive and waiting to be read.

CHAPTER II. NYIMPA NA O MA EDAN AHOM; 'MODERNITY', 'MEMORY AND MATERIAL CULTURE'

This chapter outlines critical ideas relating to the literature that grounds the research of this dissertation. It presents a historical overview of key themes regarding concepts of the term 'modernity'. Because modernity is widely understood as relating to a shift in Europe from a religious society towards a secular and increasingly industrialised society, this chapter examines its contradictions in relation to Ghana, and by extension West Africa, where modernity is often characterised by an increased attention to religion, with a focus predominantly on Christianity, and the tensions of a society that desires industrialisation, but may experience uneven technological advancements in relation to national goals. Due to the importance of religious belief in definitions of modernity, the first section of this chapter outlines a brief notion of the Akan sense of self in relation to spiritual belief and material culture, followed by a discussion of key concepts for 'modernity', 'material culture and memory' in relation to a broader academic archive of important literature relating to the themes of this dissertation.

An Akan Sense of Self

This dissertation considers the role of human agency in relation to material culture and is animated by the Akan phrase; *Nyimpa na o ma edan ahom* ('it is the human who gives breath to a house'). This phrase is used to animate the links between self, memory and material culture and introduce a very general Ghanaian philosophical discourse of being. As I do not speak any West African languages, I have relied on multiple discussions with friends and mentors who are fluent in the

Ghanaian languages Fanti and Twi to ground my understanding in meaning, as well as the writings of Ghanaian philosophers who have addressed the ontological nature of being in their writings. The decision to use this phrase as a framing device came in direct response to questions raised by the writing of African philosopher V.Y. Mudimbe (1982), who calls for a return to African languages as a starting point for examining African cultural cosmologies, and Achille Mbembe, whose texts *African Modes of Self Writing* (2002) and *On the Postcolony* (2002) deal with the problematics of African cultural constructions of identity, which inevitably fall into a comparative discourse between victim and historical oppressor as viewed through the epochs of slavery, colonialism and apartheid.²⁰⁹ As the following section of this chapter will explain, a number of thinkers link the concept of ‘modernity’ with a new found consciousness of self in respect to time, and questions that distinguish ‘subject and object’, in the sense that the object is what is experienced. Within Akan philosophy, all objects are intrinsically linked to human agency and animated by *ahom*, which means breath. *Ahom* is a subdivision of the *okra*, which is translated as the human soul, and resides in the *okra* with *nkrabea*, (an existential foretelling that encompasses the individual’s destiny and death), and *dzin*, ‘name’.²¹⁰ The *okra* is one of the three major component parts of a human being, the others being *sunsum*, the ‘basis of personality’ and *mogya*, the ‘blood’.²¹¹

As a kind of divine life force, all things in a human being’s life are animated by *ahom*; *Nyimpa na*

²⁰⁹ See Valentin-Yves Mudimbe, *L’odeur du père; Essai sur les limites de la science et de la vie en Afrique Noire*, Présence Africaine, Paris, 1988, and Manthia Diawara, ‘Reading Africa Through Foucault ; V.Y Mudimbe’s’Reaffirmation of the Subject’, *October* 55 (Winter 1990): pp.79–92, p.87 ; Achille Mbembe, ‘African Modes of Self Writing’, *Public Culture* Vol. 14, Vo. 1, Duke University Press, 2002. pp.239–273. Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, Berkley; University of California Press, 2001.

²¹⁰ Anthony Ephirim-Donkor, *African Spirituality: On Becoming Ancestors*, UPA, 2011, Rowan and Littlefield, 2021, p.91.

²¹¹ Kwasi Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars; An African Perspective*, Indiana University Press, 1996, p.17.

o ma edan ahom, means that a part of a human's spirit enters a home and animates it; literally, "it is the human who gives breath to a house". Material culture is therefore seen as inherently tied to use. A building without inhabitants will deteriorate as it has lost its source of ahom. Ghanaian philosopher Kwasi Wiredu explains that contrary to Western philosophical traditions, which distinguish between the notion of substance as empirically perceived, and abstract properties of a thing, Akan cosmology reads things as conscious and inherently mutable. For instance,

[t]he notion of the property of an object may be translated as its 'yebea' or 'tebea', which literally means 'way of being', or better, 'the way the thing is', or better still, 'the nature of the thing'.... [I]t does not make sense to conceive of the way a thing is as itself a kind of object, and second, it makes even less sense to envisage the existence of an entity which has no nature. Hence the metaphysical distinction between a thing and its properties cannot be expressed in Akan without unconcealed absurdities.²¹²

In Akan tradition, it is said that life begins when ahom/breath enters the body and ends when it departs. This understanding would encapsulate how 'the way of being' of a thing is literally tied to the notion of existence, as an entity that is in some ways animate. This might, in turn, explain why material culture is so inherently tied to and indicative of human lives, like economics, representing a history of exchanges and experiences, capable of encoding an archive of social relations.

Marx and Commodity Fetishism

While there are multiple discourses and movements within the fields of the arts, philosophy and literature that identify as modernist, or modern, it is worth noting that the influence of Karl Marx, deemed great enough to have seen him repeatedly voted the 'greatest thinker of the Millennium'.²¹³

²¹² Kwasi Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective*, Indiana University Press, 1996, p.98.

²¹³ In both 1999 and 2005 on Melvyn Bragg's Radio 4 show, Marx was voted the most important philosopher in BBC polls. See 'Marx, the Millennium's Greatest Thinker', <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/461545.stm> news of Friday

Marx does not produce the first discourse of modernity to emerge in Western philosophy, but his is arguably one of the most influential and grounds the thinking of almost all the contemporary scholars whose work this dissertation consults. Karl Marx argued that the rise of capitalism marked a radical form of social rupture that affects all forms of social relationships, grounding entry into the modern era. This rupture is characterised by the move from feudalism to capitalism and subsequent rise of the bourgeoisie, who are prime owners of the ‘means of production’. In the words of Marx himself (along with long-time collaborator, Friedrich Engels):

*The Bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his ‘natural superiors’, and has left no other bond between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous ‘cash payment’. It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervor, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms has set up that single, unconscionable freedom— Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation.*²¹⁴

Friedrich Engels, Karl Marx,
Communist Manifesto (1848)

For Karl Marx, the modern era brings violent social changes; as the move from feudalism to capitalism brings the rise of the bourgeoisie, the state aids their accumulative rise to power through exploitative trade. Marx observes that this trade is often centred in the colonies.²¹⁵ Marx asserts that ‘western Europe, the home of political economy’, is pushing a dominant universalist imperative that sees capital as an arbiter of ‘civilization’. Again, in the words of Marx and Engels:

*The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all nations, even the most barbarian into civilization.*²¹⁶

October 1, 1999 and Charlotte Higgins, ‘Marx voted top thinker’, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2005/jul/14/radio.books>, news of 14 July, 2005, [last accessed 19.12.2021].

²¹⁴ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, ‘Bourgeois and Proletarians’, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in Mortimer J. Adler (ed.), *Great Books of the Western World 50; MARX*, University of Chicago Press, 2nd Edition, 1990, p.420.

²¹⁵ See Karl Marx, *Capital*; ‘The Modern Theory of Colonization’, in Mortimer J. Adler (ed.), *Great Books of the Western World 50; MARX*, University of Chicago Press, 2nd Edition, 1990, p.379.

²¹⁶ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, ‘Bourgeois and Proletarians’, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in

Marx views ‘modern industry’ as “having established the world market, for which America paved the way”, (the ‘colonies’ to which Marx predominantly refers). ‘Africa’ features little within Marx’s writings, other than as the locus for the slave trade and material exploitation. Subsequently, this position has had the adverse effect of causing discussions of African modernity to appear as an addendum to the greater narrative of Western descriptions of the post-colony.²¹⁷ In general, Marx’s positions on Africa and Asia show a Eurocentric point of view.²¹⁸ Additionally, his orientalist opinions on Asia are highly problematic, reflecting his belief that European colonialism was ultimately a positive factor, necessary to overthrow “Oriental despotism”, Said (2003).²¹⁹

Central themes recurring in this research (although not always directly outlined), are Karl Marx’s concept of ‘commodity fetishism’; “where products conceal or reveal social relations”, read in the context of Ghana and her neighbours, and Paul Gilroy’s (1993) notion of *The Black Atlantic*, which examines historical links between the cultures within the so-called “Black Triangle” (the USA, Europe and the African continent).²²⁰ At the core of Black Atlantic culture is the acknowledgement and recovery of narratives of slavery, asserting the experiences of people of African descent into the central discourse of modernity, and charting the struggle for societies to assert humanity in the light of historical events that reduced Africans to the status of mere objects of trade. The artefacts of trade exchanged in the period of slavery have worked their way into the cultures that traded them, in both Europe, the Americas and the African continent.

Mortimer J. Adler (ed), *Great Books of the Western World 50; MARX*, University of Chicago Press, 2nd edition, 1990, p.421.

²¹⁷ Ibid. p.420.

²¹⁸ Thomas Meisenhelder, ‘Marx, Engels and Africa’, *Science and Society*, Summer, 1995, p.198.

²¹⁹ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Penguin Classics, 2003, p.153.

²²⁰ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* 1995; Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things*. 1986. p.5.

In the contemporary world, trade remains dominant in political discourse. Africa's present assessment of itself revolves around self-determination, and self-determination revolves around commerce—and specifically trade (although from an outside 'Western' perspective, this discussion is often dominated by the notion of 'aid'). From this perspective, material culture in the form of commodity culture remains core to Africa's sense of self determination. Although colonialism is over, empire looms in the form of transnational organisations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), World bank, EU and IMF, whose debt restructuring programmes of the 1970s and 1980s are said to have ensured African countries and market presence remained underdeveloped in order to privilege Europe and the USA.²²¹ Such processes again point to the notion of a hidden discourse of material culture and exchange as foundational to the African lived realities and uneven economic processes—and the idea that there is an element of political and economic systems that remains mysterious or hidden, is a characteristic of Marx's concept of commodity fetishism. Under capitalism, the economy is dominant, and relationships between people are subordinate to the relationships between things. Marx's famous text on the commodity fetish insists that the circulation of commodities allows the commodity independence from its original producers and the subsequent ability to form its own social relations, which are independent of, and in a sense surpass the social relations of exchange between the original producers of the commodity and its market. Karl Marx reads economic exchange as an archive of social relations:

*Capital is not a thing, but a social relation between persons, established by the instrumentality of things.*²²²

²²¹ Mike Davies, *Planet of Slums*, Verso, London: New York, 2006, pp.14–15, pp.62–64.

²²² Marx, 'The Modern Theory of Colonization', *Capital*, p.379.

This idea suggests that commodities are able to take on a life of their own, and that the trajectories of their social exchanges are able to create new and independent associations far removed from the original context of their production. Marx, again:

*A commodity is, therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of man's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour, because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour. This is why the products of labour become social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses. In the same way that light from an object is perceived by us not as the subjective excitation of our optic nerve, but as the objective form of something outside of the eye itself. But, it is different with commodities. There, the existence of the things qua commodities, and the value relation between the products of labour which stamps them as commodities, have absolutely no connection with their physical properties and with the material relations arising therefrom. There is a definite social relation between men that assumes in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order, therefore to find an analogy, we must have recourse to the mist enveloped regions of the religious world. In that world the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. This I call the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.*²²³

Karl Marx, *Capital Vol.1*, (1887)

Commodity fetishism describes the manner in which commodities are seen to contain human labour in an abstract form. The abstract relation between commodities and their origins, the political mechanisms that bring them into circulation under capitalism and the misleading attribution of value based not on the properties of a thing but on its manner of circulation under capitalism serve to annotate the way in which many of the artefacts to be discussed in this dissertation contain unexpected forms of exchange value, or misleading provenance, as in the following discussions of heritage tourism (which commodifies history), and 'African textiles'

²²³ Marx, *Capital*. Edited by Friedrich Engels reprinted in Adler, Mortimer, J. (ed.) *Great Books of the Western World*. 50. MARX, pub. Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., University of Chicago, Second Edition 1990, p.31.

(which are commodities identified as African, but are made by non-Africans and originate outside of the continent). The principle of commodity fetishism supports the idea of objects being able to encode alternative forms of memory, bearing in mind that commodities represent “a social relation between persons”.²²⁴

Questioning Modernity

With the passage of time, it becomes increasingly difficult to define modernity. The German philosopher of social science Niklas Luhman (1998) defines modernity as an existential condition, asking if societies that consider themselves modern can ever escape the “problem of self-description by a time line”. For Luhman, modernity is essentially a terminology tied to the passing of time. As he writes, “[w]hen a contemporary society calls itself ‘modern’, it identifies itself with the help of a differentiation from the past. It identifies itself in a temporal dimension”.²²⁵

Marshall Berman (1982, 1998) in his comprehensive discussion of modernity *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*, begins with its first description as

*...any attempt by modern men and women to become subjects as well as objects of modernization and to get a grip on the modern world and make themselves at home in it.*²²⁶

Berman’s definition hints at a wide and problematic set of references and ideologies that arise when the term ‘modernity’ is evoked, especially when used in the context of African narratives; that is, in the sense of modernisation as related to technological advances. Berman’s title ‘All That Is Solid Melts into Air’, is a quote from Marx, invoking a classic Marxist definition of modernity

²²⁴ Marx, ‘The Modern Theory of Colonization’, *Capital*, p.379.

²²⁵ Niklas Luhmann, (trans. William Whobrey), *Observations on Modernity*, Stanford University Press, California, 1998. p.3.

²²⁶ Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, Penguin Books, USA, 1998. p.5 (first published 1982).

that is characterised by huge sweeping social movements; the changing or reorganisation of class structures; the abstract dominion of capital within an increasingly bureaucratised state structure; the mass migration of peoples from rural to urban centres followed by the dissolution of traditional social relations; secularisation and specialisation; and the subsequent alienation of the capitalist subject.²²⁷ This definition remains pertinent to all realms of social life in our contemporary globalised society.

Berman's definition deliberately eschews the more orthodox and prevalent ideology of modernity that sees modernity as linked to constructs of development that emanate from a European centre. In the context of Africa during the period of colonialism, the words 'modernising', 'civilising' and 'Westernising' were all interchangeable, making contemporary and post-colonial narratives of modernity constructed in and around Africa inextricably tied to concepts of 'development' and 'progress'.²²⁸ This idea of a 'civilising European centre' spreading its influence was championed by the large-scale media response to American sociologist Sam Huntington's now highly controversial 1996 theory of "the Great Divergence".²²⁹ Huntington's concept of European superiority is echoed by many scholars, including Eric Jones, who penned an equally problematic text '*The European Miracle*' (1981).²³⁰ Although now clearly outdated, it is important to remember that these works were popularly debated throughout the late 1990s and they therefore remain useful

²²⁷ See Derek Sayer, *Capitalism and Modernity; An excursus on Marx and Weber*, Routledge 1991 and *ibid*, Berman.

²²⁸ Unfortunately, this development-based view of modernity dominates in African as well as in European scholarship. Manthia Diawara's semi-autobiographical book *In Search of Africa* repeatedly insists that modernity is an external force acting upon Africa, and as a force, one that is inextricably tied to the notion of 'progress'. Although much of the book is an attempt to confront and debunk 'Afropessimism', his writing continually returns to the suggestion that for contemporary post-independence African nations, modernity is a point of achievement centered in 'the West' that they have failed to properly attain. See Manthia Diawara, *In Search of Africa*, Harvard University Press, Second Edition, 2000.

²²⁹ See Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon and Schuster, UK: The Free Press, 1996.

²³⁰ Eric Jones *The European Miracle: Environments, Economies and Geopolitics in the History of Europe and Asia*, Cambridge University Press, 1981.

for clearly identifying the sources of the ideological construct of modernity that dominates discourse on Africa. The highly problematic, yet real understanding that modernity was something gifted, or denied by the presence or departure of colonial powers, has been countered by the arguments of historian Frederick Cooper (2005), who suggests that “colonial rule was empire on the cheap”, putting forth the idea that European colonials were less interested in modernising Africa and more concerned with extracting as many resources as possible with a minimal expenditure.²³¹ Cooper suggests that colonialism effectively ended because it was too expensive, grounding the conditions for the development of indirect rule through neo-colonialism. Nonetheless, this position contrasts sharply with African experiences under colonialism. Notwithstanding the rhetoric around colonialism, whether or not it was done ‘on-the-cheap’ and so forth, there are enduring scars that it left behind on African consciousness. The spectre of colonialism as having been primarily a civilising project continue to predicate narratives surrounding African societies through concepts such as ‘development’ and the achievement of ‘modernity’. Felwine Sarr (2019) underscores the psychological dimension of African experiences of modernity when he writes that “African modernity is a historical and psychosocial continuum resulting from a series of political events that have marked Africa’s history”.²³²

Pessimistic Modernity

The following pages will explore conflicting narratives of modernity from the perspectives of African academics. This section will ask how Africans have defined themselves and been defined

²³¹ Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, University of California Press, 2005, p.157.

²³² Felwine Sarr, *Afrotopia*, University of Minnesota Press, 2019, p.20.

in the context of ideological modernities. What different socio-political frameworks does the term ‘modernity’ evoke and what modes of modernism are African subjects seeking to encounter?

What or where is the modernity of post-independence Africa? What questions does the term raise and where are its most stark contradictions? Celebrated Africanist scholar Manthia Diawara’s semi-autobiographical book, *In Search of Africa* (2000) poses these questions as he charts a return to his native Guinea after 32 years of exile. During the trip, Diawara meets a number of prominent intellectuals and public figures and attempts to gauge the state of Africa’s modernity through discussions of historical liberation movements, negritude, pan-Africanism, and contemporary African politics. The primary framework for his dialogue is the concept of freedoms and in-freedoms, the post-colonial nation, the failings of democracy and the nature of African identity. Discussions of modernity in the context of the African continent are highly fraught, and often tied to the problematic history of European colonialism. Diawara writes:

*Our desire to become modernized has been awakened, and it cannot be denied. Women want liberation from traditional oppression; we all want access to education and material wealth; and we are tired of being ignored by the world. We know that the modern world is full of new and exciting things, and we want them for ourselves. Like all men and women, we want to be happy.*²³³

Manthia Diawara, *In Search of Africa*

Perhaps the most characteristic trait of ‘modern Africa’ as described by Diawara, is the prevailing obsession that modernity has passed it by, or is yet to arrive; an anxiety felt within the continent, and overly affirmed by the international media. Understanding that modernity implies a break from the historical past in order to address the present, these anxieties place Africa in an unstable and perpetual anticipation of its present. Diawara’s perspective is that,

²³³ Manthia Diawara, *In Search of Africa*, p.58.

...[i]f we think of modernism as a struggle to make ourselves at home in a constantly changing world, we will realize that no mode of modernism can ever be definitive.²³⁴

For Diawara, the central question of modernity rests upon the achievement of

...a truly modern subjecthood, including the right to freedom, self-determination, and equality under the law.²³⁵

Throughout the book, Diawara's voice appears more closely allied to that of his resident home, America, in its preoccupation with democracy as the unquestionable route to progress, and comparisons of Africa with the West as a model of development and civil rights. His dialogue centres around a strangely essentialist set of parameters that seem comfortable with the idea of a corrupted original African identity and, more intriguing still, the repeated suggestion that 'modernity' is an external force acting upon Africa and, as a force, one that is inextricably tied to the notion of 'progress'. He has an insistent belief in modernity as a point of achievement, best located outside Africa's territorial bounds. The following sentence is typical:

One always feels a sense of guilt leaving one's community for better chances, for an opportunity to become modernized.²³⁶

Through a dialogue with Guinean novelist William Sassine, Diawara begins a difficult discussion on 'Afro-pessimism' that reflects a prevalent voice of self-doubt within post-colonial culture.²³⁷

As Diawara writes,

Africans have corrupted modernity with their traditions and that modernity is to blame for disrupting African traditions and thereby their ability to survive in this world, turning them into 'unhappy mutants'.²³⁸

²³⁴ Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air; The Experience of Modernity*, Penguin 1982. p.6.

²³⁵ Diawara, *In Search of Africa*, p.56.

²³⁶ Ibid. p.42.

²³⁷ Ibid. pp.39–48 (chapter on 'William Sassine and Afro Pessimism').

²³⁸ Ibid. p.55.

Diawara's book also contains within it a strange inability to escape ethnic stereotypes of Africa's inherent inferiority to the West, as the following passage makes clear:

*That Africans are incapable of playing the game of modernity, which they pervert with certain aspects of their cultures, is a theory not only supported by Afro-pessimists but also driven by white supremacists, who find comfort in black people's position on the lowest rung of the socio-economic ladder.*²³⁹

Diawara criticises William Sassiné's Afro-pessimism, whilst failing to proffer an Afro-optimism in return, and in his invocation of the Weberian notion of the differentiation of social spheres, once again reveals his own Afro-pessimism, indicating that for him, a simple mimicking of the social structures of the West will provide a solution to Africa's failure to fulfil its modernist potential. In his own words:

*I believe that the salvation of Africa lies in Modernization, the creation of secular public spheres, and the freedom of individuals.*²⁴⁰

Diawara's constant invocation of the superior Western other; desire to reproduce models of the West within Africa, and the presumed failure of African modernity (as if it were an exam to be passed or failed)—in conjunction with his obvious frustration with the pace of post-colonial African political progress, highlights the observation of Edward Said; that a subject can become so entrenched in deconstructing the mechanism of its oppression that it ends up reinforcing or recreating it through constant iteration.²⁴¹

²³⁹ Ibid. pp.55–56.

²⁴⁰ Ibid. p.55. In Weber, modernity brings about increased specialisation and secularisation. Entities such as the law, economics, politics and the military become increasingly autonomous and governed by their own set of increasingly self-specific rules, an action Weber refers to as 'Rationalization'. Diawara fails to address the fact that the development of differentiated social spheres brings an increased inability to monitor and regulate such spheres externally; the World Bank, IMF, and multi-national corporations are good examples. See Derek Sayer's 'Capitalism and Modernity: An excursus on Marx and Weber', Routledge, 1991, Chapter four, "without regard for persons" pp.134–155.

²⁴¹ Edward Said in *Orientalism*, 'Orientalizing the Oriental', London penguin 1978, 1995, pp.49–73.

The modernity of Africa, as discussed by Diawara, amounts to a comparative discussion of Africa vs. the West, which sees modernity as a set of development goals, be it through the analysis of social events, or a series of mitigating social factors, which the subject may or may not be empowered to respond to, rather than a simple assessment of one's place in the present. Diawara finds it difficult to embrace a concept of modernity devoid from one of progress, and in particular he sites modernity as being situated foremost in the West and hinged on democracy. He fails to acknowledge that Africa is already engaged in modernity, both philosophically and technically—but performing in different directions and at a different pace to his ideals. Whilst he acknowledges the importance of Cold War politics and US foreign policy as substantial factors in shaping post-colonial Africa, his view nonetheless contradicts the possibility of a different modernity, centring on markers such as efficient transport and 'material wealth', and thereby ignoring the most obvious examples of modernity encountered within the countries of the Eastern Bloc under communism, where technological advancement and industrialisation were not necessarily agents of capitalism.

There are curious and, one feels, deliberate blind spots in Diawara's narrative. The first edition of *In search of Africa* was published in 1998, five years after the publication of Paul Gilroy's groundbreaking *The Black Atlantic; Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), which Diawara fails to address in any manner. Gilroy's study attempts to insert black identity into a Marxist ideological critique of modernity, arguing that slavery, and then its abolition created the framework for Western modernity and industrialisation. Furthermore, he states that the black diaspora experience is one that is characteristically modern, in its mass relocations, labour-based production, and hybridity. Gilroy identifies the locus of this modernity as "the black triangle"; an area delineated by the slave routes, from the African coast through Europe to the Americas, and goes on to analyse how this modernity continually renewed itself through constant dialogue between the diaspora

populations at points within the triangle. Gilroy illustrates this renewal through examples that range from the deeply political, to a more populist media culture understanding of what *The Black Atlantic* might be; giving first the examples of the early black independence movements of the Caribbean and US, (i.e., Toussaint Louverture, Sylvanus, and Du Bois), who were instrumental in mobilising pan-Africanist leaders within the African continent (Nkrumah and Senghor), and then through the more superficial analysis of the pop group Soul II Soul and their late 80s hit *Keep on Moving*, which was produced in London, and mixed in Jamaica by a black American record producer.²⁴²

Whilst Gilroy's book was the first of its kind to create such narratives, it remained weighted towards Black Atlantic cultural production made outside of the African continent, or in response to the African continent (with the exception of superficial discussion of pan-Africanist leaders).²⁴³ Like Diawara, he conducts a detailed study of Richard Wright's *Black Power* (1954), a strange travelogue through Nkrumah's revolutionary Ghana poised for independence, at a point where Wright had just resigned from the Communist Party and was beginning his disavowal of Marxist ideology.²⁴⁴ Besides his discomfort with communist socialism, the book is so entrenched in a discomfort with African people that it is difficult to gauge Wright's intention in writing it, and even more so his dubious place in the canon of pan-Africanism, especially given his introductory

²⁴² Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, pp.15–16.

²⁴³ There is substantial discussion of Richard Wright's travel to Ghana and 'Black Power'.

²⁴⁴ See Richard Wright, *Black Power*, Harper and Brothers, New York, 1954; Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, pp. 150–152, and Manthia Diawara, *In Search of Africa* pp. 59–76. Gilroy and Diawara are unanimous in pointing out the difficult tone of Wright's book, his discomfort with what he sees as the primitiveness of Africans and his harsh anti-Marxist, anti-communist stance. The book ends with Wright calling upon Nkrumah to militarise Africa in order to bring about the best potential of Ghana's citizenry: "A militarized social structure can replace, for a time, the political; and it contains its own form of idealistic and emotional substance. A military form of life, of social relations, used as a deliberate bridge to span the tribal and industrial ways of life, will free you, to a large extent, from begging for money from the West, and the degrading conditions attached to such money. A military form of life, will enable you to use people instead of money for many things and on many occasions!" Ibid, *Black Power*, p.349.

statement that “the West can meanly lose Africa, or the West can nobly save Africa”, which invokes yet another dimension of Afro-pessimism, and a distinct detachment on the part of African Americans towards Africans. Nonetheless, *Black Power* is useful as an assessment of its time; a chart of the first African nation to gain independence through the eyes of a (then) black American, and an amazing document of the early dialogues between African and African American cultural leaders.

Since the independence movements of the late fifties and sixties, popular perceptions of the African continent in recent years have been influenced by the Western media’s focus on its territories as beleaguered by conflict, internal strife, famine and disease—a focus that ignores a repetitive history of international policy and trade agreements, prejudiced towards protecting Western economic interests, and limiting development wherever possible, to the constraints of following a Western democratic template. The narratives of African modernity presented by Diawara, Wright and Gilroy arguably deal with an African *inter-cultural* diasporic experience that is generated through perspectives outside the continent, and are therefore particularly attuned to affirming, or deconstructing the hegemony of Western modernity. Mudimbe (1988) tires of “the decision taken to separate ‘real’ Africans from Westernised Africans”,²⁴⁵ gesturing towards the way that African voices outside of the continent have always been instrumental in Africa’s definition.²⁴⁶ A part of this dissertation raises questions of both inter- and intra-continental diasporas.

²⁴⁵ Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*, p.x.

²⁴⁶ Kwaku Larbi Korang illuminates this point with his discussion of Trinidadian-born George Padmore’s text ‘The Struggle of an Africa People from Slavery to Freedom’; What this titular gesture discloses is a New World imaginary “Africanizing” the slave experience, mapping the enslaved blackness of the New world onto the colonised blackness of the Old World. See Larbi Korang, *Writing Ghana, Imagining Africa; Nation and African Modernity*, University of Rochester Press, 2003. p.283.

As illustrated by the thinkers outlined above, African understandings of modernity reflect a more acutely felt anxiety over the positions of ‘time and self’ that struggle to refute a Eurocentric reflection of a term which is itself “sociologically empty”—a term relating to Max Weber’s observations that modernity’s rejection of religion in favour of secularism, creates a world devoid of “the metaphysical need for meaningful cosmos”.²⁴⁷ Marx also has words that speak to this concern:

*When the ancient world was in its last throes the ancient religions were overcome by Christianity. When Christian ideas succumbed in the 18th century to rationalist ideas, feudal society fought its death-battle with the then revolutionary bourgeoisie. The ideas of religious liberty and freedom of conscience merely gave expression to the sway of free competition within the domain of knowledge.*²⁴⁸

Conversely, unlike European narratives of modernity, the West African experience of modernity excludes the rise of a dominant secular society. Whether within the cultures of Islam or Christianity, religious faith underpins African cultural identities, exerting a strong influence on moral law.²⁴⁹ Religious tropes of modernity are particularly pertinent to Ghana where Christianity is very clearly associated with a good education, rejection of outmoded traditional superstitions and beliefs and identification with a superior, ‘modern’ lifestyle. This reflects contradictions between different forms of modernity that develop in tandem and relation to each other, which

²⁴⁷ Weber explains that religion creates meaning for social inequality, pain and suffering; the rejection of religious cosmologies creates an existential void devoid of assigned meaning or divine providence. See Max Weber, *Essays in Sociology*, New York, Free Press, 1946, p.281. Steven Seidman, ‘Modernity, Meaning, and Cultural Pessimism in Max Weber.’ *Sociological Analysis* 44, No. 4 (1983): pp.267–268.

²⁴⁸ Karl Marx, *Communist Manifesto*, p.428.

²⁴⁹ This is seen in regions or countries that observe Sharia Law, or in Christian dominated countries like Ghana, where Christian beliefs and scriptures are often cited in demands for enforcement of legalised homophobia. This first became evident in 2011 when then British Prime Minister David Cameron announced that Britain would no longer provide foreign aid to countries with ‘anti-gay laws’. See ‘Uganda Fury over David Cameron aid threat over Gay Rights’ 31 October 2011. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-15524013> and ‘Ghana refuses to grant gays rights despite threat, 2 November 2011. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-15558769> [last accessed 21.12.2018]. Religious leaders demanded stronger homophobic legislation in Ghana again in 2021. See also BBC News 11 October 2021, ‘Ghana Anti-Gay Bill: Ghana Church Leaders Intensify pressure to pass anti-Gay Bill, <https://www.bbc.com/pidgin/tori-58867937>, [last accessed 11 October 2021]

Sarr (2019) sees as always being in a process of ‘negotiation’, but which may contain multiple elements of defining factors expressed in socially contradictory forms that are nonetheless aspirational.²⁵⁰

Framing Modernity

In its most idiomatic sense, the term ‘modern’ it is often understood to mean “characteristic of the present and recent times; not old-fashioned or obsolete” or when relating to personhood, “up-to-date in lifestyle, outlook, opinions, etc.”. The etymological root of the word ‘modern’ comes from the Latin *modernus*, meaning ‘just now’.²⁵¹ These most simple definitions are united by an existential characteristic, which implies a sense of comparison and reflection in relation to previous teleological experiences. This sense of awareness also encompasses a sense of past, present and future, and the genesis of the terms *modern*, *modernity* and even *modernism* reflect a subliminal understanding of social history as having distinct phases or epochs that are unable to be revisited or repeated once assigned to the past. Subsequently, modernity is most commonly understood in relation to the development of a new understanding of the positions of ‘time and self’, which historically becomes determined through what (in Europe) is associated with a Renaissance development of ideas distinguishing ‘subject and object’.²⁵²

In the European experience of modernity, the tension between an increased awareness of time and self has its roots in the radical paradigm shifts of philosophical thinking that occurred in the periods between the Christian Middle Ages, Renaissance Europe and the Enlightenment; these periods saw

²⁵⁰ Felwine Sarr, *Afrotopia*, p.20.

²⁵¹ Lesley Brown (ed.), *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary On Historical Principles*. Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1993. p.1804.

²⁵² Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*, Duke University Press: Durham 1987. p.5.

a marked increase in exploration, trade, discovery of new geographies and developments in science and representation that culminate in the gradual separation of church and state alongside a transition from religious thinking towards the principles of ‘reason’, ‘freedom’, ‘self-expression’ and linear ‘progress’. The ‘Early Modern Period’ in Europe roughly corresponds to 1400–1800. The ‘Early Modern Period’ in European philosophy spans approximately from the end of the 16th century through to the end of the 18th century and grounds the genesis of Enlightenment thinking.²⁵³ Matei Calinescu (1987) remarks that the Latin term ‘modernus’ became widely used by Latin scholars in the late 5th century through a need to distinguish contemporary thinking from that of antiquity. The Enlightenment is broadly viewed as the beginning of the move from religious societies towards secular socio-political life and increasingly abstract, mathematical measurements of time, (i.e., no longer relating each day of the year to a Christian saint or needing to correspond to a Biblical sense of time).²⁵⁴ Nonetheless, Calinescu reads the sense of time and the need to distinguish eras and epochs within it, as an evolution of a distinctly Judaeo-Christian eschatological view of history.²⁵⁵ Why? Because by extrapolation one might deduct that it is the messianic timelines of Christianity with their linear drive towards rapture and resurrection underscore what Calinescu describes as a new awareness “of *historical time*, linear and irreversible”.²⁵⁶ This would mean that the Enlightenment idea of progress, converse to what might be presumed, rather than representing a clear break from religion, is in fact deeply rooted in Judaeo-Christian thinking; an idea that runs counter to the general reading of the Enlightenment

²⁵³ Donald Rutherford (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Early Modern Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p.xiii.

²⁵⁴ For an interesting discussion of the early Enlightenment tensions between devotion to biblical time and discovery of cultural records that preceded ‘Christian’ calendrical time such as Chinese and Mexican calendars, see Justin E. H. Smith, *Nature, Human Nature & Human Difference; Race in Early Modern Philosophy*, Princeton University Press, 2015, pp.104–105.

²⁵⁴ Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*, p.13.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

as marking an end to religious time in Europe. Consequently, although the Enlightenment is read as an end to the power of the Church in European societies, it marks the beginning of the establishment and rapid expansion of the Christian church in African societies. Through multiple processes, Christianity becomes inextricably tied to defining African experiences of modernity. The prevalence of Christian educational facilities under the aegis of colonialism contributes to the creation of tense of modernist binaries pitting ‘tradition’ against ‘modernity’; influencing the discourse of concepts such as ‘progress’ levelled at African societies, where the desire to ‘civilise or christianise’ Africans was part of an arguably larger project of commercial and “rational exploitation”.²⁵⁷

Increasingly, it is understood that multiple discourses and ‘alternative’ forms of modernity exist.²⁵⁸ The practice of analysing the genesis of dominant thought formations and the conditions that led to their production is described by Foucault (1989) as ‘archaeology’.²⁵⁹ This method of thinking presumes that historical world views are influenced by the scientific and cultural limitations of their individual eras. Foucault aims to define systems of thought. He argues that all knowledge is defined by systems of thought. Systems of thought are called epistemes, and by Foucault’s reckoning, there are several orders of knowledge. For example, the ‘modern’ episteme is defined through distribution and succession (thoughts that appear post Hegel’s narratives of the subject and Marx’s articulation of capital and accumulation). In this episteme, following the adoption of secular time and the drift from religious time during the Enlightenment, man is the basis of historiography. Man is the fixed point, but in order to have an external point of view, there is a

²⁵⁷ Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, p.199.

²⁵⁸ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large; Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*; Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, *Alternative Modernities*, Duke University Press, 2001.

²⁵⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Routledge, 1989.

tension between the recognition of the poorly historical nature of the 19th century, and the scepticism of linguistics and psychoanalysis (Freud). Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* is a work that investigates the study of knowledge produced under the formation of power.²⁶⁰

Foucault emphasises the importance of 'statements', that is, what has been said. Statements are rules, because their meaning is determined by their context in preceding and following statements. But they can also be events, because they can disappear and reappear.²⁶¹ Foucault looks at the production of truth meanings, which is to say rather than looking for truth itself, he looks at the history of the production of discursive truths. Working against the concept of history, he argues against making historiographical assumptions, or seeking evidence of goals or progress and suggests that history as rendered in the present may well be a mis-representation of the past. Instead of looking for continuity in a discursive entity, he looks for difference. That is why he continually returns to historical contexts, because that is how meaning is constituted; what rules remain, what new statements or rules emerge, which usher in change, etc.? In order to describe a discursive statement, one must also look at the rejected or forgotten.²⁶² Foucault analyses how certain 'truth claims' emerge during certain eras, based on written and spoken 'history'. His thinking looks at discursive formations in the context of forgotten discourses, minor and major, and the genealogical analysis, or 'archaeology' that would contextualise the work. In the words of Foucault:

*Archaeology tries to define not the thoughts, representations, images, themes, preoccupations that are concealed or revealed in discourse; but those discourses themselves, those discourses as practices obeying certain rules.*²⁶³

²⁶⁰ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish; The Birth of the Prison*, Vintage Books, 1995.

²⁶¹ Foucault, *Archeology*, pp.34–40.

²⁶² Ibid. p.169.

²⁶³ Ibid. p.155.

Foucault's acknowledgement of the idea that there are rules that control discourse and thinking within each episteme are useful tools in uncovering restrictions on knowledge production, especially in the context of African knowledge production.²⁶⁴ Nonetheless, Mudimbe (1982) rejects Foucault for setting up the same limitations on knowledge production rejected in his theories, in part due to his privileging European systems of scientific knowledge such as libraries, books and archives in the definition of bounds for epistemological thinking.²⁶⁵

Reading, locating and challenging the dominant influence of European epistemes of thinking in constructing African modernity drives a significant body of contemporary African philosophy. Mbembe (2001, 2002) identifies the conscious effort to exclude Africa from philosophical thinking as centred in the failure of Enlightenment discourse. From Hegel, to Hobbes through Rousseau, the negative attributes assigned Africans, reads them as savages with 'no history', or worse still, as '*bonne sauvages*' ripped from a 'golden age' to be corrupted from an ideal 'state of nature'.²⁶⁶ As described by Rousseau, "Among the savages ... Love of society and the care of their common defence are the only ties that unite them".²⁶⁷ Justin Smith (2007) argues that there was a conscious drive in late Enlightenment thinking to distinguish between types of human beings, all previously more or less presumed to be creatures created by God in his image. The 'specter of polygenesis' explains how the emergence of the category of race in the early modern period replaced the earlier idea of human beings as natural beings shaped by God, with the emergence of a system of classification that would place certain forms of humanity as being closer in nature to animals,

²⁶⁴ Manthia Diawara, 'Reading Africa Through Foucault: V.Y. Mudimbe's Reaffirmation of the Subject,' *October* 55 (Winter 1990), p.80.

²⁶⁵ Valentin Y. Mudimbe, *L'odeur du père ; Essai sur les limites de la science et de la vie en Afrique Noire*, Présence Africaine, Paris, 1988, pp.23–24, p.39.

²⁶⁶ Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*, p.1. See also Cook Mercer, 'Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Negro.' *The Journal of Negro History* 21, No. 3 (1936): 294–303.

²⁶⁷ 'Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Negro.' *The Journal of Negro History* 21, No. 3 (1936), p.297.

thereby rejecting the idea of a universal divine human nature in order to place racialised humans in a hierarchy of existence within nature. These concepts are derived from the notion of polygenesis (the idea that the races correspond to a God-given sense of purpose in life), a notion that was considered heretical in the 16th century given the primacy of the scriptures in the framing of any scientific argument, since all humanity is said to have descended from Adam. Indeed, John Locke argued that sub-Saharan Africans were the result of long-standing interbreeding with apes.²⁶⁸

Smith (2015), Mbembe (2002), Mudimbe (1982, 1988), et al., catalogue the influence of Enlightenment thinkers such as Hegel in creating foundational tropes in the discourse of philosophical modernity relating to race that help us to understand the genesis of institutional racism, whose epochs (loosely defined through the periods of slavery, apartheid and colonialism) are understood as having a highly attenuated scientific core.²⁶⁹ This in turn creates a tautological trap whereby African thinkers must constantly define themselves in relation to a discourse of otherness that denies their humanity. Daryl Wayne Fields observes Hegel's deliberate displacement of Egypt from Africa to Asia in order to support his claim of Africa as "that unhistorical and undeveloped land which is still enmeshed in the natural spirit".²⁷⁰

Historiography becomes an essential tool to approach analysis of the discourse of philosophy, criticising the narrative limitations created through linear Euro-centric binaries. However, as

²⁶⁸ Justin Smith, *Human Nature & Human Difference: Race in Modern Philosophy*, Princeton, 2015, p.7, pp.92–113, pp.167–170.

²⁶⁹ Valentin Y. Mudimbe, *Odeur du Père*; Valentin Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*; Achille Mbembe, *African Modes of Self Writing*, 2002 p.254; Justin Smith, *Human Nature, Human Difference*; Craig L. Wilkins, *The Aesthetics of Equity: Notes on Race, Space, Architecture and Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p.11; Daryl Wayne Fields, *Architecture in Black; Theory, Space and Appearance* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000).

²⁷⁰ Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, pp.172–190, cited in Daryl Wayne Fields, *Architecture in Black: Theory, Space and Appearance* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000), p.25.

Mbembe notes, “decolonising knowledge is not simply about de-Westernisation”. He goes on to review the dangers of state sanctioned xenophobia in African nationalist projects of ‘Africanisation’, as illustrated in the introduction of this thesis whereby both Ghana and Nigerian illegally expelled migrant workers.²⁷¹ Nonetheless, the history of Africa remains disproportionately written outside of its boundaries. Mudimbe’s *Invention of Africa* (1988) identifies the way in which Africa is constructed by ‘the colonial library’, a term that describes the large body of texts written predominantly in the 18th and 19th centuries by explorers, anthropologists, missionaries and colonial authorities that became foundational descriptions of Africa—in particular, its subjugation to Western European authority.²⁷² Victor Buchli, in his introduction to *Material Culture: Critical Concepts in the Social Sciences* (2004), remarks that the early anthropological archives were created in part to preserve a world thought to be on the brink of annihilation by the very ‘modernity’ British colonialism sought to bring forth. Artefacts were preserved with little attention to cultural context and, as such, the early anthropological obsession with collecting ‘penis sheaths’ related to the steam engine locomotive; the latter being an agent of colonialism that would bring about rapid social change.²⁷³ The juxtaposition of these two forms of material cultural are illustrative of the problematic way in which Eurocentric perspectives are preserved through the colonial library. Basu and de Jong (2016) explain how colonialism led to the creation of imperialist archives in Europe that “erased the history of the colonised”, and their work informs a shift in perspective aided by Stoler’s (2009) concept of the ‘archive-as-source’ to the ‘archive-as-

²⁷¹ See Achille Mbembe, ‘Decolonizing knowledge and the question of the archive’. Lecture given at the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WISER), University of the Witwatersrand, 2015.

²⁷² See Valentin Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa; Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge*, Indiana University Press, 1988, p.211.

²⁷³ See Victor Buchli, *Material Culture: Critical Concepts in the Social Sciences* (2004), pp.xxx–xxviii.

subject'.²⁷⁴

Equally important in deconstructing the colonial archive are writings by those who have never visited the African continent. For instance, Eze (1997) and Smith (2007) et al., analyse the evolution of historic academic racism in the fields of philosophy, illustrating how the evolution of a new distinction of time and self as presented in European Renaissance thinking into the Enlightenment was to have direct effect on how African subjects were perceived – and then eventually excluded – through deliberation by thinkers such as Kant, Hegel, Blumenbach and Thomas Jefferson from the ‘discourse of reason’ and ‘politics of the universal’—core tropes in modern philosophy.²⁷⁵

Chapter headings in Eze (1997) sometimes begin with related quotes. For example, Chapter 3: “Negroes...naturally inferior to the whites”; David Hume, Chapter 4: “This fellow was black...a clear proof that what he said was stupid”; Emmanuel Kant, Chapter 9: “The race from which we are descended has been called Caucasian...the handsomest on earth”.²⁷⁶ Eze’s reader evidences the argument that the Enlightenment, rather than excluding non-Europeans, has produced a concentrated, if not highly problematic ‘discourse of race’ that has been historically overlooked due to lack of interest on the part of European reviewers in the subjecthood of Africans, even though the core principles of the Enlightenment asserted the importance of freedom and brotherhood of mankind.²⁷⁷ A notable omission in Eze’s work is that of the only known African Enlightenment philosopher of the Early Modern period, Anton Wilhelm Amo. Amo was

²⁷⁴ P. Basu, F. de Jong. ‘Utopian archives, decolonial affordances: Introduction to special issue’, *Social Anthropology* 24 (1), (2016), pp.1–15. See also Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*. Princeton University Press, (2009).

²⁷⁵ Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, *Race and the Enlightenment*; Achille Mbembe, *African Modes of Self Writing*, 2002.

²⁷⁶ See Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, *Ibid.* p.29, p.38, p.104.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.* pp.2–9.

something of an Enlightenment experiment, born in the former *Gold Coast* and taken from West Africa as a child in 1707, most likely sold into slavery and then presented as a ‘gift’ to Duke Anton Ulrich of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel, who as his ‘godfather’ baptised him and decided to sponsor his formal classical education²⁷⁸. Amo earned a doctorate in philosophy and played a prominent role in the philosophical circles as a professor at universities in Halle (Saxony-Anhalt), Wittenberg (Saxony-Anhalt), and Jena (Saxony). He was accomplished in several languages, including Hebrew, Greek, Latin, French, High and Low German and he was skilled in astrology and astronomy and “was generally a great sage”.²⁷⁹ However, when his patron died, his investigations in the philosophy of the mind fell from favour. Smith (2015) deduces that apart from losing patronage, the otherwise gainfully employed university lecturer Amo fell afoul of increased racism stirred by the growing spectre of polygenesis.²⁸⁰ Against all odds, Amo managed to return to Axim in the Nzima region of his origin on the *Gold Coast*, where he acquired the reputation of a learned hermit and soothsayer. While Amo’s death can only be dated between 1759 and 1784, scholars suspect that he died as a prisoner under arrest at Fort San Sebastian.²⁸¹

At present, Amo is the only Enlightenment thinker from West Africa known to be trained in Europe, that does not exclude consideration of African philosophers working within Africa.

²⁷⁸ Although Amo’s academic life in Germany remains reasonably well documented, the sole document of his later life after his return to West Africa in adulthood comes from the writing of David Henri Gallandat, a Swiss medical surgeon who wrote a disturbing medical manual on slave trading. For an account of both Amo’s life and the significance of Gallandat’s report see William Abraham, ‘The Life and Times of Anton Wilhelm Amo,’ *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, 1964, Vol. 7 (1964), 60–81, and Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Lies that Bind; Rethinking Identity* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2018).

²⁷⁹ William Abraham, *Ibid.* p.60. See also Justin E. H. Smith, *Nature, Human Nature, and Human Difference: Race in Early Modern Philosophy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), pp.220–221.

²⁸⁰ Justin Smith, *Human Nature & Human Difference; Race in Modern Philosophy*, Princeton, 2015, p.7, pp.92–113, p.2, p.60, p.235.

²⁸¹ It is thought that Amo’s writings condemning slavery posed a threat to regional Dutch slave trading. Amo’s dissertation title was ‘*de jure Maurorum in Europa*’, or ‘on the rights of Moors in Europe.’ *Hallische Frage-und-Anzeigen Nachrichten*, 1747, cited in William Abraham, ‘The Life and Times of Anton Wilhelm Amo,’ *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, 1964, Vol. 7 (1964), p.69; see also p.80.

Felwine Sarr (2019) cautions against “the uncritical adoption of European temporal periodization” in the assembly of African history cycles.²⁸² The negative result of Eurocentric thinking locates ‘development, economic emergence, growth’ as the ‘principle concepts’ of African epistemological thinking.²⁸³ Sarr argues for the need to seek out new narratives of modernity with a discourse specific to African locales, citing the 16th century and drawing attention to the ‘intellectual elite of the Songhai empire—specifically, Ahmet Baba whose work was preoccupied with an African-centred reflection of modernity.’²⁸⁴ Sarr insists upon the need to escape the ‘historical and psychosocial continuum’ that reads West African notions of modernity as a series of political encounters with a conquering other.²⁸⁵ In the light of such prejudice, African modernities are viewed as a limited experience invariably shaped in response to European colonial ideologies of ‘modernisation’, whereby colonialism was promoted as a ‘civilizing project’. As a result of these factors, modernity becomes a term hinged on structural and cultural difference. Explaining the problematic construction of ‘Western’ cultures as normative in standards of ‘progress’ and a dominant discourse that asserts European geopolitical domination as part of an accepted hierarchy of development that has been long since established, placing African societies in a subordinate position in the hierarchy of ‘progress’ (itself a highly ideological temporal term). Frederick Cooper (2005) has argued that academic acceptance of this position is reductive and removes the impetus to source other experiences of African modernities. Hinged within the sense of anxiety over terms such as ‘progress’ lies an antagonism between notions of ‘tradition’, which is often viewed as a binary of modernity.²⁸⁶

²⁸² Felwine Sarr, *Afrotopia*, p.21.

²⁸³ Ibid. p.xiii.

²⁸⁴ Ibid. p.19.

²⁸⁵ Ibid. p.20.

²⁸⁶ Ibid. p.14.

Spiritual Modernity

European modernity is tied to an increased secularism in society, which Weber considered to be a result of the rise of science and rationalisation; contrasting intellectualism with religious belief. Seidman posits that Weber envisaged modernity as heading towards a ‘post-Christian’ world.²⁸⁷ Ironically, Ousmane Kane (2003) has shown how West African modernist experiences embrace religious practice; in particular Christianity and Islam, reading even the most conservative iterations of religious social practice as the desire for modernity due a desire to “mediate social change”.²⁸⁸ Kwesi Wiredu has pointed out that in the Akan tradition “there is no single word for religion”; the word *Anyameson* is an invention from Christian missionaries and therefore it is argued that, technically speaking, this term can only describe *Christianity*.²⁸⁹ Prior to the introduction of Christianity, African societies felt no need to distinguish between belief systems; thoughts that are echoed by Alatas (2002) and Joachim Matthes (2000), who make the canny observation that Islam has been Christianised through gaining the perspective of seeing itself as a religion, which reflects a kind of double consciousness gained whereby concepts that separate the seamless integration of faith create a schism that reflects the arguably less syncretic position of a religion that demands disbelief in other religious cosmologies.²⁹⁰

While the presence of Islam is linked to the Sahelian trades, the foundation of Christianity in relation to African modernities is linked first to the arrival of Europeans during the period of the

²⁸⁷ Seidman, *Modernity, Meaning and Cultural Pessimism*, p.269, p.277.

²⁸⁸ Ousmane Kane, *Muslim Modernity in Postcolonial Nigeria; A Study of the Society for the Removal of Innovation and Reinstatement of Tradition*, Leiden: Boston: Brill, 2003, p.2, p.68. Kane also gives an interesting foundation for the recent tensions between ‘boko haram’ (books are haram/European education is haram) and state authority, remembering that this is a terrorism that is distinctly targeted at Islamic elites whose embrace of modernity is seen as having gone too far in countries/regions already under Sharia Law. See p.68 of the above reference.

²⁸⁹ Kwasi Wiredu, *Universals and Particulars, An African Perspective*, Indiana University Press, 1996, p.46.

²⁹⁰ Syed Fared Alatas, in response to Immanuel Wallerstein, ‘Anthropology, Sociology and Other Dubious Disciplines’, *Current Anthropology*, Vol.44, No. 4 (August/October 2003), p.460; Joachim Matthes, *Religion in the Social Sciences: A socio-epistemological critique*. *Akademika*, 56, 2000, pp.85–105.

slave trade and then later to colonial enterprise. King Leopold's annexation of what was to become the Belgian Congo is remembered as having engendered horrendous genocide. Through his actions, some of Africa's worst recorded crimes in relation to colonialism began under the aegis of a religious evangelical enterprise.²⁹¹ Christian evangelism was consistently employed by Europeans as both a tool of, and justification for African colonialism. Comaroff and Comaroff (1991, 1997) present a study of Christianity in Southern Tswana, arguing that its instigation created new religious and cultural hierarchies and a subtle ideological oppression that eventually turned to allow Africans to employ this same religion as the basis for a culture of unification and resistance.²⁹²

The twinned enterprise of colonialism and evangelical Christianity form the foundation of Chinua Achebe's seminal modernist masterpiece *Things Fall Apart* (1958), dramatising the power dynamics of a feudal society exploited by colonialism, establishing social rupture as a major trope of African literary modernities.²⁹³ Tensions between 'traditional' African spiritual belief and 'modern' Christian thinking are best illustrated in the writings of African evangelicals whose clear explanations of the challenges of proselytising expose internal prejudice. Ghanaian Archbishop Peter K. Sarpong (2002) says of Africans "...there are ideas about witchcraft, magic and spirits everywhere in Africa. It is a spirit-obsessed life, a spirit dominated life that we lead in Africa".²⁹⁴ His book is a primer on Christian Evangelism in Ghana (and West Africa to a lesser extent), but is

²⁹¹ Marvin D Markowitz, 'The Missions and Political Development in the Congo.' *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 40, No. 3, Cambridge University Press, International African Institute, 1970, pp.234-47.

²⁹² Jean and John L. Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 1991; *The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, 1997, University of Chicago Press.

²⁹³ Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, Heinemann Educational Books, London: Ibadan: Nairobi, 1958, reprinted 1984.

²⁹⁴ Archbishop Peter K. Sarpong, *Peoples Differ: An approach to Intercultural Evangelization*, Sub-Saharan Publishers, (2002), p.18.

therefore a useful primer of Ghanaian belief systems.²⁹⁵ Sarpong argues for the importance of interculturalism in Christianity in order to respect cultures “and not destroy them”.²⁹⁶ Sarpong, however, asserts that African religion is “strictly monotheistic”, due to his argument that what we may interpret as ‘divinities’, are in fact ‘tutelary spirits’ or different manifestations of the essence of the supreme being. Sarpong does not discount the existence of a wide pantheon of ‘spirits’ that can be ‘good’ or ‘evil’, ‘non-human or non-corporeal and human and corporeal’. He also records that “we also have very good human spirits – the ancestors, good magicians, dwarfs – and very bad ones – sorcerers, witches, monsters of the forest, rivers and *sasabonsam*”.²⁹⁷ Sarpong’s explanation is a fascinating and unexpected stance for a Christian Archbishop, a major monotheistic religion, yet his willingness to accept, and even incorporate traditional African belief systems into Christian iconography illustrates the unique way in which African modernities are exemplified by a plurality of systems, none of which seem to ever wholly subsume or cancel one another out.

The tensions between Christianity and traditional African spiritual and cultural systems can be read as tied to a range of larger questions, often reflective of challenges faced by societies in the maelstrom of social change and therefore informing localised narratives of modernity. Moreover, the conversion to Christianity usually happened first in the lower ranks of society, especially in the earlier days of British colonialism. Christian subjects were protected by the colonial authority, whose laws extended further to converts than to those who were under the jurisdiction of traditional chiefs.²⁹⁸ Debrunner (1959), Cooper (1981), Simeon Messaki (1995) and Geschiere (1997) identify

²⁹⁵ For contrast see John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, London: Heinemann, 1969.

²⁹⁶ Archbishop Peter K. Sarpong, *Peoples Differ: An Approach to Intercultural Evangelization*, Sub-Saharan Publishers, (2002), p.25.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.* pp.95–97.

²⁹⁸ John Parker, *Making of the Town: Ga State and Society in Early Colonial Africa*, Heinemann, 2000, p.84

witchcraft as a peculiarly modernist practice with syncretic properties, meaning its performance is always reflective of contemporary challenges and tensions in society.²⁹⁹ Within these evolving social tensions the accusation of witchcraft becomes a tool used to destabilise the power hierarchies of feudal societies, whether transitioning into new African led power structures or European colonial occupied nations. As a result, African traditional religions often became misidentified as forms of witchcraft—indeed, as Messaki writes, “many local Africanists wonder how Western writers came up with fanciful names such as animism, idolatry, paganism, heathenism, magic and fetishism in relation to African societies”.³⁰⁰

Moore (2001) identifies a number of scholars whose research considers the “outbreaks of witch-finding cults”, which were linked in part to social ruptures brought through colonialism and periods of economic scarcity, in tandem with the work of “[m]issionaries all over Africa”, who in spite of “teaching a religion that cast out fear”, drove traditional practices underground and created an increased fear of witchcraft.³⁰¹ McCaskie (1981) is sceptical of the links between colonialism and witch-finding cults, presenting a number of historic accounts from the period of the 1920s onwards in the Gold Coast Asante Region that argue for the main factor being shifting power relations and subsequent social unease.³⁰² Gray (2001) examines the British colonial authorities’ struggles to outlaw both ‘anti-witchcraft practices’ and the practice of witchcraft in the *Gold Coast* during the

²⁹⁹ Rev. H. Debrunner, *Witchcraft in Ghana: A Study on the Destructive Belief of Witches and its Effect on the Akan Tribes*, Accra: Presbyterian Book Depot, Ltd, 1959; Frederick Cooper, ‘Africa and the World Economy’, *African Studies Review*, Vol. 24, No 2/3, Social Science and Humanistic Research on Africa: An Assessment (Jun–Sept, 1981), p.37; Simeon Messaki, ‘The Evolution and Essence of Witchcraft in Pre-colonial African Societies’, *TransAfrican Journal of History*, Vol. 24, Gideon Were Publications, 1995, pp.166–167; Peter Geschiere, *The Modernity of Witchcraft; Politics and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa*, University of Virginia Press, 1997.

³⁰⁰ Simeon Messaki, *ibid.* p.121.

³⁰¹ Henrietta Moore, Todd Sanders, (eds.), *Magical Interpretations, Material Realities, Modernity, Witchcraft and the Occult in Post-Colonial Africa*, Routledge, 2001, pp.8–9.

³⁰² T.C. McCaskie, ‘Anti-Witchcraft Cults in Asante: An Essay in the Social History of An African People’, *History in Africa*, 1982, Vol. 8 (1981), pp.124–154.

period 1927–1932, presenting the belief in witchcraft and the need to control it as being powerful enough that colonial authorities eventually had to grant the right to hold such trials to Native Tribunals in 1927.³⁰³

It stands to reason that while Christianity is an undeniable trope of modernity, so witchcraft has proven to be its ancillary. Azuawusiefe (2020) illustrates how contemporary African cinema enforces the imaginary of Christianity as the ultimate power for the eradication of spiritual malpractice (and illustrates how this has itself become a form of commerce in the mega churches of West Africa).³⁰⁴ These observations ground an understanding of major tropes in Nollywood cinema that employ narratives of economic and social uncertainty marred with occult practice. Such narratives suggest the marriage of traditional and Christian beliefs may not be as seamless as Archbishop Sarpong would point out, especially if the former becomes a scapegoat for the tensions brought through shifting power relations and economic precarity—although at a second glance, perhaps they are, since the belief in witchcraft becomes a justification for the importance of Christianity.

Furthermore, while Christian belief in contemporary African countries is often tied up ideas of evolution, access to education, and freedom from the yoke of tradition, Birgit Meyer (2004) illustrates how rather than reject religious cosmologies, contemporary African modernities are arguably characterised by an increase in religious Christian observance combined with hyper-

³⁰³ Natasha Gray, 'Witches, Oracles, and Colonial Law: Evolving Anti-Witchcraft Practices in Ghana, 1927–1932', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 2, Boston University African Studies Center, 2001, pp.339–363, on the right of Native Tribunals to adjudicate witchcraft trials specifically, p.348.

³⁰⁴ Chijioke Azuawusiefe, 'Nollywood and Pentecostalism: Preaching Salvation, Propagating the Supernatural.' *CrossCurrents*, Vol. 70, No. 3, 2020, pp.206–219.

capitalism, as exemplified by the mega churches of West Africa, which Marlene De Witte also identifies as being highly technologically, when engaged through the use of digital media.³⁰⁵

Jean Rouch, in his documentary *Les Maîtres Fous* (1955), presents a cult of foreign labourers, the *Hauka* cult in Ghana.³⁰⁶ The film remains banned in West Africa. Its footage shows a small group of minorities migrant workers as they in turn become possessed by the spirits of deceased European colonial officers. Rouch's film is an important document of economic migrants in West Africa, their journey from the northern Sahel to southern Ghana in search of work in Ghana's urban centres. The documentation of their migration and labour is itself an archive of emerging modernities. However, the religious aspect of the cult depicted represents an entirely different form of modernity reflective of the alienation of a migrant community in a foreign land. Rouch's misleading sensationalism, belies a powerful and important factor in *Hauka* cults, which was that their subjects always embodied the spirits of powerful colonial overlords, and in the past these overlords had been African. Paul Stoller (1994), makes a compelling case that the *Hauka* cults were, in fact, founded by victims of African conquests who were responding as Sahelian subjects of the Mali Empire, implying that it was a cult of conquest that historicised African colonialism prior to the arrival of European colonials.³⁰⁷

Women and Modernity

The history of women in Ghana in relation to politics and nation building projects—and, in particular, the realms of science and technology is an area that begs further study, although it falls

³⁰⁵ Birgit Meyer, 'Christianity in Africa: From African Independent to Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33 (2004), p.459; Marlene De Witte, Marleen. 'Altar Media's 'Living Word': Televised Charismatic Christianity in Ghana.' *Journal of Religion in Africa* 33, No. 2 (2003): pp.172–202.

³⁰⁶ Jean Rouch, *Le Maîtres Fous*, Films de Pléiade, 1955.

³⁰⁷ Paul Stoller, 'Embodying Colonial Memories', *American Anthropologist*, New Series, Vol. 96. No. 3. Sept. 1994, pp.634–648.

outside the scope of this dissertation. It is especially important to mention that Kwame Nkrumah, the first President of Ghana, had the vision of women working prominently in scientific fields “shoulder to shoulder with our men” in his early plans for the nation.³⁰⁸ This vision was clearly articulated in his inaugural speech of 1960 as Ghana became a Republic”

*On development, I promise to exert every endeavour to have Ghana’s human resources trained to the full in science and technology. The women of the country would not be forgotten. I can see even now before my mind’s eye, our women technicians in the factories, our women doctors in the hospitals, our women engineers building our bridges and even our women in overalls driving thousands of tractors in the fields.*³⁰⁹

A number of women operating in both the run-up to independence and first republic proved to be professional firsts in their fields, Hannah Kudjoe (b. Busua, Gold Coast, 1918) was a prominent nationalist, campaigner and the CPP’s organiser and propaganda secretary.³¹⁰ She was instrumental in several key historical events that led to the demise of British colonial rule, including leading a drive for the release of the ‘UGGC Big Six’ following their arrest after the 1948 shooting of ex-servicemen and subsequent national riots.³¹¹ Jean Allman (2009) describes the central political role Kudjoe had in mobilising women across Ghana and ensuring that Nkrumah remained general secretary of the UGGC.³¹² Alongside Dr. Evelyn Amarteifio, Kudjoe was head of one of the ‘two large women’s groups in the country’. Encouraged by Nkrumah, it was planned that these groups should merge into one unit, but male detractors within the party saw the political power of women as an enormous threat, in particular because the ratio of women voters to men was significantly higher (at about three or more to one), so that for the men the likelihood of eventually being ruled

³⁰⁸ Jean Allman, ‘The Disappearing of Hannah Kudjoe’, *Journal of Women’s History*, Vol.21 No 3, 2009, p.25.

³⁰⁹ Kwame Nkrumah, *I Speak of Freedom*, Panaf Books, London, 1961, reprinted 2001, p.236.

³¹⁰ Jean Allman, ‘The Disappearing of Hannah Kudjoe’, *Journal of Women’s History*, Vol.21 No 3, 2009, pp.13–35.

³¹¹ Ibid. p.17.

³¹² Ibid.

by a woman president was ‘a real and present danger’.³¹³ Allman argues that Kudjoe, alongside other prominent political women, was simply written out of history as the nation consolidated. Furthermore, the years of military rule pushed the historical memory of political women even further into the background.

Another remarkable figure in early post-independence Ghana was a US citizen who would eventually become a naturalised Ghanaian. Shirley Graham Du Bois (b. Indianapolis, Indiana, USA, 1896), was the founding Director of Ghana Television. Taking the role in 1963, she became the first female television director in the world, a fact sparsely mentioned in most Graham Du Bois biographies, if mentioned at all. This omission may be indicative of a general failure to acknowledge the historic role of prominent women in the fields of politics, media and technology, particularly in African histories. Or equally, one might put the lack of remembrance down to factors such as the systemic racism that informed her identity as African-American, and the sexism that would reduce her to being remembered only as the second wife of W. E. Du Bois.³¹⁴ In her position as director, she oversaw and initiated broadcast programming for schools in ‘Science, Geography and Literature’, as well as creating “an evening program for illiterates”.³¹⁵ Her remarkable work in television technology and political influence as a national advisor in Ghana remains arguably misunderstood. This may be in part because she was indicted in the US by the FBI for communist activity and in part because she held strongly pro-China views at the height of

³¹³ Ibid. pp.25–26.

³¹⁴ In the USA considerably more work has been done on her importance as a composer; she wrote the first opera by a black woman composer *Tom Tom* in 1932. Oberlin College recently recognised her life’s work through a symposium *Intersections: Recovering the Genius of Shirley Graham Du Bois in February, 2020*. For a remarkable work recovering the importance of her role as Director of Ghana Television see Gerald Horn, *Race Woman; The Lives of Shirley Graham Du Bois*, NYU Press (2000). For context about the importance of her position and President Kwame Nkrumah’s vision of media as propaganda machine, see P.A.V. Ansah, ‘Kwame Nkrumah and the Mass Media’ in K. Arhin (ed.) *Life and Work of Kwame Nkrumah*, Africa World Press, 1993, p.84. For a general history see Kevin Gaines, *American-Africans in Ghana; Black Expatriates in the Civil Rights Era* (2006).

³¹⁵ Gerald Horn, *Race Woman; The Lives of Shirley Graham DuBois*, NYU Press (2000), p.178.

the Cold War and was largely blamed for bringing W.E. Du Bois into the Communist Party. In order to be equipped for her job she took a course in television electronics in Japan, but also visited several European countries to study television networks, a trip that was noted by the FBI.³¹⁶ She was also Chairman of the Board of the Ghana Electrical Manufacturing Company, a project partnered with the Japanese company Sanyo (that would later be part of Panasonic Corporation).³¹⁷

The narratives of Hannah Kudjoe and Shirley Graham Du Bois have yet to be incorporated into the general histories of Ghana taught in schools, or publicly disseminated in popular fora. Although arguably foundational stories, their recovery remains fragile until more widely dispersed; an omission indicative of the subjective nature of history building and the need to continually search for new approaches to reconstructing the past in order to overcome historic prejudice.

Post Modernity

In 2002, eight years before Ghana was declared a middle income country, it was revealed that police officers in the city of New York scanned and emailed parking tickets and citations to Ghana, to be processed at a cheaper rate. Workers stationed in a subsection of Accra's largest internet café, were paid the same amount of money a month that an American would be paid for 2 hours on the job (figure 12.1). The New York Times reported in an article; "If you are caught playing your radio too loudly in Times Square your ticket does not just go to City Hall to be processed. It goes to Ghana."³¹⁸

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ *In New York Tickets, Ghana Sees Orderly City*, by Robert Worth, New York Times, July 22 2002.

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2011) describe the presumed succession of historical “economic paradigms” in modernity, where a given field of production is dominant, starting first with “agriculture and the extraction of raw materials”, followed by the development of industry and goods and, finally, the ‘paradigm, in which providing services and manipulating information are at the heart of economic production’.



Figure 12.1 Busy Internet, Accra internet café that hosts the company Data Management contracted to process parking tickets from New York. Senam Okudzeto, 2006.

The third phase, characterised by the move from the dominance of industry to the ‘production of services and industry’, is seen as “a process of economic post modernisation, or better, informatization”.³¹⁹

³¹⁹ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Harvard University Press, 2000, p.280.

In science and technology, post-modernism is more easily recognised in its restructuring of understandings of time and space—the internet being the most post-modern of inventions, with its hyper accessibility and lack of hierarchy or censorship of information.³²⁰ Socioeconomic post-modernity would appear to follow this logic, cantering on the fragmentation of the dominant modes of capitalism and multiple restructurings of global economy. Conversations about modernity and Africa are dominated by such discussions of economic modernisation, but clearly there is no historical succession in its case. All three economic paradigms exist simultaneously with continually fluctuating levels of dominance, depending on the region and the country. Given African markets' inescapable reliability on external regulations and trade agreements, there is an indication that several African nations (Ghana, South Africa and Nigeria, for example), will more likely transit from the first paradigm of agriculture and the production of raw materials, straight into the third, 'the production of services and industry', missing phases of development such as the industrialisation of agriculture completely due their positions as economic leaders within their regions, and an increased reliance on international trade to sustain their large populations.³²¹

Memory and Material Culture

Memory serves to affirm existence. The importance of memory is evidenced in the active efforts to eradicate cultural memory made by totalitarian regimes such as the Nazis and the Soviet Union. Such processes of erasure, designed to eradicate collective memory, are articulated by Connerton (2006), whose five different approaches to forgetting were outlined earlier in this thesis ("structural

³²⁰ This is becoming less and less true as web-programmes learn how to prejudice the appearance of sites in web-searches and IP addresses from 'non-secure' servers are blocked; for instance, try buying something with a credit card from an African IP address; impossible!

³²¹ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Harvard 2000, pp.280–281.

amnesia”, “forgetting as constitutive in the formation of a new identity”, “repressive erasure,” “politically expedient forgetting” and “humiliated silence”).³²²

Within the realms of human interaction, individual memories are used to ground new perspectives in historical discourse. However, it must be remembered that individual memory is different from history. History aims to define moments; to articulate them; and to describe their linkages. Memory, in itself, is simply an ability: the act of recall. The Roman orator Quintilian is credited with creating memory techniques associated with using the visualisation of objects in a room, or a journey through a building—a process we now describe as building a ‘memory palace’.³²³ Carruthers (1992) describes techniques of memory recall in the European Middle Ages that might use objects or architectural features to tie memories down with visual associations.³²⁴ Within these techniques, if memory serves to affirm existence, it could be said that objects, and by extension material culture, are used to affirm memory.

Material culture could be read as the physical accretion of artefacts related to human activity. Deetz (1977) reads material culture as a product of society; culture itself is formed through a series of ‘socially transmitted rules’, and material culture could be read as the artefacts produced through the performance of culture; the residue of human social activity in the world that is the “sector of our physical environment that we modify through culturally determined behaviour”.³²⁵

³²² Connerton, ‘Cultural Memory’, pp.319–322.

³²³ Michael Rowlands, ‘The Role of Memory in the Transmission of Culture’, *World Archeology*, Vol 25, No.2, Conceptions of Time and Ancient Society, (Oct., 1993), p.143.

³²⁴ Mary Carruthers, ‘How to Make a Composition: Memory Craft in Antiquity and in the Middle Ages’, in Susannah Radstone, Bill Schwartz. *Memory; Histories, Theories, Debates*, Fordham University Press, New York, 2010, p.22.

³²⁵ J. Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten: The Archeology of Early American Life*, Garden City, NJ: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1977, p.26.

Perhaps as a result of being directly tied to the cultural aspects of human activity, objects are often employed to aid processes of memory. Sigmund Freud links objects to *melancholia*; in particular, to mourning and remembrance of the dead through objects associated with them.³²⁶ Adrian Forty (1999) contradicts the idea of objects as pneumatic devices. As he writes, “[o]bjects are the enemy of memory, they are what tie it down and lead to forgetfulness”.³²⁷ Forty promotes the understanding that forgetting is a corollary function of remembering—to do one you must at some point do the other. Forgetting is not merely something that happens; it is also an active psychological process that is sometimes desired by individuals or groups. Nonetheless, what is forgotten, either wilfully or by accident is itself a record of knowledge production and by extension, history formation. Foucault has an interesting concept that he refers to as the ‘*field of memory*’, indicating concepts that are outdated:

*...statements that are no longer accepted or discussed and which consequently no longer define either a body of truth or a domain of validity, but in relation to which relations of filiation, genesis, transformation, continuity, and historical continuity can be established.*³²⁸

Material culture put into the service of memory sees memory increasingly housed in prosthetic devices. As Connerton writes:

*...the last 150 years have witnessed a revolution in communication as radical as that which resulted from the invention of printing, and long before that, the invention and diffusion of writing. Photography, phonography, the cinema, radio, television, video and the Internet have together created a new collective memory. Superimposing a new stratum of memory on to that circulated by writing, these inventions have made even greater quantities of memory potentially accessible.*³²⁹

³²⁶ Giorgio Agamben, ‘The lost object’, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*, (trans. Martinez, Ronald, L.), *Theory and History of Literature*, Vol. 69. University of Minnesota Press, 1993, pp.19–21.

³²⁷ Adrian Forty, *The Art of Forgetting*, p.186.

³²⁸ See Foucault, *Archeology*, p.64.

³²⁹ Connerton, *Cultural Memory*, p.317.

The use of external storage systems such as digital recordings, film and photographs created a shift in how memory functions. Viewers are given the false impression that they are reliving historic events and historical trauma becomes reduced to the way it has, or has not been assimilated into public media records.³³⁰

Pierre Nora's (1989, 1998) concept of *lieux de mémoire* proves a critical framework for opening up the possibilities of memory, showing how objects and sites can become a trigger for collective processes of historicisation and play a role in significant social shifts in the understanding and function of memory in the modern era, whereby memory ceases to be a cognitive function and becomes increasingly external to the individual's body.³³¹ *Lieux* can be understood as 'sites' of memory. They are formed as societies and technologies progress and move from cognitive forms of memory to written memory. Memory then becomes something that is housed in statues and memorials but also captured in machines stored as binary data. Nora refers to any material or immaterial culture able to trigger or evoke a communal sense of recollection or heritage, as *lieux de mémoire*.

Nora's project is situated in France, where the proliferation of information and drastic social changes, such as the decline of agrarian societies in favour of industrialised agriculture, brought about a need to bridge the gap between personal memory and the construction of history. In France, unorthodox vehicles for mobilising social memory came into play, ranging from the recreation of lost peasant recipes, through the national anthem, to buildings no-longer extant (like the palace of the Tuileries), to the re-enactment of important social events. The idea of a 'sense' evoked through

³³⁰ Ibid. p.318.

³³¹ See Eds. Nora, Pierre and Kritzman, Lawrence D. trans Arthur Goldhammer. *Realms of memory: The construction of the French Past/ under the direction of Pierre Nora*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1992.

‘sites’ of memory is important. *Lieux* can historicise events not directly experienced by the viewer and give a sense of remembrance accompanied by a strong emotional response, even when the memory is learned, or culturally imposed.

In *Capital*, Marx suggests that material production is the core enterprise upon which human society is hinged, describing “the life-process of society” as being “based upon the process of material production”. J. Deetz (1976) describes material culture as the physical accretion of human thought, which in turn, directly informs and is informed by social interactions:

*Material Culture, it is often correctly said, is not culture but its product. Culture is socially transmitted rules for behaviour, ways of thinking about and doing things. We inherit our culture from the teachings and examples of our elders and our peers rather than from genes, whether it is the language we speak, the religious beliefs that we subscribe to, or the laws that govern our society. All such behaviour is reflected in subtle and important ways in the manner in which we shape our physical world. Material culture is usually considered to be roughly synonymous with artefacts, the vast universe of objects used by mankind to cope with the physical world, to facilitate social intercourse, and to benefit our state of mind. A somewhat broader definition of material culture is useful in emphasizing how profoundly our world is the product of our thoughts, as that sector of our physical environment that we modify through culturally determined behaviour.*³³²

D. Slater (1999) has suggested that culture is now moving towards “dematerialization” and in this context there is “a breakdown or ‘implosion’ of the difference between representation and reality, sign and material good, culture and economy”.³³³ This idea is evidenced by the radical turn internet culture has brought to society, whereby forms of communication such as social networking, blogging and the subsequent narratives of consumption realised in these forms become themselves material currency. Similarly, Victor Buchli (2004) sees material culture as becoming more “ethereal and problematic” placing the analysis of the processes by which things are judged

³³²J. Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten: The Archeology of Early American Life*, Garden City, NJ: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1977, p.26.

³³³ D. Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1997, p.182.

material or immaterial at the forefront of material culture studies.³³⁴ Victor Buchli's five volume edited anthology *Material Culture; Critical Concepts in the Social Sciences*, provides an invaluable historical timeline of critical texts showing how Material Culture Studies has developed through the fields of archaeology and anthropology to incorporate the work of economists, philosophers, geographers, political scientists, psychologists, historians and social scientists.³³⁵ The field's earliest protagonists were often colonial officers, sent to survey and control both people and landscape.

Buchli (2013) underscores the fact that colonial conquest inevitably begins with an assessment of the built environment.³³⁶ The strategic analysis of the potential subject nations' territorial environment by would-be colonial powers, is the basis for both military and economic conquest, illustrated by Thomas Bowdich's travelogue *Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee* (1819).³³⁷ Bowdich was sent as an agent of the Royal Africa Company "to deprecate these calamities, to conciliate so powerful a monarch, and to propitiate an extension of commerce".³³⁸ The 'Mission', describes Kumasi as a golden El Dorado while also providing precise architectural illustrations of the Ashanti court (nineteenth-century photographs later confirmed their accuracy). Echoing Edeny (1990), who details that observational sketches of local people, structures, flora and fauna were also undertaken alongside the scientific mapping projects of colonial officers in

³³⁴ Victor Buchli, (ed.) 'General Introduction', *Material Culture; Critical Concepts in the Social Sciences*, Vol. 1.1, Routledge, 2004, p.xxxviii.

³³⁵ This timeline begins with A.L-F Pitt-Rivers, *On the Evolution of Culture* (1875) and ends with Carl Knapett's 2002 essay 'Photographs, Skeumorphs and Marionettes: Some Thoughts on Mind, Agency and Object'. See Buchli, *Material Culture*, pp.xvii–xxiv.

³³⁶ Victor Buchli, *An Anthropology of Architecture* (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2013), Chapter 1, 'The Long 19th Century,' pp.19–45.

³³⁷ Thomas Edward Bowdich, 'Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee', Cambridge Library Collection, (first published 1819), 2014.

³³⁸ 'Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee' quoted in Alan Lloyd, *The Drums of Kumasi; The Story of the Ashanti Wars* (London: Longmans, 1964), 28. See also 28–35. For further reading on architecture and colonial conquest see Victor Buchli, *An Anthropology of Architecture* (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2013), especially chapter 1, 'The Long 19th Century', pp.19–45.

India.³³⁹ Said (1994) illustrates how political constructions of empire were invariably accompanied by a second form of cultural conquest—that which aimed to give a false sense of ownership over the cultural artefacts of the colonial territory, again placing descriptions of material culture at the fore in strategies of control and exploitation.³⁴⁰

The rich archive of descriptions and drawings of the built environment materials present in European travelogues and colonial records contradicts the prevalent prejudice of the time that read African societies as lacking architectural histories. Nonetheless, the field of African architecture and readings of the built environment presents a relatively new discourse in Material Culture Studies. In recent years, several significant publications have arisen to counter this prejudice dealing within the subject of African architecture in relation to theories of race, space, modernism, memory and power. For instance, Nnamdi Elleh (2002), looks at a monumental public architecture in Morocco and Côte d’Ivoire and reads it as emerging from the discourse of colonial architectural significations of power.³⁴¹ On the other hand, Manuel Herz, reads architecture in the context of an often optimistic assertion of the goals and ideological aspirations of emerging post nations.³⁴² Leslie Lokko (2020), Irene Cheng (2015, 2020), Charles L. Davis (2020) and Mabel O. Wilson (2020), working within the field of race and architecture, illustrate how architecture can produce responses to race that can be understood through a series of imposed categories of difference and exclusion, which often enforce the prejudice of racial taxonomy.³⁴³ Araya Asgedom (2000)

³³⁹ Mathew Edeny, *Mapping an Empire, The Geographical Construction of India 1765–1843*. University of Chicago Press, 1990.

³⁴⁰ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, Vintage Press, 1994, p.40, p.60.

³⁴¹ Nnamdi Elleh, *Architecture and Power in Africa*, Praeger, Westport Connecticut, London, 2002.

³⁴² Manuel Herz, et al. (eds.), *African Modernism, The Architecture of Independence; Ghana, Senegal, Côte d’Ivoire, Kenya, Zambia*, Park Books, 2015.

³⁴³ See Lokko, Leslie *White Papers, Black Marks; Architecture, Race, Culture*, Athalone Press. 2000, pp. 18–20; Irene Cheng, ‘Race and Architectural Geometry: Thomas Jefferson’s Octagons’, *J19 The Journal of Nineteenth Century Americanists*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Vol. 3, No. 1, Spring 2015; Irene Cheng, Charles L Davis

struggles with the dilemma of responding to a contemporary practice that can no longer locate a “fully autochthonous” architectural practice, indicating the need to examine ‘repetition’ in relation to the social uses of space, whose unique quotidian rhythms often provide a framework for identifying local cultural identities.³⁴⁴ Within this framework sound becomes a tool for analysing cultural specificities within architectural spaces, looking at sounds of daily life which allow ‘contaminated’ spaces to reveal their own polyphonic archives of practice. By extension, Asgedom reads the construction of percussive music/drumming in itself as a form of architectural practice, because it also takes into account how acoustics react to space and form to alter sound.³⁴⁵ This unusual essay reminds us that at its core, architecture is an analysis of how bodies move through time and space—it is both an anticipation, analysis and record of how human beings conduct their lives. Rarely do we ask for acoustic archives of the built environment, yet they may contain remarkable data that reveal new kinds of social narrative.

As the phenomenological question of what constitutes objects in material culture comes increasingly to the fore, authors such as John Searle (1995), Bruno Latour (1996), Ron Eglash (2006) and Ian Bogost (2012) have shown how research from the fields of the technical and applied sciences such as mathematics, biology, particle physics and nanotechnology is becoming increasingly important for broadening our understanding of the functions and forms of material culture in society.³⁴⁶ Within these frameworks Material Culture Studies expands to become a

II, Mabel O Wilson. *Race and Modern Architecture: A Critical History from the Enlightenment to the Present*, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020.

³⁴⁴ See Araya Asgedom ‘The Unsounded Space’ in Leslie, Lokko (ed.), *White papers, Black Marks, Architecture, Race, Culture*, Athalone Press, 2000, pp.237–275.

³⁴⁵ Ibid. pp.242–245.

³⁴⁶ See John Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, Penguin, 1995, p.6–7; Bruno Latour, *Aramis or The Love of Technology*, (trans. Catherine Porter), Harvard University Press, 1996; Ron Eglash, ‘Technology as Material Culture’, in *The Handbook of Material Culture*, p.330, pp.336–338; Ian Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology*, pp.9–10, pp.14–19, p.28.

discourse that has applications beyond the realm of human senses into what we learn to exist through the increased sensitivity of scientific instruments.

Rick Altman (1992) explains sound as a form of material culture, created by moving particles at a molecular level:

*Three elements are required for the production of any sound. First there must be a vibration, such as that of the vocal chords or a violin string. Second, the vibration must take place in a medium whose molecules can be set in motion, such as air, water, or a railroad rail (sound cannot be transmitted through a vacuum). Third, the transmitting medium must absorb and transmit the original vibrations in the form of changes in pressure.*³⁴⁷

Sound – and by extension music – is synonymous with African cultures, and yet it is not read as constitutive of material culture. Stuart Hall (1997) identifies ‘culture’ as underpinning all social interactions and inventions that “carry meaning and value for us, which need to be meaningfully interpreted by others, or which depend on meaning for their effective operation. Culture in this sense permeates all of Society”.³⁴⁸ A remarkable modernist history of Ghana is available through the work of several musicologists. Beyond the analysis of the physical properties of sound, Plageman (2012) shows how early 20th century ‘proto high-life’ in Ghana brought its own new material culture of consumption and display, empowering a new class of young urban workers: “[b]y 1920 *asiko* had gained repute as a new marker of social and political force: young people with access to cash and imported items...eagerly displayed their fortune and independence through dress, adornment, or other materials of prestige”.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁷ Rick Altman, ‘The Material Heterogeneity of Recorded Sound’ in *Sound Theory, Sound Practice*, New York: Routledge, 1992, p.17.

³⁴⁸ Stuart Hall (ed.). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, London SAGE/The Open University. 1997. p.3.

³⁴⁹ Nathan Plageman, *Highlife Saturday Night*, Indiana University Press, 2012, p.50.

These items of prestige were undeniably modern artefacts often taken to rural areas by returning migrant workers, who might use them strategically in performative displays of newly acquired material wealth to impress home communities. Accessories such as “umbrellas, handkerchiefs, hats, goggles”, as well as alcohol and cigarettes were brandished to the accompaniment of music.³⁵⁰ In descriptions of the evolution of Ghanaian nationalist identities, orthodox surveys of Ghanaian political and economic histories tend to neglect the field of the cultural capital of music, and yet as Katherina Schramm (2000) has argued in her essay *The Politics of Dance: Changing Representations of the Nation in Ghana*, music, theatre and popular broadcasts are inextricably linked to nation building.³⁵¹ Charting the vicissitudes of conditions and materials produced by the cultural industries can often lead to a finer understanding of socio-historic conditions of everyday life. Tom Collins, a Ghanaian academic and former executive of the Musicians Union of Ghana (MUSIGA) details how much of President Nkrumah’s populist success was buoyed through his support of the local entertainments industry through the state-run monopoly Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC).³⁵² Nkrumah was particularly encouraging of pan-Africanist genres in theatre and high-life and their attempts to develop “the African personality and pan-African ideals of the independence ethos”.³⁵³ Having enjoyed so much initial state support, the subsequent development of Ghana’s music industry became an unfortunate mirror of Ghana’s changing political ideologies, reaching its absolute nadir in the late 1970s when the music industry collapsed alongside the general economy.

³⁵⁰ Ibid. p.52.

³⁵¹ Katharina Schramm, ‘The Politics of Dance, Changing Representations of the Nation in Ghana’. *Africa Spectrum*, Vol. 35, No 3 (2000), pp.339–58.

³⁵² John Collins, ‘Ghanaian Popular Music’, *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana, New Series, No 9*, 2005 p.22.

³⁵³ Ibid. p.21.

Following the economic mismanagement of the Acheampong military regime in the years following 1972, the decade saw the mass migration of Ghanaian musicians abroad.³⁵⁴ Those that remained faced further challenges during the Rawlings military regime, when a two-and-a-half-year curfew (1982–84) put a complete stop to evening and night-time performances. The last nail in the coffin came in the form of a 160% luxury goods tax on musical equipment and the simultaneous downsizing of music in school curricula. These last two events meant that when the economy recovered in the late 1980s, there were substantially less skilled musicians' resident in Ghana; a fact that Collins cites as leading to the development of turntable culture and new electronic based genres of music more akin to techno and hip hop. Although the kinds of music produced following this period were sharply altered, the industry itself grew again, mirroring the more liberal political and economic policies of the mid-nineties. By 1999 the International Federation of Phonogram Industries estimated the internal revenue of Ghana's cassette and CD sales at "the equivalent of 25 million dollars per year".³⁵⁵

Bill Maurer's (2006) text *In the Matter of Marxism* argues that Material Culture Studies is inextricably premised by Marxist analytical perspectives that have inspired a number of theoretical approaches, including the recent developments in 'Thing' theory.³⁵⁶ These theories are particularly indebted to Marxist constructions of commodity fetishism, taking their cue from Marx's assertion that "there is a definite social relation between men, that assumes in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things."³⁵⁷ Arjun Appadurai's influential edited collection of essays *The Social Life of Things* (1986) argues for a methodological reversal of Marx's emphasis, shifting

³⁵⁴ Ibid. p.26.

³⁵⁵ Ibid. p.36.

³⁵⁶ Bill Maurer, 'In the Matter of Marxism', 2006. Marx, Extract from *Capital, Vol. I* reprinted in Buchli, *Material Culture*, p.54.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

focus from the means and moment of production, towards the ‘things in motion’, that is, the ‘total trajectory’ of things from the moment of production.³⁵⁸ Within this, things may have shifting valencies, moving from commodity to sacred, or symbolic and political object and back. Appadurai reads things as encoding and illuminating human behaviour and not the other way around. This approach towards ‘relation between things’ and their influence on human behaviour allows the understanding that things can be social agents with social lives. This logic is applied to Appadurai’s later work *Modernity at Large* (1996), which offers a corrective to the notion that capitalism and globalisation produced homogenised cultures, arguing that mass produced globally circulating artefacts may nonetheless have very specific cultural uses and applications.³⁵⁹

Appadurai stresses that there is a cultural dimension to globalisation. It is not, as we often fear, a totalising, homogenising force, although it may have very sinister applications and effects (as his discussion on factors for ethnic violence explain). Contrary to some of the more problematic theories, such as the ‘great diffusion’, writing helps to us to understand that the roots of globalisation are deeply rooted in history and its processes and applications are never even.³⁶⁰ Furthermore, the same artefacts of globalisation, rather than flattening societies, undergo a “localising process” that underscore the ways in which the major tropes of modernity are experienced in different ways by different peoples.³⁶¹ Predicating the trajectory of things, Appadurai’s discussion of the movements or socialisation of things argues for a carefully considered logic of ‘methodological fetishism’, which is explained as being “in part a corrective to the tendency to excessively socialize things”, while nonetheless using an analysis of material

³⁵⁸ Appadurai, *Social Life of Things*, p.13.

³⁵⁹ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

³⁶⁰ Ibid. p.11.

³⁶¹ Ibid. p.17.

culture to highlight economic and social difference through things that are readily available in multiple societies.³⁶² Increasingly, the role of the mass media contributes to localising processes in material culture; idiomatic realms of telecommunication can present populist narratives of material culture that in themselves illustrate the five dimensions of global cultural flows described by Appadurai; *ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes and ideoscapes*, asking how constructions of history and memory can be formed through objects narrated in conversations held over the internet.³⁶³

In John Searle's *The Construction of Social Reality*, he has the following to say:

The world consists entirely of entities that we find it convenient, though not entirely accurate to describe as particles. These particles exist in fields of force, and are organized into systems. The boundaries of systems are set by causal relations. Examples of systems are mountains, planets, H₂O, molecules, rivers, crystals, and babies. Some of these systems are living systems; and our little earth, the living systems contain a lot of carbon-based molecules, and make very heavy use of hydrogen, nitrogen, and oxygen. Types of living systems evolve through natural selection, and some of them have evolved certain sorts of cellular structures, specifically, nervous systems capable of causing and sustaining consciousness. Consciousness is a biological, and therefore physical, though of course mental, feature of certain higher level nervous systems, such as human brains and a large number of different types of animal brains.³⁶⁴

Within the context of Searle's observations that "consciousness is a biological and therefore physical" entity, something as abstract as human thought may also be considered as constitutive of material culture.

Bill Brown (2004) has developed theory of things, drawing upon Heidegger's tool analysis, in order to draw a distinction between 'things' and 'objects'—a thing being an object that no longer

³⁶² Appadurai, *Social Life of Things*, p.5.

³⁶³ Ibid. p.33.

³⁶⁴ John Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, Penguin, 1995, p.6.

works, or has ceased to function in the expected manner.³⁶⁵ A part of Brown's thing theory examines the part of objects that are receding, or elude us—those parts that “prevent us from thinking about objects, let alone things...”.³⁶⁶ This draws upon Heidegger's notion that there is a part of things that elude our ability to assess or experience them. For instance,

*For in addressing these entities as 'Things' (res), we have tacitly anticipated their ontological character. When analysis starts with such entities and goes on to inquire about Being, what it meets is Thinghood and Reality. Ontological explication discovers, as it proceeds, such characteristics of Being as substantiality, materiality, extendedness, side-by-sideness, and so forth. But even pre-ontologically, in such Being as this, the entities which we encounter in concern are proximally hidden.*³⁶⁷

Heidegger illustrates an ontological distinction in the concept of existence; things are subject to definitions and their properties. Existence can only be experienced through interaction with the world; through language, description and experience. There is a limit to how much you can explore being outside of what exists. The idea of things as being able to act upon and influence humans has been greatly elaborated upon by the work of Bruno Latour (2005) in Actor Network Theory (ANT), which describes existence as a series of aggregated networks where humans and objects are in a constant state of interaction and construction.³⁶⁸ ANT makes the proposition that objects and humans may form unexpected and mutually informing networks and that the survival of these networks depends on the continued performance of the relations between actors.

Speculative realism takes a radical drive towards creating a 'subjectless object', arguing that the analysis of objects is always flawed by the continued return to the objects' relationship with its

³⁶⁵ Bill Brown, *Things*, University of Chicago Press, 2004, p.5.

³⁶⁶ Bill Brown, 'Thing Theory.' *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 28, No. 1, The University of Chicago Press, 2001, p.7.

³⁶⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 1926, Blackwell Publishing, 2013, p.96.

³⁶⁸ Bruno Latour. *Reassembling the Social; An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, Oxford University Press, 2005.

human observer (Bryant, 2011).³⁶⁹ Departing from Heidegger's famous 'Tool Being' analysis of the hammer, the speculative realists argue for the creation of a 'flat ontology', encouraging the understanding that like an iceberg underwater, the majority of the characteristics of an object are unavailable to us for analysis, and that objects in fact are constantly receding. The question of the object, of what substances are, is subtly transformed into the question of how, and whether we know objects.

The question of objects becomes a question of a particular relations between humans and objects.³⁷⁰ The understanding that objects are receding calls for the awareness between overlooked relationships, such as the unobserved, unseen parts of an object, as in the contact point between paper weight and table, and extends infinitely to demand that the very molecular sub-structure of an object be taken into account. When objects are reduced in such a fashion, the entire existence of the world becomes illuminated as a social construction, weighted towards human empirical experience—for at a molecular level, objects and their relationships have a radically different set of meanings and associations. This multi-dimensional and molecular consideration of objects is a feature of the work of Levi Bryant (2011), Timothy Morton (2007) and Graham Harman (2002, 2010), from the school within speculative realism known as 'Object Orientated Ontology' (OOO). OOO argues for a reorientation of the understanding of objects away from object/subject relations and towards a greater understanding of humans and their environment.³⁷¹ As Levi Bryant writes:

*The real problem is that human and world are taken as the two fundamental ingredients that must be found in any situation. As a result, the relation between humans and apples is assumed to be philosophically more significant than the relations between apples and trees, apples and sunlight, or apples and wind.*³⁷²

³⁶⁹ See Levi Bryant 'Towards a Finally Subjectless Object' in *The Democracy of Objects*, Open Humanities Press, 2011 pp.13–33.

³⁷⁰ Bryant, *Democracy of Objects*, p.16.

³⁷¹ Levi Bryant 'Towards a Finally Subjectless Object' in *The Democracy of Objects*, Open Humanities Press, 2011.

³⁷² Ibid.; Graham Harman, *Tool Being; Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*, Open Court, Chicago and La Salle, Illinois, 2002; Graham Harman, *Towards Speculative Realism*, Zero Books, Winchester, 2010, pp.146–147;

Morton and Harman's work in particular, draws on the thinking of Heidegger to create a philosophy of the environment, drawing attention to the existence of 'hyperobjects' and pollutants whose existence have profound ecological consequences but lie outside the realm of our perception including, for instance, microplastics, which may take centuries to degenerate, outliving their producers.³⁷³ This thinking tries to create a sense of ecology that sees the idea of 'nature' as a romantic construction, born in part out of the scientific rationalism of the Enlightenment, which increasingly separated man from environment (as distance was created from the concept of humans being God's creations alongside all else).³⁷⁴ Morton's paradigm seeks to deliver a flat ontology that situates human kind in the ecological environment and not separate from it.³⁷⁵ In Morton's words, "[h]ow everything is interconnected is also a thing".³⁷⁶ In its most extreme interpretation, this attempt to remove anthropological perspectives creates a unifying 'thing' out of humans and their environment.³⁷⁷ OOO argues that the great majority of phenomenological approaches to the observation of objects are flawed, because they do not take into account the hidden dimensions of objects—i.e., that part that is in essence constantly 'receding'. Hence, our study of objects is invariably (and incorrectly) a study of human/object relations; by placing humans in the ecological environment we at least gain the perspective of our interconnectedness, as part and package of the very entity that is beyond our grasp, and whose demise contains our own.

With the above thoughts in mind, the following pages attempt to explore new connections within

Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature; Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, Harvard University Press, 2007, Timothy Morton, *Being Ecological*, Pelican Books, 2018.

³⁷³ Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, University of Minnesota Press, 2013.

³⁷⁴ Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p.16.

³⁷⁵ Morton, *Being Ecological*, p.78.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, pp.170–172.

the discourse of material culture, examining objects to ask how, and if, latent properties are embedded in material culture that can reveal new narratives of African modernist histories.

CHAPTER III. MATERIALS, MONUMENTS, MOURNING

The previous chapter highlighted the hybrid nature of Ghanaian experiences of modernity—in particular, in relation to an increased affirmation of imported religious beliefs that exist alongside aspirations for technological advancement. This chapter examines a range of artefacts extant in contemporary Ghanaian culture that respond to different forms of memorialisation in pre- and post-independence society. These artefacts also employ an imported or hybrid vernacular in the case of public monuments and other forms of material culture. Artefacts and objects are sought that help narrate Ghana's hybrid national identity in relation to important historic events such as the First and Second World Wars, as well as to trade. The historic relationship to trade is examined in order to argue that commodity culture is central to both the nation's genesis and collective sense of self. Imported artefacts of trade are explored in relation to shared cultural traditions; in particular, those of mourning and memory. They represent different forms of monument (for instance, to national identity and nationhood), yet are also typologies imported to form public memory. The scale of artefacts ranges from symbolic and intimate towards large-scale and political. In either case, the efficacy of the representation is critiqued. As political monuments often commemorate deceased national heroes, they are examined alongside other examples of material culture relating to mourning and memory. A good text to begin situating this discussion is Georges Bataille's text on architecture. As Bataille writes:

Architecture is the expression of the very being of societies, in the same way that human physiognomy is the expression of the being of individuals. However, it is above all to the physiognomies of official figures (prelates, magistrates, admirals) that this comparison must be related. Indeed, only the ideal being of society, the one who orders and prohibits with authority, is expressed in the architectural compositions proper. Thus, the great monuments rise like dikes, opposing the logic of majesty and authority to all the troubled elements: it is in the form of cathedrals and palaces that the Church or the State address themselves and impose silence on multitudes. It is evident, in fact, that monuments inspire

social wisdom and often even a real fear. The storming of the Bastille is symbolic of this state of affairs: it is difficult to explain this movement of the crowd, other than by the animosity of the people against the monuments which are their real masters. Also, whenever the architectural composition is found elsewhere than in monuments, whether in physiognomy, costume, music or painting, one can infer a predominant taste for human or divine authority.

Georges Bataille, *Documents No.2*, May, 1929

How might we locate, or review our examples of monuments that might physically or metaphorically employ the “logic of majesty and authority” to assert political or social power; in particular, in relation to political practices of commemoration regarding community members who are deceased? What, if any, are the ways in which monuments and memorials appear culturally distinct in Ghana? Jane Guyer (2002) argues for the importance of ephemeral monuments in African cultures. For examples, regardless of scale, important representations of power may be transient; Ashanti gold ornaments were habitually melted down to fashion new ones as regimes, status and power dynamics evolved into different configurations.³⁷⁸ Similarly, important sites of political and social power, such as religious oracles were not buildings but “natural sites of wondrous qualities”. For Guyer, “power over people was not obviously realizable or representable in monumental form”.³⁷⁹ Bataille’s text allows for the interpretation of architectural values outside of the built environment, “whether in physiognomy, costume, music or painting”. Understanding that monuments can be ephemeral, yet hold tremendous cultural significance, we might seek out a form of commemoration on a smaller scale before exploring the range of political representations possible for monuments in contemporary Ghana.

³⁷⁸ Jane Guyer, foreword in Nnamdi Elleh, *Architecture and Power in Africa*, Praeger, Westport Connecticut, London 2002. p.xiv.

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

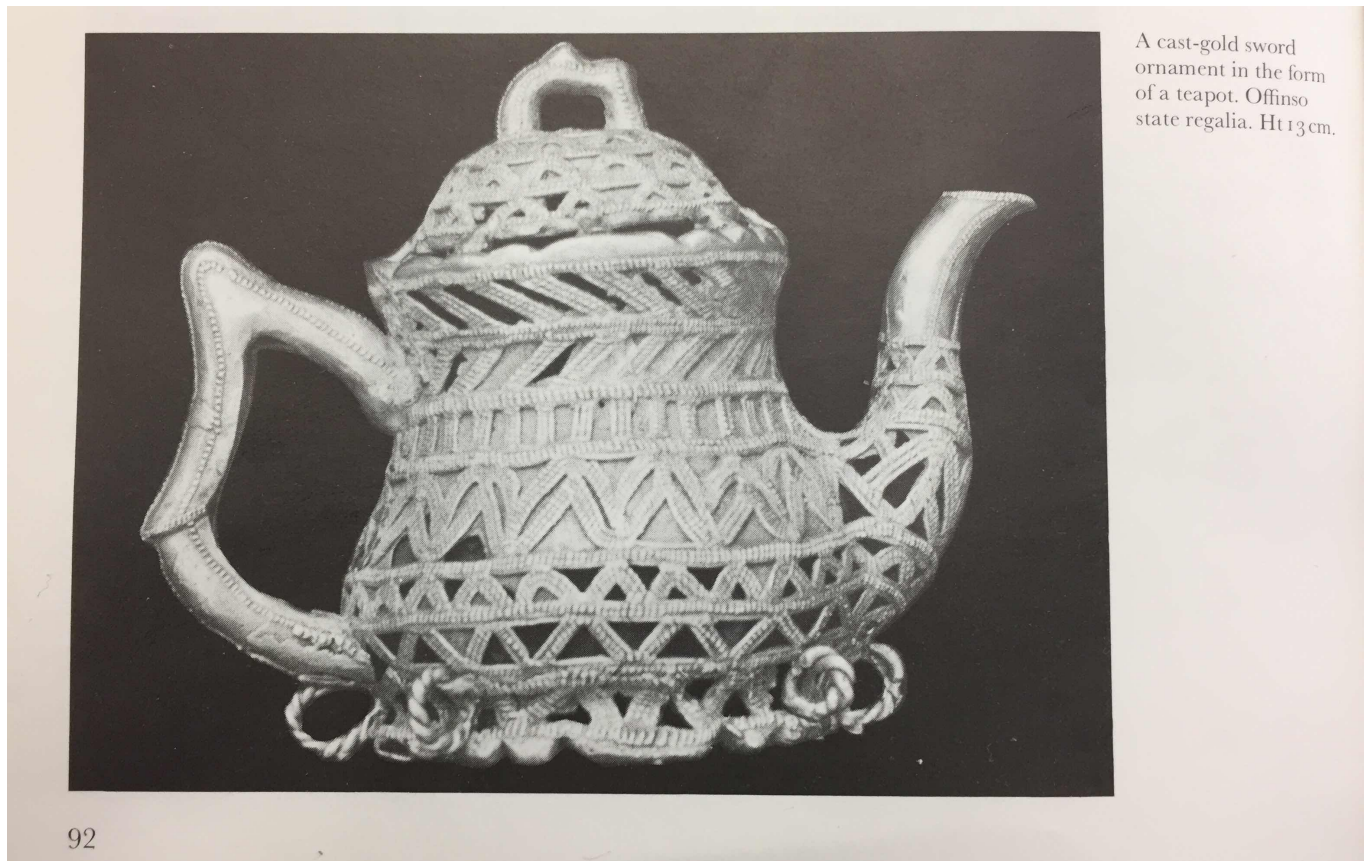


Figure 12.2 Cast Gold Sword Ornament, Offinso state regalia, taken from Malcolm D. McLeod, *The Asante*, London, British Museum Publications, 1981, p.92³⁸⁰

³⁸⁰ This image is also reproduced in Doran H. Ross, 'The Iconography of Asante Sword Ornaments,' *African Arts*, Vol. 11, No. 1, Regents of the University of California, UCLA James S. Coleman African Studies Center, 1977, p.18.



Figure 13. Cast Gold Sword Ornaments, Bekwai State regalia showing “sugar bowl, rhizome and crab” ornaments, taken from Doran H. Ross, ‘The Iconography of Asante Sword Ornaments.’ *African Arts*, Vol. 11, No. 1, [Regents of the University of California, UCLA James S. Coleman African Studies Center], 1977, p.20

An 1884 photograph illustrating one of the Asantehene’s swords shows an unexpected object attached to its body; that of an elaborate gold casting of an ordinary European teapot. A similar item described as a ‘sugar bowl’ appears in a 1977 image by Dorane Ross.³⁸¹ Thomas Birch Freeman (the important Anglo-African missionary credited with founding the Methodist church in Ghana), remarked similar castings on other ceremonial regalia on his visit to Asante in 1844.³⁸² Ross (1977) interprets these vessels as replacing traditional ‘*kuduo* and *abusua kuruwa*’ ritual funerary and drinking vessels.³⁸³ This practice of incorporation, in particular the iconography of

³⁸¹ Doran H. Ross, ‘The Iconography of Asante Sword Ornaments.’ *African Arts*, Vol. 11, No. 1, Regents of the University of California, UCLA James S. Coleman African Studies Center, 1977.

³⁸² McLeod, Malcolm D. *The Asante*, London, British Museum Publications, 1981, p.93.

³⁸³ Ross, ‘Iconography of Asante Sword Ornaments’, p.22.

once exotic, but now mundane imported objects (such as coins and utensils) continues to be used in the chiefly regalia of contemporary Ghana. In *The Asante*, Malcolm D. McLeod (1981) observes a cultural practice where “once functional objects were elaborated and made to serve as regalia which could identify the rank and purpose of the bearer and also express ideas about political and moral relationships”.³⁸⁴ McLeod suggests that the symbolism of the teapot might be “interpreted as an indication of the King’s access to exotic goods and also, because it is a vessel, of his ability to provide for those he ruled”.³⁸⁵

What cultural processes allow the internationally ubiquitous teapot to be transformed into a remarkable symbolic object that oscillates across multiple registers of meaning? What processes allow it to serve as a symbol of the customary duties owed by the living to the dead and also the power of its bearer? As regalia on a state sword, it represents political power and the authority of the particular office of the sword bearer. As a representation of a symbolic vessel with ritual function/s, it is used to represent spiritual duty, and communion with the deceased ancestors. As an accurate depiction of an imported object acquired through trade, it remains representative not only of international trade relations, but also the duty of a traditional ruler to provide for his subjects and support their economic livelihoods through the maintenance of foreign commerce and markets. Moreover, the appearance of these decidedly ‘domestic’ European objects on objects that appear so readily associated with conquest and war alongside the sword, bring together an unexpected narrative of teapot and sugar bowl that, in fact, accurately point to multiple overlapping and interrelated narratives of colonial conquest, trade, plantation slavery and globalised markets. Do such objects indicate that a part of post-independence Ghanaian identity is inextricably linked

³⁸⁴ McLeod, Malcolm D. *The Asante*, London, British Museum Publications, 1981, p.93.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.* p.93.

to its extensive regional history of trade? Furthermore, is there a constituent part of national identity so strongly evolved, that once-foreign imported historical artefacts have now been indecipherably woven into cultural traditions?³⁸⁶ Sometimes artefacts are of such great social significance that they become freed from the conscious association with economic exchange and, in their new function, enter into the realm of pure spiritual symbolism. This transition from material culture to spiritual becomes greater in resonance when objects are embedded into the powerful Ghanaian traditions of mourning, memory and the broader material culture of funerary ritual. Importantly, an artefact of great symbolic importance may not be of monumental scale. From relatively small sword ornaments to the symbolic golden stool of the Asante Empire (said to embody the spiritual power of an entire nation), it might be argued that, compared to European monument culture, historic monuments in Ghanaian traditions were inversely proportional in representative power to scale.

³⁸⁶ Ibid. p.87.

'African' wax-print fabric



Figure 14. Designer and Fabrics, Akosombo Textiles Limited (ATL), Accra. Photo Senam Okudzeto, 2012

Textiles are of enormous cultural importance in Ghana and West Africa in general. They remain one of African culture's strongest signifiers and, particularly in Ghana, have been incorporated into the rituals of major rites of passage such as traditional marriage ceremonies (where brides are always presented with bolts of fabric), and funerals (where mourners are instructed to wear specifically patterned or coloured fabrics that correspond to the days of mourning). It is also commonplace for companies or organisations to commission fabrics for special event. In general then, textiles are used to signify important social milestones. They are a form of collective commemorative practice that has become increasingly definitive of Ghanaian 'traditions' carried forward in contemporary life. Marx's much quoted concept of the commodity fetish is helpful in

the understanding of African wax-print, an industrially produced artefact originally introduced to the *Gold Coast* through the Triangle Trade, which has become so highly integrated into West African cultures that it is largely believed to have originated from the continent. The wax-print referred to is the kind of brightly coloured cotton fabric made through wax resistance patterning that has become particularly synonymous with African identities.

Appadurai (1996) stresses that there is a cultural dimension to globalisation. According to him, it is not, as often believed, a totalising, homogenising force, although it may have very sinister applications and effects, Drawing on Marxian concepts of commodity fetishism, Appadurai understands that the roots of globalisation are deeply rooted in history, and its processes and applications are never even.³⁸⁷ Furthermore, the same artefacts of globalisation, rather than flattening societies, undergo a ‘localising process’, which underscore the ways in which the major tropes of modernity are experienced in different ways by different peoples.³⁸⁸ Using these thoughts as a departure, the next section will describe some cultural uses of African textiles in contemporary Ghana; the introduction of wax-print as a globally traded commodity into the region; and the ways in which imported textiles have been thoroughly enculturated into Ghanaian society.

It might be said that wax-print bridges the divide between both traditional and contemporary cultural practice as it is popular for both formal and ritual occasions, such as funerals and weddings, as well as for contemporary fashion. In Ghana, certain kinds of coloured wax-print are expected to be worn at funerals, but depending on the colour and patterns, ‘wax’ might equally be appropriate for church or in a nightclub. Regardless, the fabric’s appearance is unanimously read as ‘African’, evoking a sense of national pride and authenticity even though it is known that the

³⁸⁷ Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, p.11.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.* p.17.

fabrics themselves are a historic form of imported currency. Women in Ghana collect fabrics to buy, sell and store for future trade, much as they would do with gold or trade beads. Nonetheless, it is possible for textiles to simultaneously be associated with economic exchange and enter into the realm of local spiritual symbolism through the sometimes very poetic interpretation of patterned symbolism on the imported wax-prints; this is especially pertinent to textiles that display the forms of Adinkra proverbs or the encoded linear patterns of traditional Kente cloth.³⁸⁹ This wide range of uses for an artefact that retains its value as a form of social and economic currency, while also having essential ritual functions pertaining to important life rites (particularly death and marriage) illustrate how a strongly social character is assigned to a commodity. Marx, again, is useful to consult here:

There is a definite social relation between men that assumes in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order, therefore to find an analogy, we must have recourse to the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world. In that world the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race. So, it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. This I call the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.³⁹⁰

Ruth Nielsen (1974) provides a detailed history of the development of the West African textile industry focusing on trade between “England, Holland, Switzerland”. She defines “African print” as “all types of printed cloth intended for Africa, meaning that the market determines the

³⁸⁹ Adinkra are symbols from the Akan spiritual cosmology that represent proverbs. They can be carved, printed or sculpted and are often used on textiles, in particular black and white funerary clothes. For further explanation see Peggy Appiah, ‘Akan Symbolism’, *African Arts*, Vol. 13, No. 1, UCLA James S. Coleman African Studies Center, 1979, pp. 64–67. Kente is a fabric assembled from elaborately woven strips that are produced exclusively by men on wooden looms, its patterns may represent proverbs or lineage narratives relating to particular clans. The fabric is unique to Ghana and the Akan traditions of neighboring Côte d’Ivoire and originates in Asante culture. Legend has it that two men studied a spider’s web and copied the work establishing their home of Bonwire as the legendary royal weaving town of Asante. See Peggy Stolz Gilfroy in *Patterns of Life: West African Strip Weaving Traditions*, National Museum of Art, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington DC, 1987, p.34.

³⁹⁰ Karl Marx: *Capital*. Edited by Friedrich Engels, p.31 reprinted in Adler, Mortimer, J. (ed.) *Great Books of the Western World*. 50. MARX, pub. Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., University of Chicago, Second Edition 1990.

identifying label, not the country of origin. Similarly she describes “African wax-prints” as “machine made batiks which imitate Javanese handmade batiks, but with designs acceptable to African tastes”.³⁹¹ Therefore, Nielsen clearly defines the ‘African-ness’ of a textile, with its trajectory as a commodity intended for exchange. It does not matter if that textile never reaches the African continent; its design with a specific market in mind is enough to construct its identity.

Marx’s concept of the *commodity fetish* insists that “the products of labour become commodities, social things whose qualities are at the perceptible and imperceptible by the senses”.³⁹² For Marx, commodities embody an abstract form of human labour that obfuscates its origins and effects. The labelling of wax-prints as ‘African’ is a clear example of how the abstraction of human labour that Marx describes can easily come into being.

John Picton is widely respected as one of the premier authorities on African textiles. In contrast to Nielsen’s work, his book *African Textiles; Looms, Weaving and Design* (authored with John Mack), explores a body of materials produced by hand within the geographical bounds of the African continent (albeit sometimes using imported materials or threads in manufacture). Picton and Nielsen describe textiles as a core part of lived African cultural experiences. Nielsen identifies African textiles as being a “significant part of the African culture and socio-economic structure”.³⁹³ Picton states that it is “impossible to consider life and art in Africa in the absence of textiles”.³⁹⁴ Alisa LaGamma, in ‘The Essential Art of African Textiles: Design without End’, observes the immense pace of innovation inherent to the culture of textiles on the African continent that

³⁹¹ Nielsen, Ruth. ‘The History and Development of Wax-Printed Textiles Intended for West Africa and Zaire’, Diss. Phil, Michigan State University, 1974, p.14.

³⁹² Marx, ‘Commodities’, *Capital*, p.31.

³⁹³ Nielsen, *ibid.*, ‘Foreword’ (no page number).

³⁹⁴ John Picton, *The Art of African Textiles: Technology, Tradition and Lurex*. London, Barbican Art Gallery, 1995. p.11.

produces the “constant renewal of regional textile genres” that fulfil “ongoing cultural needs and desires”.³⁹⁵ It was in consideration of this incredible dynamism that John Picton decided to remove the word ‘traditional’ from the second edition of his book *African Textiles*; an interesting omission that might suggest textiles are at the forefront of African-led modernities.³⁹⁶

The reading of local cosmologies into the visual language of an imported commodity of predetermined design is illustrative of the commodity fetish and the mechanisms of a “definite social relation between men that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things”. This assertion is supported by the iconography of artist Godfried Donkor’s film *The Currency of Ntoma* (2012), a rare visual catalogue of the textile collection of his mother Mary Donkor, a fabric trader from an Ashanti royal family.

The film begins with the image of an unnamed Ashanti chief, elaborately wrapping his body in a huge piece of black, richly patterned ceremonial *bazin* cloth.³⁹⁷ The cloth is of such an enormous weight and length that the viewer can clearly see the chief’s muscles flexing as he carefully heaves the heavy folds of fabric into place. The dark colours suggest that this is a funerary cloth, to be worn on formal occasions of mourning. Before he is finished dressing, the film cuts to Mary Donkor sitting in her living room in Kumasi. A split screen shows a large pile of neatly folded fabrics underneath a window in her home. The split screen alternates between two young girls who first unfold and then display the textiles, and Mary Donkor, as she describes the textiles’ names, social value and symbolic meaning. She associates all the textiles displayed with European trade, beginning with the words:

³⁹⁵ Alisa LaGamma, ‘The Essential Art of African Textiles; Design Without End’, *African Arts*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (Spring, 2009), p.88.

³⁹⁶ Picton, *African Textiles*, p.11.

³⁹⁷ Bazin is a kind of polished cotton textile prized for its heavy weight, patterning and shiny surface.

*They say in ancient times our ancestors did not wear cloth. They had a tree in the forest called 'Kyen Kyen' which they would beat the bark and vine, into a flat straw that would cover their bodies front and back. This was until the trade with Europeans when they started wearing cloth.*³⁹⁸

The words of Mary Donkor create an impression of deeply ingrained tradition over time. Combined with the image of the chief performing his elaborate ceremonial dress, the audience is given the impression of a culture of use so complex that it must be taught. The sculptural folds inherent to the chiefs' regalia appear difficult to imitate without instructions. Although Mary Donkor states that 'cloth' arrived with European trade, the manner of dress shown in the video is unlike anything worn in Europe since the days of Roman and Greek togas (although considerably more voluminous), so the viewer must presume that although the cloth is imported, its style of dress is a local invention. While observing that the male protagonist's immense effort in dressing suggests formal attire, audiences unfamiliar with Ghanaian culture are not assured that he is a chief until the film credits roll and identify him as "Nana Nketia-Ntomafurahene I".

³⁹⁸ Donkor, *The Currency of Ntoma*, 2012.



Figure 15. Godfried Donkor, *The Currency of Ntoma*, 2012. Film Still.

The detailed 18th century travel journals of Danish Dr. Isert , a botanist whose travelogue documents detailed observations of everyday customs in the *Gold Coast*, confirms that by the time he visited Accra in 1785 most inhabitants were wearing imported fabrics of one kind or another, which depending on “one man’s wealth and privilege in relation to another could be coarse cotton cloth brought here from East India, or of printed cotton, or of chintz, or of half-silk or silk cloth”.³⁹⁹ However, textile historian, Peggy Stolz Gilfroy (1987) cites the trade in imported cotton textiles as beginning much earlier. She suggests evidence indicates that Phoenician dyes and textiles were exported throughout Africa by the Berbers around 500 BCE, when they used “horses and donkeys to draw chariots from Morocco south to the Senegal River, and from Carthage to the middle Niger

³⁹⁹ Isert, Paul. ‘Eight Letter 16 October, 1785, *Letters on West Africa and the Slave Trade*, p.113.

River”.⁴⁰⁰ It is thought that these trans-Saharan trade routes also eventually reached the borders of the forest kingdoms of West Africa.⁴⁰¹ Gilfroy’s account contradicts the traditional narrative of Ghanaian oral culture, which credits the arrival of cotton and silk thread and fabrics with the arrival of European traders during the period of the transatlantic slave trade.

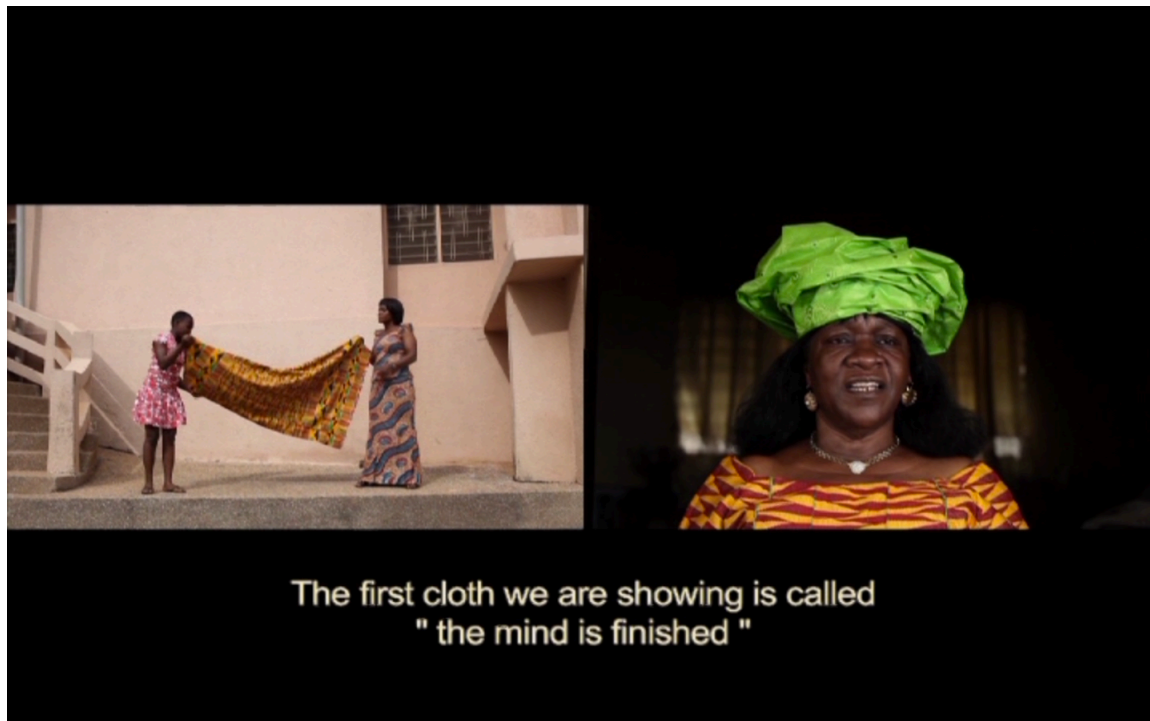


Figure 16. Godfried Donkor, *The Currency of Ntoma*, 2012. Film Still.

The first piece of fabric shown by Mary Donkor is an elaborately woven Kente cloth named “the mind is finished” (so-called because, “when the ancestors finished designing this cloth, they used all their designs in one Kente”).⁴⁰² The early Kente cloths were made through unravelling silks and other coloured fabrics bartered through trade. The travelogues of Dr. Isert confirm that many

⁴⁰⁰ Peggy Stolz Gilfroy, *Patterns of Life: West African Strip Weaving Traditions*, National Museum of Art, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington DC. 1987, pp.18–26.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid. pp.18–26.

⁴⁰² Donkor, *The Currency of Ntoma*, 2012.

of these silks originated in the Far East through trade with Europeans, although again Gilfroy contradicts the popular understanding of a European trade monopoly, suggesting that 18th century Asante also had access to Nigerian produced silk from Egga in Nupeland through the trans-Saharan trade routes from the northern Nigerian town of Kano.⁴⁰³

The next part of *The Currency of Ntoma* chronicles highly valued Dutch wax-prints given names by “our mothers and grandmothers” that associate them with specific proverbs or spiritual beliefs. In the case of a fabric named “*Bad mind cannot harm you*”, the design of the fabric is seen to be so beautiful and harmonious that it gains the ability to function as a kind of talisman, holding a mystical form of power somehow embodied in its design by its Dutch creators. The names associated with the fabrics also constitute an archive of changes in ‘social culture’ and customs. They often contain a melancholy critique of the strict demands made on women and children by traditional social systems. Polygamous marriage might take the place of a formal welfare system; a use of custom hinted at through the fabric named “*Only mother knows what her child will eat*”. A woman quoted in Gilfroy offers that this particular fabric “is a sombre fabric for us, some people lose their mothers and live with their stepmothers and suffer”.⁴⁰⁴ This particular fabric functions as a mnemonic device, recalling a period when the likelihood of a child losing a parent through illness or childbirth was high; children would become the wards of second wives in polygamous arrangements who were likely to neglect them. Similarly, another imported Dutch print is called “Some years are not good”, which is described by one of Gilfroy’s interlocuters in the following manner:

...because some of us will go through trials during a year, some will lose husbands, close relatives, children. It is a melancholic name that our mothers use to describe adversity. It

⁴⁰³ Ibid. Gilfroy, p.35.

⁴⁰⁴ Donkor, *The Currency of Ntoma*, 2012.

*is a Holland print with many colours, black, green and white. Classic cloth here in Ghana.*⁴⁰⁵

Since women are the primary traders of textiles, it is in some way understandable that the names of textiles are gendered, reflecting the difficult social realities of women's lives, their dreams, hopes, fears and spiritual beliefs. Similarly, gender-specific usage may influence the names attributed to certain fabrics or even the styles of wrapping the traditional toga. Such names might be indicative of profession, physical prowess, social or marital status. For example, a particular way to wrap a man's Kente cloth is named *Okatakyie*, which translates as "Brave Man" and indicates a style favoured by chiefs. Another ostentatious style of wrapping a man's toga deliberately leaves a long train dragging on the ground behind the wearer. This one is named "I have a wife", meaning the wearer has a wife at home to wash it after it's been dragged around all day.⁴⁰⁶

Not all the names of *Ntoma* are gender-specific or reflect suffering. Some are associated with communal proverbs, such as the following, which cautions a community on how to avoid adversity.

*A single tree falls in the wind before a forest of trees, this means that if one tree is standing on its own, the wind can easily uproot it. Our elders used it as a proverb for life. That when a community is united all they do will be successful, if they separate, they are vulnerable...a forest of trees can never be uprooted by the wind, that is the meaning of this fabric from Holland, again quality print.*⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁶ See *Wrapped in Pride; Ghanaian Kente and African-American Identity*, September 12 1999–January 2 2000. Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, exhibition archives, 'How to Wear Kente', <https://africa.si.edu/exhibits/kente/how.htm> [last accessed 20.01.2019].

⁴⁰⁷ Donkor, *The Currency of Ntoma*, 2012.

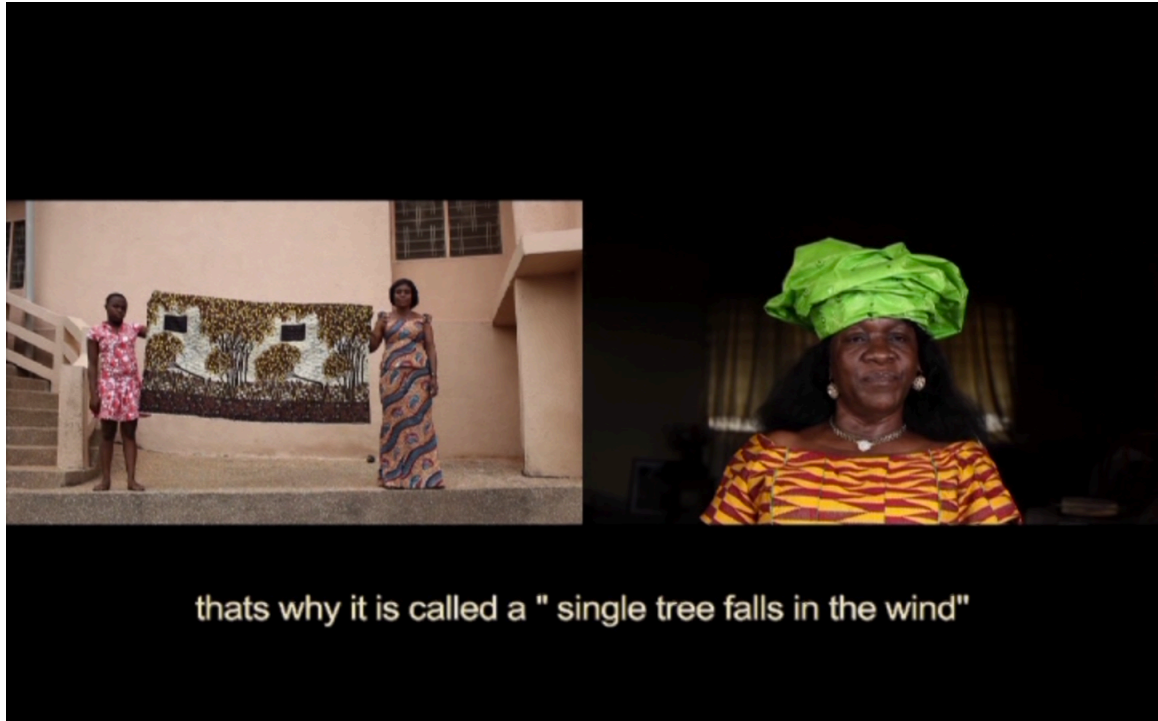


Figure 17. Godfried Donkor, *The Currency of Ntoma*, 2012. Film Still;

In the film, Mary Donkor explains the many complex uses of fabric and how they are worn for various special occasions: “Kente, where along with royalty, people are allowed to wear Kente, lace, funeral cloth, black and white for church, funeral, gold and bright things for special occasions”.⁴⁰⁸ In Ghanaian funerary culture, ‘cloth’ is central and strictly coded. Many of the nation’s strictest burial traditions began through copying Ashanti/Akan culture and it remains widely regarded as having the most elaborate funerary rites. Regardless of religion or culture, almost all people in contemporary Ghana adhere in some way to these main funerary traditions surrounding fabric and display. Traditional funerals take place across several days, possibly up to a week, but normally the main rites will culminate on a weekend. Friday would be a wake keeping, where the colours of mourning are black or black and red, particularly if the deceased is from a

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

royal family. 'Red' is interpreted widely and can be any colour from bright orange, through to some yellows and brown. Saturday would see the congregation wear black and white and, should the deceased be over seventy years old, the Sunday service would request all mourners wear 'pure white' to 'celebrate' the life of the deceased. Incidentally, the order to wear white is a visual reference to the edicts of the Christian bible, which states that "the days of our lives are numbered three score and ten", and therefore anything over that number of years is seen as a gift and therefore a cause for celebration.

Wax-print is not only worn to funerals; bolts of fabric are also placed in the coffins of the deceased, along with other material goods such as teeth and hairbrushes. These artefacts are thought to be symbolic of the items the deceased will need in the afterlife. The ability for (both imported and local) wax-prints to assume such profound social and spiritual significance is a form of economic transubstantiation unique to West African cultural practice. Marx identifies commodity fetishism as causing "the products of labour [to] become social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses".⁴⁰⁹ The magical powers attributed to – as well as the social forms of historic memory associated with – various *Ntoma* underscore this function, showing how textiles can become social entities with active social lives. Much like the medieval trade in Christian relics, Mary Donkor explains how she sold part of her fabric collection to finance the roof of her house. Although sometimes embodied with spiritual power, the textiles always remain currencies. However, as the next section of this chapter will argue, the value of these textile currencies has begun to change in relation to new forms of trade and diminishing production values in the digital era.

⁴⁰⁹ Mortimer J. Adler (editor), *Marx*, 'Commodities', *Capital*, Britannica p.31.

Currently, the majority of textiles bought on the African continent are produced in China, while the most valued print, known as ‘Hollandaise’, is still made in Holland. While the longest history of production of fabric remains in Europe, the West and Central African communities also developed their own print factories in the period leading up to national independence in the 1950s and 1960s. The most valued wax-prints throughout the African continent have always been Dutch. Perhaps this is because the Dutch trade in such textiles is the oldest, having existed for more than a hundred and seventy-five years. This industry is currently dominated by a company called Vlisco.⁴¹⁰

The far-flung origins of the wax-print industry in Holland have an unexpected trajectory. Through a series of complex exchanges that appear both “perceptible and imperceptible by the senses”, Africans believe these products to be Dutch, while the Dutch industry suggests the fabrics were rather introduced by Africans.⁴¹¹ Neither position may be entirely accurate or inaccurate. In Dutch commercial textile circles, a little known story of West Africans conscripted into the Dutch Army is increasingly promoted as the story of how wax-prints came to the west coast of Africa.⁴¹² This narrative credits African sailors conscripted into the Dutch Navy to serve in the conquest of Java with the introduction of batik wax-prints to the *Gold Coast*, now present in modern day Ghana.⁴¹³ This most celebrated myth of the Dutch textile industry says that the sailors were paid for their service at the end of their period of conscription, and with these funds they bought Javanese wax-

⁴¹⁰ According to the company website, “Vlisco has been designing and manufacturing fabrics loved by African women since 1846”, <https://www.vlisco.com> [last accessed 21.01.2019].

⁴¹¹ Ibid. Marx.

⁴¹² Ineke van Kessel has researched this history extensively, see *Merchants, Missionaries and Migrants: 300 years of Dutch Ghanaian Relations*, KIT, 2002.

⁴¹³ <http://www.vlisco.com/since-1846/en/page/311/> (VLISCO incorrectly lists the 1837 date of departure as the date of African soldiers return to the continent) [last accessed 25.10.2013].

print fabrics and brought them back to the *Gold Coast*, and by extension the rest of West and Central Africa.⁴¹⁴

Historian Ineke van Kessel has argued that the majority of these sailors were illegally conscripted slaves and pawns. After being press-ganged into the navy by slave masters, they were forced to buy their freedom with their navy pensions if they wanted to be decommissioned.⁴¹⁵ Van Kessel uncovered archival evidence confirming that, in many instances, the sailors were not paid until repatriation to the *Gold Coast*, meaning that due to poverty, they would have had little means to buy fabrics on their journey home.⁴¹⁶ As further evidence of their indentured status, she cites an 1837 contract between Wilhelm I of the Netherlands and Kwaku Dua, King of the Ashanti Empire, whereby the latter promised “to deliver 1000 recruits within a year”, having “received 2000 guns by way of payment with a promise of 4000 more to come”.⁴¹⁷ In fact, 1500 troops were sent from Kumasi during the period 1837 to 1841, and between 1836 and 1842, a further 2100 left from the Ghanaian coastal town of Elmina for the East Indies. This means that 3600 slaves were conscripted into the Dutch Navy illegally during the years 1837 to 1842, a period that corresponds to the 1808 British ban on the transatlantic slave trade.⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁴ The contemporary artist Yinka Shonibare explores the British role in the textiles trade in his contemporary sculptural works which use wax-print to visualise the hybridized nature of a cultural construction viewed as ‘African’.

⁴¹⁵ In the case of these soldiers they were not pawned in a manner that followed normal cultural traditions (it was common during the time of slavery for people to be pawn themselves or a relative had to repay a debt), rather they were press-ganged into joining the navy; slave traders would collect a commission for delivering them. See Akosua Perbi, *A History of Indigenous Slavery in Ghana from the 15th to the 19th Century*. Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2004.

⁴¹⁶ “Archival sources documenting the estates of veterans who died *en route* do not mention wax-prints” – excerpt from ‘The Legend of the Java Veterans and the wax-prints’ by Ineke van Kessel, vitrine text at the Java Museum, Elmina, Ghana. Van Kessel also suggests that West Africans were already familiar with Indian batiks brought there through the trans-Saharan caravan routes in the period proceeding European trade.

⁴¹⁷ Ineke van Kessel ‘The Black Dutchmen; African Soldiers in the Netherlands East Indies’ in *Merchants, Missionaries & Migrants*, p.136.

⁴¹⁸ See Ineke van Kessel, *Merchants, Missionaries & Migrants*, pp.4–6.

The links of indentured slavery, Dutch colonialism, the cotton trade and capital were in no way missed by Marx:

*The history of the colonial administration of Holland – and Holland was the head capitalistic nation of the seventeenth century – “is one of the most extraordinary relations of treachery, bribery, massacre and meanness”. Nothing is more characteristic than their system of stealing men to get slaves for Java. The men-stealers were trained for this purpose. The thief, the interpreter, and the seller, were the chief agents in this trade, native princes the chief sellers. The young people stolen were thrown into the secret dungeons of the Celebes until they were ready for sending to the slave ships.*⁴¹⁹

Both Marx and Engels in *Capital*, and Georg Simmel emphasise that the value of a commodity is set by the process of its exchange and not the other way around. Can it be said that the value of wax-print textiles was originally determined through the processes of exchanging human beings as commodities, and that a part of the value attributed came through the exchanges having taken place at a point in history where those involved in the trade were wilfully aware it was no longer legal? If this were the case, the abstraction of the commodity fetish, that “social relation between men that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things”, is literally an exchange where a bolt of fabric represents the historic trade of a human being.⁴²⁰ The fabric becomes valuable only because the human being traded is of value, its exchange value is set by the parameters of the sinister market that engages its production. Simmel clarifies the point in the following terms:

*It is exchange that sets the parameters of utility and scarcity, rather than the other way around, and exchange that is the source of value: The difficulty of acquisition, the sacrifice offered in exchange, is the unique constitutive element of value, of which scarcity is only the external manifestation, its objectification in the form of quantity.*⁴²¹

⁴¹⁹ ‘Genesis of the Industrial Capitalist’, *Capital*, *Britannica*, pp.372–373.

⁴²⁰ Marx, ‘Commodities’, *Capital*, p.33.

⁴²¹ Simmel, quoted in Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things* p.4; also see Marx’s chapter ‘Commodities and Money’: “exchange value is the only form in which the value of commodities can manifest itself or be expressed”, *Capital* p.14 and pp.13–36.

In a word, exchange is not a by-product of the mutual valuation of objects, but its source. In the case of the commodity value of Hollandaise fabric, neither trade nor value were guaranteed from the start of production. Originally developed for markets in Java and the Far East, the Dutch textiles were first rejected as an unwanted waste product since consumers in the Far East considered them vulgar and ill-produced in comparison to locally made cloth. It was only through the opening of West African markets that the Dutch wax industry could thrive, and the period of exchange between Dutch and West Africa markets corresponds too closely to the period of illegal slave trading between the regions for these textiles not to be a clear relic of these processes. As *Ntoma*, textiles are read as embodying an archive of social history; could it be that their ability to represent the tensions and pitfalls of social life, as well as the Akan parables they are said to embody, in fact mirror a history where these fabrics could quite literally be exchanged for a *life*. A human life, in any case, is a thing of great value, underscoring the aura of a commodity whose past was embedded in horrific, yet monumental exchange contracts. This history is grounded in actions relating to life and death, and is therefore naturally embedded in a commodity whose cultural history is founded on a set of sombre exchanges that inexorably destroyed the lives of the enslaved. Perhaps the great weight of this history imbues *Ntoma* with the weight of social history, which although forgotten, resonates in the understanding that major life altering themes are represented in its forms, underscoring Marx's idea that "capital is not a thing, but a social relation between persons, established by the instrumentality of things".⁴²² Marx makes no bones about his thoughts of the colonies and their role in supporting capitalism:

The colonial system ripened, like a hot-house, trade and navigation. The "monopoly societies" of Luther were powerful levers for concentration of capital. The colonies secured a market for the budding manufacturers, and, through the monopoly of the market, an increased accumulation. The treasures captured outside Europe by undisguised looting,

⁴²² Marx, *Capital*, p.376.

*enslavement, and murder, floated back to the mother country and were there turned into capital.*⁴²³

Following the canny observations of Marx, the origins of the textile trade encode an unexpected narrative of Dutch colonial and imperial economic ambitions realised through exploitation and ‘enslavement’.

There is a curious and hitherto unremarked correlation between the period of King William I’s military conscriptions on the *Gold Coast* and the establishment of the Dutch textile industry. The King built the first three industrial batik factories in Haarlem around 1834 as an act of philanthropy in order to combat unemployment and poverty in the region. The factories were constructed in collaboration with the Belgian printing company Prévinaire and ran at a loss for the first six years of their existence. But it was not just a purely philanthropic undertaking: the secession of Belgium in 1830 brought a strong need for the Netherlands to create a textile industry of its own to replace the critical trade lost between Flanders and the Dutch East Indies.⁴²⁴ It is believed that the discovery of West African markets was an accidental but welcome way to trade industrially produced wax-prints. Though it is known that the Netherlands began trading goods and textiles with the *Gold Coast* in the period following 1594, the question remains as to whether some of the industrial batiks from William I’s state-sponsored enterprise made their way into the holds of the Dutch ships heading to pick up conscripts for Java in West Africa. The period following the 1834 establishment of the three first industrial batik factories in Haarlem, and the 1837–1842 illegal conscriptions of Africans into the Dutch Navy are almost concurrent; this might well mean that

⁴²³ Ibid.

⁴²⁴ W.T. Kroese, *The Origin of Wax Block Prints on the Coast of West Africa*, Duoprint by, Henglo, 1976, pp.14–16.

these prints were also used to trade illegally conscripted slaves into the navy, rather than the mythology that those sailors were freemen who introduced the prints to coastal West Africa.

Eventually, a Scottish merchant from Glasgow called Ebenezer Brown Fleming gained credit for popularising the trade of wax-prints to West Africa; he created a virtual monopoly in trade by the late nineteenth century. He specialised in Prévinaire prints, which again raised the question as to whether Brown Fleming's success was in anyway related to the earlier enterprise of King William I. Further confusion surrounds these events, as the Scotsman cannily registered extant Dutch wax designs under his own copyright.⁴²⁵ The wearing of wax-print was originally restricted to the African nobility, and later to the very wealthy. The establishment of *Gold Coast* markets in the late-19th century was critical to the wax-print trade and more lucrative than can be imagined—but the memory of how the prints had been acquired was deliberately obfuscated. A 1976 statement by Vlisco, the Dutch company that remains the dominant producer of wax-print in contemporary society, pays “tribute to the people of Ghana who have increased the popularity of Vlisco's Dutch wax block and Java prints to such an extent that we can now consider the whole of tropical Africa as our marketing ground”.⁴²⁶ It is ironic that ‘Hollandaise’, a quintessentially European name, has become inextricably linked to contemporary African identity since the luxury product represents only a very small portion of wax-prints produced worldwide.⁴²⁷

Wax-prints continued to be an expensive imported commodity out of reach for ordinary West Africans for many years. The popular use of wax is indebted to the emergence of textile factories in Nigeria during the 1980s and 1990s. These companies produced millions of yards per year of

⁴²⁵ Ibid. p.47.

⁴²⁶ Ibid. p.6.

⁴²⁷ See ATL Market Share estimates diagram. ‘Hollandaise’ refers to the best quality industrial batiks manufactured by Dutch textile companies; these are the most prized wax-prints in African markets.

extremely cheap wearable wax, allowing whole segments of lower income Africans to begin to wear a fabric that was previously only for the wealthy. Today, the Nigerian industry has all but collapsed due to the flood of even cheaper copies from China and the Far East. Estimates from within the trade industry suggest that production rates dropped drastically within four short years, from a 2002 peak of 200 million yards per year to a mere 50 million yards in 2006.⁴²⁸

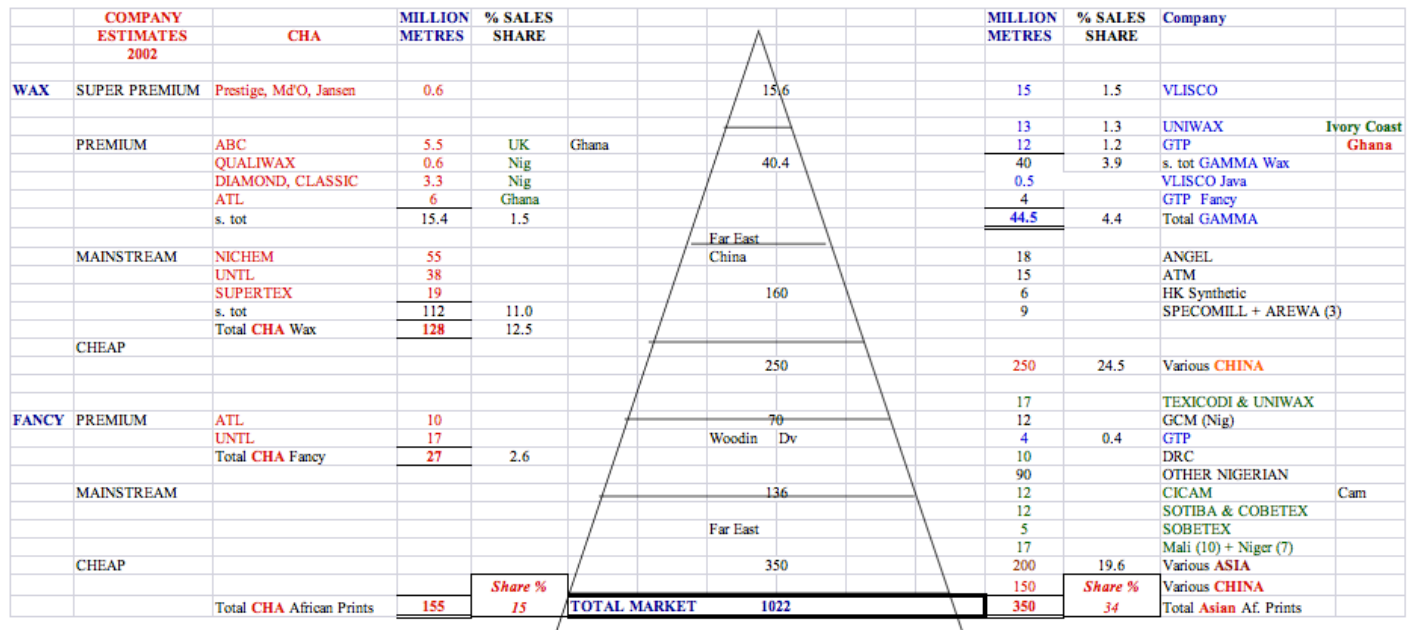


Figure 18. Akosombo Textiles Ghana (ATL) 2002, Market Share estimates. Note the distribution weighted towards the ‘Far East and China’. Source, Steve Dutton, Sales and Marketing Manager, ATL.

Steve Dutton, Sales and Marketing Manager at Akosombo Textiles LTD (ATL), a prominent textiles company founded in Ghana in 1967, suggested that the Africa-based production of wax-print might soon go out of business. His fears were that the industry would completely collapse if the Dutch, British and West African companies that produce original designs go out of business

⁴²⁸ See Orla, Ryan. ‘Chinese Threat for Ghana’s Textile Firms’, BBC News, 2006; <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/5298290.stm> [last accessed 21.01.2019].

due to cheap imitations. I interviewed him in 2013 during a fraught period when the Africa-based textiles industry was on the point of collapse.⁴²⁹

Lieux de mémoire

The next part of the thesis will explore the function of contemporary monuments in Ghana and their ability to engage the public. It draws, in part, on the ideas of Pierre Nora, whose concept of *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) identifies a significant social shift in the understanding and function of memory in the modern era, whereby memory ceases to be a cognitive function and becomes increasingly external to the individual's body.⁴³⁰ *Lieux* are 'sites' of memory. By Nora's account, as societies and technologies progress, they travel from cognitive, through written memory, finally to memory being something that is housed in statues and memorials but also captured in machines and stored as binary data.⁴³¹ Nora's own words are instructive:

The transformation of memory implies a decisive shift from the historical to the psychological, from the social to the individual, from the objective message to its subjective reception, from repetition to remembrance. The total psychologization of contemporary memory entails a completely new economy of the identity of the self, the mechanics of memory and the relevance of the past.

Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory*.⁴³²

⁴²⁹ See Senam Okudzeto, 'Hollandaise', *Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam (SMBA) Newsletter* November 3 2012 – January 6, 2013. ATL was founded in Ghana in 1967.

⁴³⁰ See (eds.) Nora, Pierre and Kritzman, Lawrence D., trans. Arthur Goldhammer. *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past under the direction of Pierre Nora*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1992. 1998.

⁴³¹ Nora, Pierre., 'Between memory and history: Les lieux de mémoire', *Representations*, No 26: Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory, (Spring 1989), p.7.

⁴³² (eds.) Nora, Pierre and Kritzman, Lawrence D., trans. Arthur Goldhammer. *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past under the direction of Pierre Nora*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1992. 1998, p.10

In contemporary society, memories travel from text to objects, and through technological channels such as the web, into virtual space. In contemporary society, the distinction between personal memory and collective history becomes increasingly vague. Nora refers to any material or immaterial culture able to trigger or evoke a communal sense of recollection or heritage, as *lieux de mémoire*. The idea of a ‘sense’ evoked through ‘sites’ of memory is important. *Lieux* can historicise events not directly experienced by the viewer and give a sense of remembrance accompanied by a strong emotional response, even when the memory is learned, or culturally imposed. One might think of the symbolism of a paper poppy worn on Remembrance Day and its complex set of allusions, not only to the First World War, but also to the poem, *In Flanders Fields*, which in itself functions as a *lieux de mémoire*.⁴³³ In a similar fashion, the earlier discussion of Dutch wax-prints in relation to the textile collection of Mary Donkor, illustrates how material culture can be used as a receptacle of cultural memory.⁴³⁴

Nora’s discussion of the conflation of memory and history is particularly geared towards French nationalist sentiment, concentrated by an increased turn towards memorialisation within French culture. He insists that the *lieux de mémoire*, although existing in all eras, are particularly produced by the crisis of modernity. There is a degree of difficulty faced when attempting to apply Nora’s very specific project to the development of Ghanaian nationalist history. Nonetheless, this next section of this chapter will attempt to illustrate a series of monuments in Ghana that both respond to national modernist crises and attempt to employ an arguably international language of monument building that mirrors similar forms in Europe and the rest of the world. It is important

⁴³³ A famous 1915 poem attributed to Canadian Lieutenant John McCrae commemorating the First World War. See the Imperial War Museum, UK ‘The First World War Poetry Digital Archives’: <http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/collections/item/1643>.

⁴³⁴ For a discussion of imported wax-prints in relation to Akan proverbs, see pp.178–180 of this thesis.

to avoid inadvertently contributing to the jingoism of European diffusionist theories, which argue broadly towards the belief that African nations are simply following the linear trajectory of Western nations in their development.⁴³⁵ Nonetheless, there are shared moments of Afro-European history, such as in the case of the First and Second World Wars, which permit entry into comparisons of public memorialisation that remain relevant to both cultural zones, primarily as both Africans and Europeans fought together. This gains particular significance when contemplating the histories of the many tens of thousands of African soldiers who served in the British and French colonial armies during the First and Second World Wars. Roger Gocking's *History of Ghana* states that:

*More than 11,000 Africans were recruited from the Gold Coast for military service during the First World War, while over 65,000 saw military service in the Second World War.*⁴³⁶

Although thousands of soldiers in the *Gold Coast* regiments died in the First and Second World Wars there are, at present, no European memorials to commemorate them and no popular demand to do so—a fact that is remarkable considering the importance of the military in the nation's leadership since the start of independence.⁴³⁷ As outlined by Bjorn Hettne in *Soldiers and Politics: The Case of Ghana*, initially after independence Nkrumah wanted a strong military of “divisional size” for Ghana, no matter what the cost.⁴³⁸ In time he became fearful of the armed forces who were in turn equally disenchanted with the foreign policies of his rule.⁴³⁹ The disgruntled army

⁴³⁵ Problematic theories of a civilising European centre spreading its influence were championed by a large-scale media response to Sam Huntington's now outmoded theory of 'The Great Divergence'. See Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon and Schuster, UK: The Free Press, 1996.

⁴³⁶ Gocking, *History of Ghana*, p.75.

⁴³⁷ See the interview transcription with architectural historian and former Mayor of Accra, Nat Nuno Amarteifio in appendix.

⁴³⁸ Bjorn Hettne, 'Soldiers and Politics: The Case of Ghana', *Journal of Peace Research*. Vol. 17, No. 2, Special Issue on Imperialism and Militarization (1980) p.190, pp.173–193.

⁴³⁹ The army was increasingly despairing of Nkrumah's determination to aid every African liberation struggle on the continent. Their involvement in Congo after the assassination of Lumba was particularly contentious.

corps proved increasingly volatile and after several failed assassinations (including one by grenade in 1962, and another attempt in 1964 when a member of Nkrumah's security staff was shot dead by a policeman at his Flagstaff House office), he was finally overthrown by popular military coup in 1966.⁴⁴⁰

With hindsight, Nkrumah's early efforts to create imposing martial institutions proved arguably more enduring than his own period of tenure; as shown from the early 1970s through to the mid-1990s, when Ghana's government was almost exclusively in the hands of the military. Given that the years of military rule correspond to the period of the country's most dramatic economic decline, Ghana's relationship with the armed forces of its military past remains somewhat ambivalent.

Nonetheless, two of the most popularly recognised architectural symbols of Ghanaian nationalism, the National Stadium (Public Works Department, 1961) and adjacent to it, one of the most supremely celebrated icons of the nation, the Independence Arch at Black Star Square in Accra may be read as military monuments, although this is in no way a popular understanding of their function. The latter is a dramatic structure in the style of a Roman victory arch erected by the Nkrumah Government in 1957 to commemorate the site where, on 28 February 1948, three decommissioned servicemen from the Gold Coast Regiment of the Royal African Frontier Force were gunned down by the panicked officers of the then British Colonial Authority during a peaceful demonstration.⁴⁴¹ The soldiers, Sergeant Adjetey, Corporal Attipoe and Private Odartey Lamptey, were members of the Ex-Servicemen's Union that was *en route* to present the British governor at Christianborg Castle with a petition protesting the unpaid pension rights promised

⁴⁴⁰ Gocking, *History of Ghana*, pp.135–136.

⁴⁴¹ See Crinson p.154 and *Ghana News Agency* online record 28/02/2011: <http://www.ghananewsagency.org/details/Politics/Ghana-remembers-the-28th-February-Crossroads-Shooting-incident/?ci=2&ai=26013> [last accessed 14/01/2019].

during the war. In addition to those murdered, several soldiers were badly injured. In the days before the shooting, a national boycott of goods had been organised in protest of increasingly high prices levelled by European and Lebanese merchants, whose trade monopoly and profiteering appeared to be supported by the colonial authority.⁴⁴²



Figure 19. Independence Arch at Black Star Square, Accra. Photo: Senam Okudzeto/Arnd Engel 2011

These events took place at a point where civil tension in the colony was at its peak and was key to destabilising British power. Incensed citizens of the capital quickly erupted into riots that soon

⁴⁴² Gocking, *History of Ghana* p.83 and *Ghana News Agency* online record [last accessed 28/02/2011]: <http://www.ghananewsagency.org/details/Politics/Ghana-remembers-the-28th-February-Crossroads-Shooting-incident/?ci=2&ai=26013>.

spread throughout the urban centres of the nation, including distant Kumasi and Koforidua. Kwame Nkrumah and other members of the UGCC leadership were immediately imprisoned, and after several days of rioting the colonial authority was forced to admit it had lost control. A state of emergency was announced and soldiers from Nigeria brought in to quell the angry mob.⁴⁴³ Even after peace was established, it was undeniably clear that the days of the British were drawing to a close. An investigation into the shootings and cause of the riots was ordered and the concluding report recommended self-government for the colony, making the shooting of the ex-servicemen one of the most critical events in the country's move towards independence.⁴⁴⁴ The death of the soldiers and subsequent riots are inextricably linked to the disgruntled populace's fury with being held to ransom by inflated consumer commodities. This means that the monuments also commemorate the successful conquest of a colonial trade war. Furthermore, there are two additional military monuments within the territorial frame of Black Star Square and the National Stadium that are critical to the understanding of the sites' symbolism. These two monuments are easily overlooked by both locals and passing tourists due to the limitations of their design in relation to their surroundings and the contemporary ban on photographic documentation of the site.

Passing through the entrance to the stadium, immediately to the left and directly adjacent to the Independence Arch across the street, is a monument comprised of a series of five extremely wide and flat horizontal steps of stone laid one upon the other, decreasing in size with each. These steps rise like a low pyramid to frame the form of a large yet, compared to its architectural surroundings,

⁴⁴³ Gocking, *History of Ghana*, p.84.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ghana News Agency* online record 28/02/2011:

<http://www.ghananewsagency.org/details/Politics/Ghana-remembers-the-28th-February-Crossroads-Shooting-incident/?ci=2&ai=26013>.

thin polyhedral pale stone clad pillar. The pillar is placed on the third step of its supporting base, and atop the pillar stands a bronze sculpture representing a Ghanaian veteran soldier. The image is popularly believed to depict a soldier from the same division of soldiers martyred at the 28 February Christianborg Crossroads shooting.⁴⁴⁵ Behind the plinth on the 5th step of the supporting base is a low stone structure tilted like a lectern to display text dedicated to Ghanaian soldiers who died in international campaigns. The relatively narrow dimensions of the central plinth supporting the sculpture mean that the monument is dwarfed by the much more monumental structures of the stadium and arch. The soldier is presented in an unwarlike contrapposto position—one leg-striding forward and wearing a floppy sun hat with a gun hanging limply by his side, perhaps to symbolise the end of battle, or peace. The entire structure constitutes the *Tomb for the Unknown Soldier*. At the base of the pillar is a wide bowl-like sconce that is supported by its own plinth that extends across several steps. The bowl is said to contain an eternal flame, although the flame appears to be extinguished. The sconce of the eternal flame is currently painted in the bright national colours of red, black, gold and green.

Unfortunately, since first documenting the site in 2011, photography of the Independence Arch, Stadium and monument has been disallowed by the government. The entire site, especially the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier is fiercely guarded by the military. Nkrumah's writing in *I Speak of Freedom* (1960) suggest that the tomb, or at the very least, its eternal flame may have predated the construction of the square. This may possibly be the very "eternal Flame of African Freedom", lit by Nkrumah on the evening celebrations marking the nation's transition into a republic on 1 July 1960.⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴⁵ The soldiers who were gunned down in the march to Christianborg were veterans of the West Africa Frontier Force who served under the Allied Forces campaign in Burma during the Second World War.

⁴⁴⁶ See Nkrumah, *I Speak of Freedom*, p.237.



Figure 20. Independence Arch at Black Star Square, Monument to the Unknown Soldier, Eternal Flame, Accra. Photo: Senam Okudzeto / Arnd Engel, 2011



Figure 21. Independence Arch at Black Star Square, Monument to the Unknown Soldier, Eternal Flame, Accra. Photo: Senam Okudzeto / Arnd Engel, 2011

In his book, Nkrumah speaks of his excitement and the central importance of the ceremonial events surrounding the republic celebrations, as well as the drive to the racecourse; a site that is proximate to the current site of the Independence Stadium, Tomb and Eternal Flame:

...the racecourse where preparations had been made for a fireworks display preceded by the ceremonial lighting of the “Flame of African Freedom.” As darkness began to fall over the city I rose to give a speech which moved me deeply as I spoke:

We have come here tonight to light the torch of African freedom. This flame which we are about to light will not only enshrine the spirit of the Republic of Ghana, but will also provide a symbol for the African freedom fighters of today and tomorrow. We shall draw inspiration from this perpetual flame for the struggle of African emancipation.

Day after day and year after year this flame will reflect the burning desire of the African people to be free – totally free and independent – fettered by no shackles of any nature whatsoever and will signify their ability to manage and direct their affairs in the best interest of themselves.

I light this flame not only in the name of the people of Ghana but also in sacred duty to millions of Africans elsewhere now crying out for freedom. And I charge all of us here present to remember that this great struggle of African emancipation is a holy crusade to which we must constantly stand dedicated and which must be prosecuted to a successful end.⁴⁴⁷

What is the correlation between the eternal flame lit by Nkrumah and the one that stands at the Independence Square today? Discrepancies appear in the name and reported location of Nkrumah’s flame at, or near the race course. Technically speaking, the central location of the race course would have occupied more of the area further behind Independence Square towards the old city centre. This is approximately where the current Nkrumah Mausoleum stands, less than a kilometre away and a little further along the coast. Given the violence of his overthrow in the 1966 military coup, it would not be cynical to presume that Nkrumah’s eternal flame may not have burned consistently throughout Ghana’s national history (it certainly didn’t seem lit when I last

⁴⁴⁷ Nkrumah, *I Speak of Freedom* p.237.

visited). It is also possible that the flame might have been relocated, moved or renamed, or reconstructed, especially as we know that many of the archives, building programmes and materials relating to Nkrumah's regime were renamed or destroyed in the period immediately after he was deposed. The subsequent decades of military rule transitioned through several fragile political regimes into a dictatorship under Rawlings, which eventually transitioned into a democratic system alternating between two parties. These alternating political regimes and their attempts to rebrand the country have created a number of historical puzzles in the built environment.⁴⁴⁸ The many years of military rule may have guaranteed confusion with regard to the symbolism of the eternal flame, notwithstanding the erection of an entirely new monument to the Nkrumah original. The 'perpetual flame for the struggle of African emancipation' was at some point deemed more suitably lit in remembrance of the forgotten and fallen military.

The anomaly of the eternal flame appears more contentious in the context of a second overlooked military monument in the vicinity of the stadium. In a nearby area adjacent to the main campus of Independence Stadium, is the almost completely forgotten Liberation Day Monument. It is officially said to commemorate the veteran soldiers shot at the Christianborg Crossroads shooting. The main structure of the Liberation Day Monument has proportions very similar to the polygonal vertical plinth at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, only this structure appears more as three triangular planes of stone leaning against each other to form a central column. The three sides of the column do not quite meet, leaving spaces between. From a distance the monument appears as an incomplete plinth that has no sculpture on top of its central dais; up close its component parts

⁴⁴⁸ See Lucasz Stanek, 'Architects from Socialist Countries in Ghana (1957–67): Modern Architecture and Mondialisation'. *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 74, No. 4 (December 2015), p.417 describes how the National Liberation Council 'adjusted' the direction of building programmes. And in general the article illustrates the obfuscatory hierarchy of state building programmes, which rarely attributed the design of public projects to individual architects, pp.416–442.

fragment to appear as separate elements independently supported. On each façade at the base of the plinth are three large plaques. The first commemorates the veterans shot in the events leading to independence; the second commemorates the soldiers that died in the 1966 coup that overthrew Nkrumah on 24 February that year and the third commemorates the “Unknown Ghanaian who died in the cause for Freedom and Justice for Ghana.”⁴⁴⁹ The inconsistency of use in fonts of the different commemorative plaques suggests they were erected at different points in history. The construction of the monument is as confusing as it is remarkable, as it unapologetically commemorates ‘unknown’ civilians, martyred soldiers, a military coup and two overthrows of government; one colonial and one national.

⁴⁴⁹ Harcourt Fuller (2014) has written an impressive book with a (few big mistakes in an otherwise accurate and) detailed history of monuments constructed by Nkrumah. However, this monument has caused him some confusion. He lists it as the “Three Slab Marble Cenotaph” and distinguishes it as being solely for commemoration of “The Unknown Ghanaian” (p.123). He wrongly assumes that the 1966 Liberation Monument was a separate construction listed as the “24th February Cenotaph” (p.154). Frustratingly, he shows images of this single monument from different perspectives listing the images as recording two separate monuments; namely figures 6.4, 6.5 and 6.5 (said to be the “Three Slab Cenotaph”) and figure 8.1 (listed as the 24th February Monument). See Fuller Harcourt, *Building the Ghanaian Nation-State*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. For visual comparison see the typically confused Wikipedia pages for the sites in particular the images chosen for the still empty plinths; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberation_Day_Monument Subsequently you will see here that at some point recently, figurative busts have been added to the monument in the contemporary metallic plastic style; <https://www.theajalabug.com/home/2017/10/30/accra-guide-ghana> [last accessed 21.01.2019].



Figure 22. Liberation Day Monument, Accra.⁴⁵⁰

Since the 1966 coup in Ghana, Liberation Day has only ever been associated with the overthrow of Nkrumah. Under military regimes, the date of February 24 was a compulsory public holiday, but Liberation Day is no longer celebrated except in the polemics of angry journalists.⁴⁵¹ The relative lack of information of when this monument was erected and how it came to be named for the 1966 military coup means that the monument simultaneously commemorates and disavows both the establishment and the demise of no less than three governmental regimes. Subsequently, the monument's ability to have survived the several decades since the country's transition back into democracy after years of military rule might serve as a testimony to how little known or regarded it is. In very recent years, three new figurative sculptures have appeared at the base of the

⁴⁵⁰ Source; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberation_Day_Monument [last accessed 06.12.21].

⁴⁵¹ See polemic by John Hamilton, Cape Coast Constituency from 23/02/2018, 'February 24th, 1966: Ghana's Day of Liberation', in Ghanaian digital new source *Myjoyonline*; <https://www.myjoyonline.com/opinion/2018/february-23rd/february-24-1966-ghanas-day-of-liberation.php>.

formerly abstract monument.⁴⁵² These appear to depict the martyred ex-servicemen and are covered in a metallic copper paint. Their sudden appearance highlights the inconsistency faced when attempting to date monuments in Ghana—a fact that is further complicated by the habit of government regimes to constantly change inscriptions, add embellishments and alter historical facts; a habit that has become well established in the years since independence. Harcourt Fuller’s *Building the Ghanaian Nation-State: Kwame Nkrumah’s Symbolic Nationalism* (2014) attempts a very thorough study of the military and national monuments of both the Nkrumah and subsequent regimes, examining public state records and newspaper archives with particular reference to the “1963 National Statues Project”. The handful of mistakes in this extremely useful work illustrate the difficulty in determining the original form and intent of post-independence monuments in Ghana.⁴⁵³

Public fora and open source internet-based platforms are currently contributing to the confused information circulating concerning the monument. The current Wikipedia page shows the Liberation Day monument, as it was when I last visited in 2012. There are three rectangular structures mirroring the three sides of the vertical monument. It could well be that these were empty plinths waiting to be filled with the commemorative busts of the martyred soldiers.

⁴⁵² This was discovered comparing blog posts on the monument, see <https://www.theajalabug.com/home/2017/10/30/accra-guide-ghana> [last accessed 17 January 2019].

⁴⁵³ See footnote 54 and also Harcourt Fuller. *Building the Ghanaian Nation-State*, pp.19, p.124 and p.174.

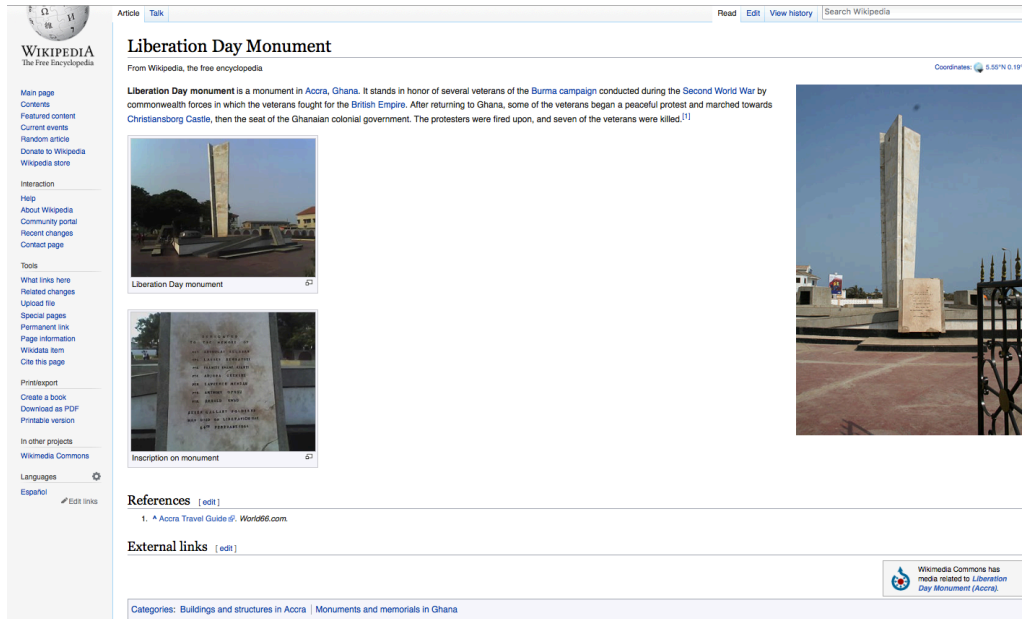


Figure 23. Screen grab of the Liberation Day Monument Wikipedia page.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberation_Day_Monument [last accessed 16/01/2019]

In contrast to the lack of visual integration of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and eternal flame into the surroundings of Black Star Square, the Independence Arch appears to have successfully fulfilled its symbolic function as a national monument within the contemporary Ghanaian psyche.



Figure 24. Screen grab of the Liberation Day Monument showing recent embellishments that appear to be sculptures depicting the martyred veterans. The updated image of this monument is currently absent from its Wikipedia page. Source: <https://www.theajalabug.com/home/2017/10/30/accra-guide-ghana> [last accessed 17/01/2019].

Each year on February 28, a solemn military parade is held, followed by a presidential wreath-laying ceremony and prayers to mark the anniversary of the ex-servicemen's shooting. The annual event is televised and reported in the popular media. These ceremonial acts underscore the commemorative function of the arch, generating a sense of collective memory and national pride. Nonetheless, its design has repeatedly received critical response from non-Ghanaian observers who, uncomfortable with its marked resemblance to European victory arches, find it inauthentic and lacking clear reference to Ghanaian culture. Mark Crinson in *Modern Architecture and the End of Empire* (2003) and Nnamdi Elleh (1996) in *African Architecture* catalogue a number of hostile responses to the arch, in particular noting one from Frantz Fanon, who was posted in Ghana as ambassador to the Transitional Algerian Government until the time of his death. Fanon disliked Nkrumah's building programmes, which he felt to be both pandering to an educated elitist sense of internationalist modernisation and unmindful of native cultural trends.⁴⁵⁴ These sentiments are repeated in Helmy Sharawy's paper 'Toward the African Revolution; 'Black Skin White Masks'', which again states Fanon's frustration with the newly independent Ghana.⁴⁵⁵ Elleh in *African Architecture: Evolution and Transition*, expands upon the reasons for this discomfort, reading a difficult cultural incongruence into Nkrumah's choice to use the form of the arch. Elleh writes:

*...it represents the irony and identity crisis that surround African politics...a Western trophy in stone has been borrowed to celebrate an African victory over a Western imperial power of the twentieth century.*⁴⁵⁶

Janet Berry Hess in 'Imagining Architecture: the structure of Nationalism in Accra Ghana', argues in favour of Nkrumah's adoption of the 'international style', suggesting he deliberately adopted

⁴⁵⁴ Crinson, *Modern Architecture* p.154–156 and Elleh, *African Architecture*, p.295.

⁴⁵⁵ Helmy Sharawy, 'Toward the African Revolution; Black Skin White Masks', conference paper for CODESRIA 30th anniversary conference – Dakar 10–12 Dec 2003. Available at CODESRIA online: <http://www.codesria.org/IMG/pdf/sharawi.pdf>

⁴⁵⁶ Elleh, Nnamdi. *African Architecture: Evolution and Transformation*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997, p.293, quoted in Mark Crinson, *Modern Architecture at the End of Empire*, p.154.

the iconography of Western architecture and appropriated extant colonial plans for architectural development to underscore the nation's drive towards modernity.⁴⁵⁷ Nkrumah's hope to underscore a smooth and symbolic transition to power through his building programme is discussed later in this dissertation. While foreign observers may remain discontented with the international appearance of the Independence Arch, their judgement supposes a dominant view of the arch whose disappointment lies in the knowledge that this arch is not unique. For most Ghanaians who grew up knowing the Independence Arch first, however, and perhaps the Arc de Triomphe in Paris second (if at all), it remains an enduring symbol of national identity. Its popularity is underscored by frequent use in commercial films, pop videos, internet blogs, social media and the ubiquitous postcard. It would appear that the arch has successfully captured the nationalist imagination in Ghana. Further discussion in this chapter may confirm the Independence Arch as the only uncontested monument to nationalism in the country.

Although the victory arch commemorates an instance of brutal murder, it also encapsulates the overthrow of a tyrannical colonial regime. Therefore, celebration is inextricably woven into its symbolism, and this overshadows the sadness inherent in its memorialisation of death. Notably, there have been no sculptural representations or visual depictions of the three murdered ex-servicemen who are, in essence, the nation's first martyrs until very recent times. Prior to the mysterious and recent amendments to the Liberation Day monument, their only representation has been through the text of one the aforementioned monument's commemorative plaques and The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, but it should be noted that the martyred soldiers' bodies were definitely recovered after their brutal murders, as evidenced by a 2016 post on the Ghana.Net

⁴⁵⁷ Janet Berry Hess, 'Imagining Architecture: the structure of Nationalism in Accra Ghana'. *Africa Today*, Vol. 47, No.2 (Spring 2000), Indiana University Press, p.45.

digital news portal that bemoaned the sorry state of Sergeant Adjetey's graveyard in Osu.⁴⁵⁸ Perhaps the soldiers' true monument is the Independence Arch. The former mayor and architectural historian Nat Amarteifo has repeatedly expressed frustration at a general lack of monuments throughout the city, begging further questions of national monuments in Ghana and their function.⁴⁵⁹

Mourning and Material Culture

A discussion of Ghanaian funerary culture is perhaps essential to decoding the expectations of public monuments and their function in contemporary Ghanaian society. Although the appearance of the Independence Arch may be contested as 'inauthentic', its enduring social importance and combined ritual narratives of celebration and mourning have strong echoes of traditional Ghanaian funerary culture, not only in its deliberate combination of mourning and celebration, but also in the way in which the mourning process is unified through a very specific local use of an arguably international material culture. The popularity of the Arch is maintained through its being located adjacent to the National Stadium, a site used regularly to host immensely popular concerts, and other public events such as the presidential inaugurations. It is therefore viewed as a place of collective celebration that is used by every segment of the population, underscoring the immense importance of community in the Ghanaian cultural consciousness.⁴⁶⁰ The regular use of the national stadium helps to enforce a shared sense of nationhood and collective identity in citizens.

⁴⁵⁸ See 'Memorial of Sergeant Adjetey-Osu', Accra. <http://ghana-net.com/sergeant-adjetey.html> [last accessed 22/01/2019].

⁴⁵⁹ Nat Nunu Amarteifo, private interview.

⁴⁶⁰ For the first large scale public concert held in Black Star square see Denis Saunders, Director, *Soul to Soul*. 1971. Produced by Richard Bock and Tom Mosk for Nigram-Aura Productions, documentary film; 96 mins.

The historic transformation of a place of suffering and mourning into a site of celebration illustrates how celebration is continually evoked in public practices that honour the dead in Ghanaian culture.

In Ghana, the importance of family, kin and ancestry within social structures is continually re-inscribed through social rituals such as births, marriage and death, but funerals in particular are considered the most paramount social rite throughout Ghana's many diverse ethnic cultures. In many parts of Ghana, mundane objects are essential parts of the mourning process. Everyday items such as textiles, mirrors, combs, toothbrushes and talcum powder are 'traditionally' placed in the coffin to be buried with the deceased.⁴⁶¹ This incorporation of material culture into the mourning process underscores the ephemeral condition of life by asserting that a part of a person's existence is eternal. Strangely, it is ordinary commodities, such as talcum powder and hairbrushes that affirm the transcendence of the soul. Such objects constitute a specific set of material constructions completely unique to Ghanaian funerary practice that display a form of commodity fetishism that makes mourning into a profound metaphysical experience. The burying of mundane objects exposes the apparatus of the commodity fetish that attributes transcendental powers to these objects.

Death in Ghana is dealt with as a collective social process. Although domestic intra-mural sepulchres remain illegal, being able to bury a loved one within or close to the grounds of the family home is still a marker of good traditional funerary practice, particularly in rural areas where graveyards may appear in very close proximity to family homes or villages.⁴⁶² Specific memorial rites are ordered at determined intervals from the point of death, corresponding to the age of the

⁴⁶¹ These practices are carried out by both Christian and animist communities in Ghana and are not in any way viewed as anomalous to Christianity.

⁴⁶² In spite of intramural sepulchre being outlawed in 1888, it is still common practice to bury relatives within family compounds, especially outside of the capital and in rural areas where land is more abundant. Houses will have graves within adjoining gardens or plots of land, as close to the grounds of the family house as possible.

deceased at the time of departure and particular factors such as whether or not their parents are still living.⁴⁶³ It is common to have memorial rites at intervals ranging from six months to one year, and up to ten years after the death of an individual, meaning that at the communal or clan level it is a highly evolved, private and perpetual social ritual, which is satisfied with being performed within a closed community.⁴⁶⁴ Funerals of anyone living to be over 70 years old are seen as a celebration of life. The mourning process can last weeks or even years. Because of this, people often spend their whole lives setting aside savings to cover the costs of their funerals.⁴⁶⁵ Guests are always invited to a social reception where they enjoy food and music in honour of the deceased.⁴⁶⁶ They will also be issued a code of dress, depending on the region, as well as the stage and day of the funeral rites.⁴⁶⁷ Remembering that families and clans more often than not encompass hundreds of individuals and can be so extensive as to encapsulate tens of thousands of people. The elaborate process of memorialising the dead creates unity within family groupings and affirms the importance of family ties as the primary construction of contemporary Ghana. The cultural

⁴⁶³ Funerary observations can be very varied and complex, but while most are long drawn out public affairs, there are certain instances of death, such as for instance the loss of a child, that demand quick, discreet funerals where only the immediate family attend.

⁴⁶⁴ It is perhaps for this reason that state funerals can be somewhat equivocal undertakings, in this context the family taking precedence over the state. See Elizabeth Ohene's article *African Viewpoint: Ghanaians Fight Over the Dead*, on the BBC online 18/10/2011: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-15339281>.

⁴⁶⁵ It is customary for guests to make cash donations at funerals in honour of the family. As a result small enterprises have arisen who offer to buy funerals from families who are short of funds to pay for the ceremonies. These funeral companies will organise the burial, cater all functions in exchange for the right to keep the cash donations of the hundreds of guests who will inevitably attend the funeral.

⁴⁶⁶ The cultural importance of Ghanaian funerals is so great that the *New York Times* has reported on elaborate Ghanaian-American funerals in New York. See Emmanuel Opoku, 'Dance, Laugh, Drink, Save the Date, it's a Ghanaian Funeral', *NY Times*, 11 April 2011. For a less sensationalised account of Ghanaian mourning and funerary culture, see Abena P.A. Busia's 'What Is Africa to Me? Knowledge Possession, Knowledge Production, and the Health of Our Bodies Politic in Africa and the Africa Diaspora', *African Studies Review*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (Apr 2006), pp.15–30 and the anthology Abena P.A. Busia, *Traces of Life: A Collection of Elegies and Praise Poems*, Clark Publishing, 2008.

⁴⁶⁷ Depending on the occasion and age of the deceased, it may be appropriate to wear red, black or white. All are common funeral colours. It is traditional to wear a white cloth printed with black adinkra symbols (hieroglyphs representing proverbs) on the Sunday of the burial (usually when Christian rites are held). Families may commission a special fabric to be made for a funeral and it is not uncommon to see thousands of people wearing the same fabric at a funeral celebration.

specificity of the mourning process in Ghanaian culture finds a particularly unique expression in the vernacular traditions of the La coffin builders of Accra.

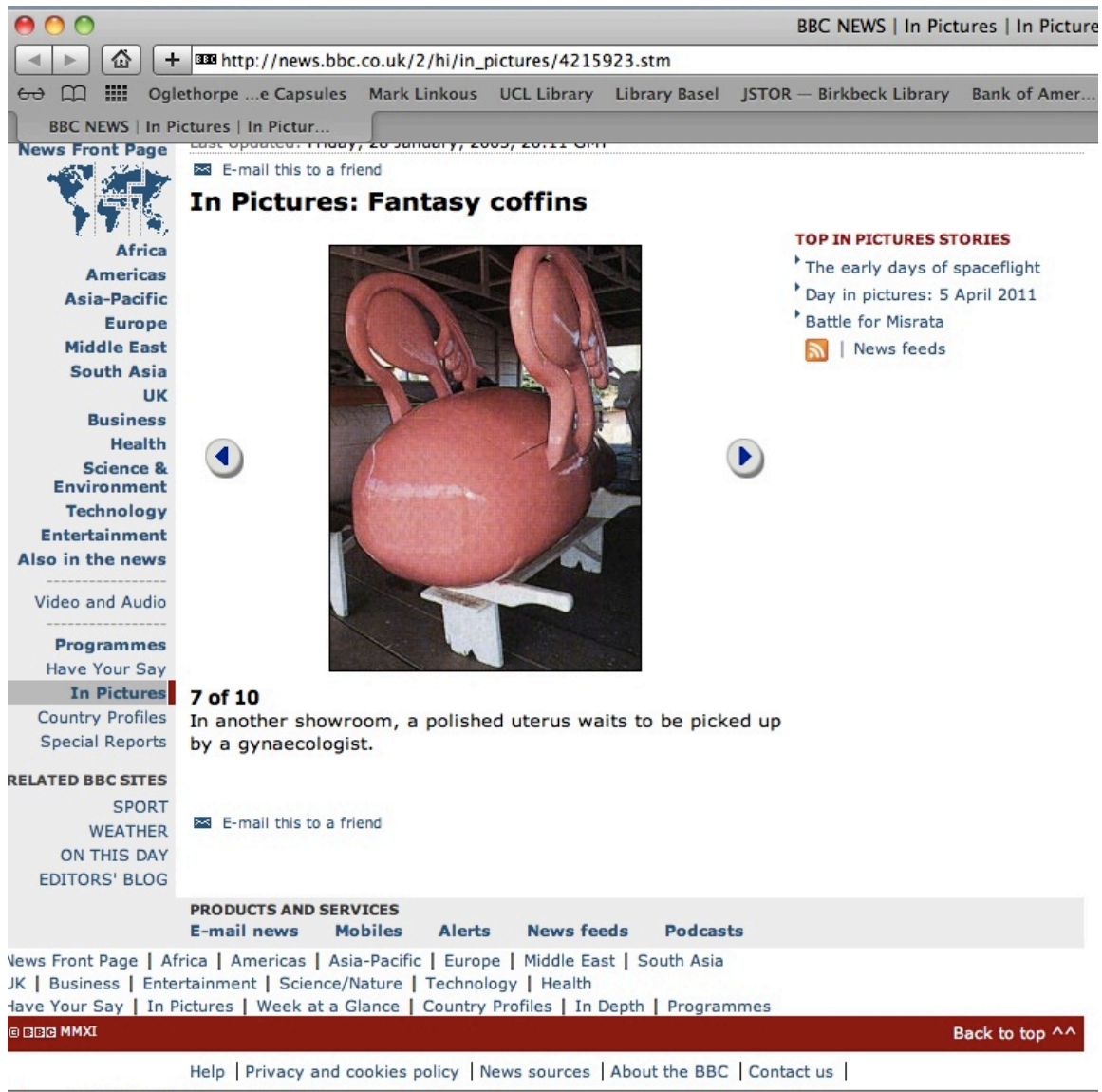


Figure 25. Screen grab of BBC 2005 article on 'fantasy coffins', http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_pictures/4215923.stm [last accessed 22/01/2019]

Members of the Ga culture, the La coffin builders are famous in and outside of Ghana for their intricately carved sarcophagi in the shape of material objects representing the profession of the deceased. The workshops of the more prominent carvers are easily seen when driving along beach roads, with colourful giant beer and coke bottles, standing proudly next to disarmingly oversized

mobile telephones and *Nike* trainers. Each carving has a lid, which when opened reveals an intricately pleated silk interior, reminding the unfamiliar viewer that despite the cheerful exterior, these objects are designed for a more sombre purpose.

The La coffins have become noted enough that several master carvers such as Pa Joe now enjoy international careers exhibiting works across the world in fine arts galleries and museums.⁴⁶⁸ Many Ghanaians outside of Ga culture have started to commission coffins in this style, and foreigners seem equally seduced. The British actor Gryff Rhys Jones devoted a 2010–2011 art project in collaboration with the Sainsbury Collection to the coffins, successfully commissioning an elaborate coffin in the shape of a video camera as part of his project.⁴⁶⁹ As the coffins travel out of the specificities of Ga culture into national Ghanaian culture and beyond, they are increasingly referred to as ‘fantasy coffins’. This new nomenclature indicates a shift in culture, as historically the coffins were more likely to be less rooted in fantasy and more rooted in the traditional approach of commemorating the life activities of the deceased.

The objects reproduced as coffins present a public record of material culture in contemporary urban Accra. Often representing the more popular trades of a given community, such as soft drink sellers and cell phone salesmen, there are a disproportionate number of Coca-Cola bottles and Nokia cell phones on display at the coffin builders’ workshops, indicating not only the commemoration of the deceased, but a catalogue of economic commerce and livelihood in the contemporary city.

⁴⁶⁸ Paa Joe regularly shows work at Ghanaian Painter Agblade Glover’s *Artist Alliance* in Accra, a fine and applied arts showroom run in the form of an artists’ commercial cooperative. Paa Joe is also represented by Jack Bell Gallery in London: <http://jackbellgallery.com/paajo2.html>.

⁴⁶⁹ See Griff Rhys Jones, ‘Ghanaian Fantasy Coffin’, 27 September 2011– 4 December 2011, the Sainsbury Collection website: <http://www.scva.org.uk/exhibitions/current/?exhibition=117>.

John Collins (2017) offers a little-known perspective on the genesis of the La coffin culture; he insists that the ‘fantasy coffin’ culture actually came directly out of the Second World War when Ghanaian carpenters working on the allied war effort in Takoradi began the practice of making coffins in the shape of the international war planes they worked on and burying their dead in them.⁴⁷⁰ The international popularity of Ga coffins illustrates a unique circular narrative, whereby globalised objects in material culture take on a very specific local culture usage, tied to forms that represent the labour of the deceased when alive. As the fame of the coffins spreads outside of Ghana, they travel from being representations of the material labour of globalised objects into becoming actual objects of global exchange and in doing so, being removed from function and given a new context as art forms. Nonetheless, the material objects reproduced in Ga funerary culture display a dynamism in how funerary practice evolves to incorporate imported material tropes of modernity whilst simultaneously following the edicts and social expectations within the confines of traditional Ghanaian approaches to mourning. The La coffin makers’ incorporation of the ephemeral objects of trade and commodity culture into the transcendental phenomena of death reflects anthropologist Michael Taussig’s observation about how commodity fetishism insists that everyday objects can exist as “elemental and immutable things”. Taussig writes,

*Time, space, matter, cause, relation, human nature, and society itself are social products created by man just as are the different types of tools, farming systems, clothes, houses, monuments, languages, myths, and so on, that mankind has produced since the dawn of human life. But to their participants, all cultures tend to present these categories as if they were not social products but elemental and immutable things. As soon as such categories are defined as natural, rather than as social products, epistemology itself acts to conceal understanding of the social order. Our experience and our sensed reality are not natural but social constructions.*⁴⁷¹

⁴⁷⁰ Collins, John. ‘Popular Performance and Culture in Ghana: The Past 50 Years’, *Ghana Studies*, Volume 20, 2017. University of Wisconsin Press, p.183.

⁴⁷¹ Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism*. Chapel Hill Press, 1994, p.4.

The incorporation of symbols of labour into a burial sarcophagus does indeed reduce the life of the deceased to an elemental and perpetual representation of a life lived, as being represented exclusively by labour. No marriages, no births, no markers of social life other than the professional occupation of the one to be buried find representation in the form of a fantasy coffin. Are these forms an attempt to reconcile the contradictions of the commodity fetish by burying a representation of labour in the material world with the deceased? Do they in fact reveal the absurdity of capital as a “social relation between persons established by the instrumentality of things”, precisely because they insist that things are dead without human lives to animate them?⁴⁷² Or, do the fantasy coffins clearly illustrate “a social relation between men that assumes in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things”? Do fantasy coffins illustrate a social belief unique to capitalist modernity, that human lives are only animated through their relationship with things, in particular the products of labour? Or are they a different kind of fetish operating in the realm of the subconscious? Giorgio Agamben (1993) reminds us that Freud links objects to *melancholia* and the process of remembering the mourned through objects associated with them—the libido creates a fixation with every object associated with the beloved deceased and creates a narcissistic bond with the object that replaces them.⁴⁷³ This identification of mourning with the objects associated with the deceased creates “the will to transform into an object of amorous embrace what should only have remained an object of contemplation”.⁴⁷⁴ These amorous objects are then reproduced in an act of celebration and not only replace the deceased but house the deceased.⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷² Marx, ‘The Modern Theory of Colonization’, *Capital*, p.379.

⁴⁷³ Giorgio Agamben, ‘The lost object’, *Stanzas; Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*, (trans. Martinez, Ronald, L.), Theory and History of Literature, Volume 69. University of Minnesota Press, 1993, p.20.

⁴⁷⁴ Giorgio Agamben, ‘The lost object’, *Stanzas; Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*, (trans. Martinez, Ronald, L.), Theory and History of Literature, Volume 69. University of Minnesota Press, 1993, p.20.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.* p.19.

The incorporation of globalised material culture into the specificities of Ghanaian funerary practice is not unique to the La coffin culture. Musicologist Steven Feld produced an intriguing documentary on the funerary culture of a small community of La lorry drivers, *A Por-Por Funeral for Ashirifie* (2007).⁴⁷⁶ Feld's film catalogues the little-known culture of Por-Por music; an onomatopoeic title that references a unique style of funeral dirges, played entirely on archaic squeeze bulb car horns by mourners during burial rites. The music is remarkably complex and its sophisticated compositions seem contrary to the outmoded form of horn on which they are produced. Remembering that for a very long time, contemporary cars have used the electronic klaxon, these instruments suggest a musical practice that must be as old as lorry driving in Ghana, if not as old as the memories of lorries themselves. The symbolic continuity inherent in the form of the now-out-dated squeeze bulb horn is illustrative of the unique way in which La culture incorporates both historical and contemporary experiences through the traditional demands of ritual. The incorporation of the antique materials unique to the labour of lorry drivers narrate Marx's observations of the social underpinnings of the commodity fetish, as there "is a definite social relation between men that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation among things".⁴⁷⁷ These 'things' might be read as the material residue that describes multiple social relations in addition to vernacular forms of communication between vehicles on the road. Driving on Ghana's roads is considered very dangerous. So much so, that taxi, long distance lorry and bus drivers in particular are popularly said to start the day with a tot of schnapps 'for courage'. A car horn is a valuable asset for road safety. In light of the dangers associated with working in the

⁴⁷⁶ Steven Feld, *A Por Por Funeral for Ashirifie*, from the compilation *Jazz Cosmopolitanism in Accra, Ghana. A film Trilogy by Steven Feld* (video), 2009, (material recorded Jan 1, 2005–Dec 1, 2008).

⁴⁷⁷ Adler, J. Mortimer, (ed.) *Karl Marx: Capital. Edited by Friedrich Engels, Great Books of the Western World. 50. MARX*, pub. Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., University of Chicago, Second Edition 1990, p.31

transport industry, the transformation of a simple tool, essential to road safety into a form of musical eulogy, is a tautological reflection upon death that sublimates the spectre of high mortality rates associated with Ghana’s driving professionals and transforms it into a source of poetic expression. This transformation underscores Marx’s assertion that “from the moment that men in any way work for one another, their labour assumes a social form”.⁴⁷⁸



Figure 26. Video still: chapter title: “Musical Condolences” part 2, 8:06 min. Steven Feld, *A Por-Por Funeral for Ashirifie* (2007).

Por-Por music creates a doubled process of memorialisation that not only eulogises the central characteristics of the profession of the deceased, but also an extinct material culture within his trade. This is also a gendered funerary practice unique to men that melds a celebration of the

⁴⁷⁸ Marx, *Capital*, p.31.

lineage of the lorry driver and the lorry itself, as if man and vehicle were interchangeable in their continuity.

The phenomenon of Por-Por music illustrates the sometimes very specific ways in which mourning is performed in Ghanaian society. While families and communities are at the heart of the process, an individual's place in the world is defined not only in relation to the social networks that supported their lives, but also the material culture that formed the basis of their socio-economic existence. The material artefacts of their socio-economic existence then become a key part of the mourning process.

Ghana@50

Understanding the importance of community in mourning processes may give insight into Ghana's lack of public monuments. In the context of a society that privileges family structures and clan networks, memorialising public figures—especially those such as historically significant politicians, becomes an area of contention.⁴⁷⁹ The social structures of Ghanaian family networks are rhizomatic in nature, meaning that an individual is judged not only as representative of his or her own deeds, but also to the deeds of his or her relatives and extended family networks. This form of social representation is highly augmented in the field of politics, directly bearing upon political figures, and it may or may not find favour with the particular political party in office. As a consequence, large-scale national memorialising necessarily breaks with, and at times sublimates more complex and nuanced aspects of tradition in order to perform its function, something that

⁴⁷⁹ See Fuller Harcourt, *Building the Nation State*, on the parliamentary petitions to construct a monument to J.B. Danquah, p.180.

may appear comparatively stilted and incomplete in relation to community-based practices of mourning.

Under the socialist President Rawlings (1983–2003), a number of public monuments dedicated to the founding fathers (who were not, coincidentally, members of opposing political parties), were deliberately allowed to fall into disrepair.⁴⁸⁰ While Rawlings neglected the statues of UGCC leaders such as J.B. Danquah and Prime Minister K. A. Busia, he rescued a vandalised and decapitated sculpture of former President Kwame Nkrumah and had it installed at the rear of an impressive new mausoleum in a commemorative park that also housed a museum dedicated to the memory of the first president.⁴⁸¹

⁴⁸⁰ The Monument of J.B. Danquah in Osu was singled out for Rawlings' vilification, being repeatedly lowered in height during his regime, although for some reason it survived his presidency and was elevated and restored by the Kufour administration for the advent of the 2007 Ghana@50 festivities.

⁴⁸¹ See Janet Berry Hess, 'Imagining Architecture: The Structure of Nationalism in Accra, Ghana'. *Africa Today*, Vol. 47, No. 2 (Spring, 2000), Indian Press p.35.



Figure 27. Rear view of the Nkrumah Mausoleum, Kwame Nkrumah National Park, Accra: At the back is a decapitated sculpture of Nkrumah that was vandalised after his deposition. A new sculpture of Nkrumah is at the front of the mausoleum. Photo: Senam Okudzeto and Arnd Engel, 2010.

The mausoleum's opening in 1971 marked the third time Nkrumah was 'buried' in the almost 20-year period after his death in 1972, as Sekou Toure initially refused to allow his remains to return to Ghana unless he was given the full honours of state funeral. Eventually, after an initial state funeral in Guinea, later in the same year, the Acheampong regime conceded, and Nkrumah's remains were repatriated. He was buried far from the capital in his hometown of Nkroful. The third burial ceremony took place after Rawlings constructed the mausoleum, once again disinterring his remains and moving them to the nation's capital. The initial creation of the site proved controversial; many outside of Ghana were surprised to learn that this was the first real attempt

since the efforts of the Acheampong regime to rehabilitate Nkrumah's memory.⁴⁸² In the years following his deposition, the founding president remained, by and large, unpopular, viewed by many Ghanaians as an unwelcome socialist, despotic mercenary and African imperialist.⁴⁸³

At the front of the mausoleum, a new sculpture was erected, depicting Nkrumah in long flowing robes and confidently striding forward. The surface of the sculpture appeared in the shiny metallic gold plasticised paint that is used frequently in contemporary Ghana. Symbolically, the decapitated statue, its head on a separate plinth, like a king fresh from the guillotine, was placed at the back of the mausoleum. It sits in an unimposing location on the edge of a narrow path leading to the site's museum. Fuller reports that both this and another vandalised statue were partially restored in 1977 for exhibition in the 'Ghana Museums and Monuments Week' programme.⁴⁸⁴ The original Nkrumah sculpture was designed by the Italian sculptor Nicola Cataudella. It was initially erected in 1956 and at that time bore three inscriptions, reading "We prefer self-government with danger to servitude in tranquillity", "Seek ye first the political kingdom and all other things shall be added unto it" and "To me the liberation of Ghana will be meaningless unless it is linked up with the total liberation of Africa".⁴⁸⁵ These inscriptions are no longer present, but instead there are two new plaques, the first under the bust of the head reading:

OSAGYEFO DR. KWAME NKROMAH (1909 –1972)
THE BRONZE HEAD OF DR. KWAME NKROMAH'S ORIGINAL STATUE-WHICH STOOD
IN FRONT OF

⁴⁸² It was the Acheampong regime that gave Nkrumah the posthumous title *Osageyfo*, or *The Redeemer*. See Harcourt Fuller's book and doctoral thesis which have extensive sections on Nkrumah statues and the Acheampong regime, *Symbolic Nationalism During the Kwame Nkrumah Era in the Gold Coast/Ghana*, LSE, August, 2010, pp.271–277, and 'From "Redeemer to Redeemed?" in *Building the Ghanaian Nation-State: Kwame Nkrumah's Symbolic Nationalism*, New York: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2014. pp.175–188.

⁴⁸³ Nkrumah's drive towards pan-African unity has been re-interpreted as a form of imperialist expansion; he is also remembered as the only president to have served two countries, Ghana and Guinea Conakry (The latter appointment of honorary co-president was made by Sekou Toure at the point of his exile from Ghana).

⁴⁸⁴ Fuller, p.171.

⁴⁸⁵ See Janet Berry Hess, *Imagining Architecture: The Structure of Nationalism in Accra, Ghana*. *Africa Today*, Vol. 47, No. 2 (Spring, 2000), Indian Press p.35.

THE OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE, ACCRA
VANDALISED DURING THE FEBRUARY 24, 1966
MILITARY AND POLICE COUP D'ETAT

THIS WAS RECOVERED AND PRESENTED BY A
PATRIOTIC CITIZEN TO THE INFORMATION
SERVICES DEPARTMENT WHICH IN TURN
RELEASED IT TO THE PARK ON MAY 2ND, 2009

MOUNTED ON THE PARK ON SEPT. 1 2009

OSAGYEFO DR. KWAME

NKRUMAH (1909 –1972)

THE ORIGINAL STATUE OF DR. KWAME
NKRUMAH

WHICH STOOD IN FRONT OF
PARLIAMENT HOUSE
OPPOSITE OLD POLO GROUNDS, ACCRA
ATTACKED BY A MOB, VANDALISED AS
IT STANDS

NOW IN THE WAKE OF A MILITARY
WITH POLICE
COUP D'ETAT ON 24TH FEBRUARY 1966
RECOVERED FOR THE NATIONAL
MUSEUM IN 1975

THIS IS ON LOAN TO KNMP FROM
GHANA MUSEUMS
AND MONUMENTS BOARD
MOUNTED ON 11TH JUNE, 2007

The architecture of Kwame Nkrumah National Park, its statues, museum and its mausoleum are surprisingly silent to the political memory of Nkrumah. While the museum houses several photos and a few scraps of paper bearing his hand, there are no quotes from his speeches and no texts on his ideologies visible. Photos are not allowed, and the site is virtually empty. The exception to this is the bookstore, which is filled with numerous biographies, publications of speeches and various other kinds of Nkrumah memorabilia. The bookshop appears distinct from the main campus of the mausoleum tucked discreetly into a corner towards the exit to the car park.

The new inscriptions on the plinths supporting the rescued statues underscore the difficult relationship Ghana has with its first president. Their text makes the events of Nkrumah's deposition into an inescapable event that cannot be denied or forgotten. In contrast, the triumphal statue at the front of the mausoleum has no text. The symbolic reading of the positioning of these two sculptures of *Osagyefo*, 'the Redeemer', reminds viewers that he too has transitioned through an act of being redeemed. The placing of the old, 'bad' Nkrumah at the back of the mausoleum, whilst the new, 'good' Nkrumah, silent and without politics leads the nation forth at the front of a grand facade. Mark Crinson (2001) observes the Nkrumah statues as "trace relics which embody the loss of faith in the leader-hero and as relics of a safely distant past".⁴⁸⁶ The actual structure of the mausoleum is executed in grey blocks of granite. It resembles an inverted Akan linguist's sword (see fig 28.); an important visual reference to local cultural traditions whereby a king's emissary would hold a sword upright to reference pending war, or downwards to indicate 'all is well' and peace.⁴⁸⁷ Malcolm D. McLeod has described the immense symbolic importance of ceremonial swords in Akan culture with particular reference to diplomacy.

*Those chosen by kings and chiefs to deliver messages or conduct important negotiations carried, or were accompanied by men carrying, gold handled swords. These people were frequently encountered on the roads and paths of Asante. Visitors were often guided and controlled by sword bearers.*⁴⁸⁸

As with the Liberation Day Monument, whose multiple plaques commemorate several contradictory events; the 1966 coup against Nkrumah, the overthrow of the British in 1948 and

⁴⁸⁶ Private discussion and see Mark Crinson, 'Nation-building, collecting and the politics of display: The National Museum, Ghana', *Journal of the History of Collections*, Volume 13, Issue 2, 2001, pp.231–250.

⁴⁸⁷ In "Akan Symbolism", Peggy Appiah notes a near violent diplomatic crisis occurring in 1881 between British Colonial Governor Griffith and his allies in the Fante Confederation puzzling over the symbolic meaning of a ceremonial axe repeatedly sent by the Asante king during diplomatic negotiations. Eventually being corrected by King Ghartey IV of Winneba who assured "the axe is not emblem or sign for war, it is for peace", p.65 Peggy Appiah, 'Akan Symbolism', *African Arts*, Vol. 13, No.1 (Nov., 1979), pp. 64–67.

⁴⁸⁸ McLeod, *The Asante*, p.90.

National Independence—the decapitated statue and attendant text irretrievably footnote an otherwise serene setting with a strong visual reminder of Nkrumah’s violent overthrow. These multiple representations of conflicting regimes make the architectural narrative of the mausoleum more powerful. When a linguist inverts a chief’s sword, it is to indicate that war is over. The monument’s visual narrative could be read first as demanding attention as this giant sword represents the delivery of a great message by a higher power. The rear adjacent placement of the decapitated Cataudella statue confirms Nkrumah’s difficult political past, his role as a warrior within the formation of the nation state, and within the symbolism of the sword we read historical battles that have now been peacefully reconciled, remembering that some statues of Nkrumah were literally maimed by explosions. The mutilation of his statue has a double valence: the antique sculpture provides a relic whose fragmented form evokes a deep past, and a record of an actual political violence at a particular moment, making it difficult to completely dissociate the symbolism of the decapitated statue from the sword shaped mausoleum that holds Nkrumah’s remains. Are we to read the iconography of these images as insisting Nkrumah’s decapitation as a political leader was an undeniable foundation for the creation of the contemporary state? An essential acknowledgement of the fraught path to national stability? Regardless, it is one of few national monuments to successfully incorporate local symbolism into a modernist architectural form.⁴⁸⁹

The Nkrumah mausoleum marks the success of the Rawlings regime in re-establishing Nkrumah as one of, if not *the* central figure in the nation’s history. In contrast, there was a deliberate neglect

⁴⁸⁹ The 1961 Harry Weese designed former U.S. Embassy is the first such building noted in Ghana and was said to be based on the inverted form of a Northern King’s palace, but this suggestion has been met by scholars with mild suspicion. More controversial still, is the form of Flagstaff House, the relatively new seat of government, whose enormous expense was widely debated in parliament, is built to resemble an Asante Royal stool. See Janet Berry Hess, *Imagining Architecture*, p.45.

by his government of public monuments to the disfavoured five of the ‘Big Six’. The NPP opposition party eventually replaced the Rawlings government, headed by President J. Kufour (2000–2008). This political party was, at the time, populated by an unusually large number of the children of founding fathers—in particular those whose parents eventually turned against an unpopular Nkrumah.⁴⁹⁰

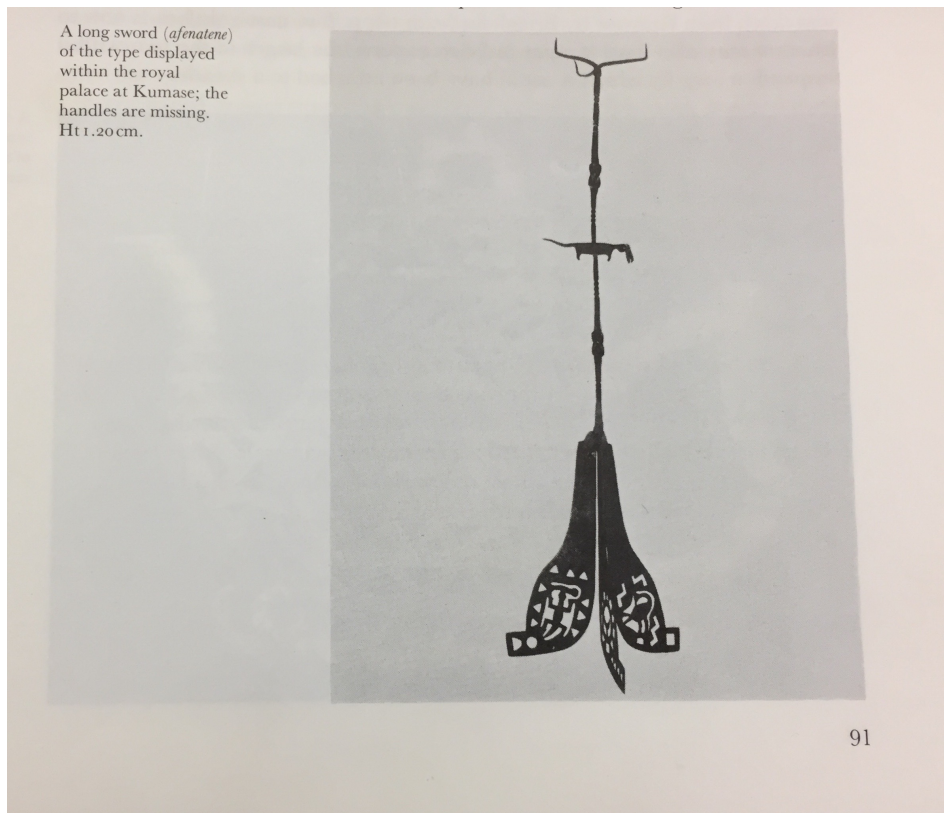


Figure 28. Asante Ceremonial Sword, source: Malcom D. Mcleod, *The Asante*, 1981, p.91

⁴⁹⁰ There are a number of examples from this period of government; Jake Obetsebi Lamptey, former Tourism Minister (2004–2007) of the NPP government under President Kufour, was the son of one of the ‘Big Six’ (founding fathers under Nkrumah) of Ghana (who is memorialised by a sculpture in Obetsebi Lamptey circle). The foreign Minister (2003–2007), Nana Akufo-Addo, former foreign minister in the Kufour government and current president of Ghana is the son of former president Edward Akufo-Addo (1970–72). Both politicians were presidential candidates in the 2007 NPP party elections. See Ghanaian academic and daughter of Nkrumah’s rival and subsequent Prime Minister of Ghana, Dr. K.A. Busia, Abena K. Busia’s book on praise poems. Her glossary of biographies at the end inadvertently gives detailed links to how the various members of the NPP party, living and dead, are interrelated. See Abena K. Busia, *Traces of Life: A Collection of Elegies and Praise Poems*. Ayeba Clark: Oxfordshire. 2008. pp.109–124.

Its administration set about restoring these neglected monuments under close public scrutiny in the media and was always working under threat of the criticism of self-aggrandisement.⁴⁹¹ The attention paid to neglected monuments by the Kufour and Rawlings governments proved to be a telling gauge of the political status quo in Ghana at any given time.

In 2009, Ghana's government transitioned back to opposition rule under President Atta Mills, the former Vice President in the President Rawlings regime. Hailing from the traditionally more socialist NDC party, it was understandable that the new government placed full emphasis on celebrating the centenary of Nkrumah's birthday. While all the newspapers ran front cover stories with large photographs of Osagyefo, the narrative content of articles illustrated the conflicting love-hate relationship Ghana has with its founding father.⁴⁹² For instance, the first paragraph of Ghana's state-owned *Daily Graphic* of Friday September 18 2009 front page began with the following lines:

*His life is a cocktail of myth, vision, selflessness, hard work and ambition. Seven times he escaped assassination attempts, three times he is buried – once abroad and twice in Ghana; many times his effigy is burnt to ashes; for many years he is mocked and scorned by the very people he liberated from oppression and colonial bondage, and for a long time his books and everything about him are ordered for destruction by his detractors in an attempt to wipe out his memory, at least from Ghanaian history. But he survived and remains the most celebrated person ever to grace the soils of Ghana and Africa. Truly Nkrumah never dies.*⁴⁹³

The Kufuor Government following Rawlings was decidedly not socialist, and in places very anti-Nkrumah.; many of its members being literally heirs of the UGCC men described historically as

⁴⁹¹ "I was disappointed to see the statue of J.B. Danquah at Danquah circle...covered with the NPP flag although that roundabout and statue are national monuments not party monuments". See Ghana News Association, General News of Friday, *GhanaWeb* 7 January, 2005, 'Ghanaians Urge Kufour to Reconcile the Nation'. <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Ghanaians-urge-Kufuor-to-reconcile-the-nation-73005> [last accessed 20/01/2019].

⁴⁹² Nkrumah was popularly addressed with the honorific 'Osagyefo', meaning 'The Redeemer'.

⁴⁹³ Kofi Yeboah, 'Nkrumah, The myth, his mission & vision', *Daily Graphic*, Friday September 18, 2009.

‘inheritance elites’.⁴⁹⁴ The two-term election of the Kufour regime between the years of 2001 and 2008 was timely for taking place within the framework of the national celebrations for the 50th Anniversary of Ghana’s Independence (and also for escaping the pressure to engineer the central events of the Nkrumah centenary celebrations). However, in the period of *Ghana@50* and leading up to Nkrumah’s centenary birthday, then President Kufuor sidestepped the controversy and exploited the opportunity for publicity promised by the events for all they were worth. The city became peppered with historically implausibly photoshopped posters showing an image of the two men holding hands and beaming broadly while performing a two-armed victory wave.⁴⁹⁵ These images appeared on giant billboards throughout the country as one of the main emblems of the 50th anniversary celebrations. They marked a significant attempt to rehabilitate the past, although not through revisiting the deeds of Nkrumah, and only allowing his image to proliferate when policed by the proscribing presence of President John Kufuor.⁴⁹⁶ The photoshopping of the decidedly pro-capitalist President Kufuor into an image embracing the socialist President Nkrumah literally gave Kufuor the upper hand; in a visualisation of controlled rehabilitation, the grasp of the living president’s hand was placed over that of the deceased, exerting a silencing control that subsumed Nkrumah’s political past into Kufuor’s NPP government. Nkrumah was not allowed to be represented alone and no matter how untenable the idea, he was made to appear as a crony of the present regime.

⁴⁹⁴ For a detailed catalogue of imagery and events surrounding the independence celebrations see Emmanuel Akyeampong and Ama de-Graft Aikins, ‘Ghana at Fifty: Reflections on Independence’, *Transition*, No. 98 (2008), Indiana University Press, pp.27–28.

⁴⁹⁵ Emmanuel Akyeampong and Ama de-Graft Aikins, ‘Ghana at Fifty: Reflections on Independence’, *Transition*, No. 98 (2008), Indiana University Press, pp. 24–34.

⁴⁹⁶ Highly ironic given the popular understanding that the NPP is the contemporary party that sprang from the National Liberation Movement (NLM) and inheritance elites of the UGCC. See Adzedze, p.5.

The overwriting of history in favour of good public relations – remembering Kufour was noted for his attention to public relations – did not go unremarked by academics.⁴⁹⁷ Ghanaian historians Emmanuel Akyeampong (2008) and Ama Aikins (2008) criticised the 2007 celebrations for failing to measure up to ‘the broad inclusiveness’ of the 1957 Independence celebrations, citing a “notable absence of constituencies dear to Nkrumah’s heart ... women, commoners and African-Americans, to mention only three”.⁴⁹⁸ Their essay, ‘Ghana at Fifty: Reflections on Independence’ (2008), remarked on the strange insistence that Kufour’s image accompany that of Nkrumah’s visually. The image of Nkrumah was in a sense policed, or held under guard, removed from its specific political narrative and placed into a generic history of ‘leadership’. The authors write:

*Despite the barrage of images featuring Kufuor and Nkrumah, there was public contention regarding the amount of official attention paid to Nkrumah's legacy. There was very little of what El Shabazz, an African American resident in Cape Coast, or young Ghanaian university students in Accra had expected: the broadcasting of Nkrumah's speeches over the airwaves, or footage from the era featured on television. Nkrumah's family house in Nkroful where he was born was reported to be in serious disrepair, and the Nkroful community threatened to boycott the anniversary celebrations. Indeed, some opined that this was an independence anniversary celebration in the Danquah-Busia tradition – two figures who had opposed Nkrumah.*⁴⁹⁹

With profound resonance, Fathia Nkrumah, the former president’s Egyptian wife, passed away during the anniversary year and the government of Ghana fulfilled her request to be buried alongside her husband in the mausoleum, flying her body to Ghana for interment. In the context of the absurd posters of Nkrumah and lack of real representation of his political platforms, the repatriation of his widow proved a less hollow consolidation of old and new regimes. Her May 27

⁴⁹⁷ The Kufour government credited itself for its focus on international PR and the development of a policy of ‘Economic Diplomacy’.

⁴⁹⁸ Emmanuel Akyeampong and Ama de-Graft Aikins, ‘Ghana at Fifty: Reflections on Independence’, *Transition*, No. 98 (2008), Indiana University Press, pp.24–34.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.28.

burial temporarily called an end to the absurdities of Nkrumah misappropriations and returned reflection once again to a solemn appreciation of the real events of his life.

The awkwardness of approach to public memorialising was not only apparent through the disingenuous use of Nkrumah's image in public billboards. *Ghana@50*, the title chosen by the national administration, ultimately lacked gravitas, its moniker hung in the air like an unfinished sentence waiting to be written. However, it was meant to be read as a reference to tech-savvy development and modernity, implying a nation literate in fashionable 'internet culture' through its youthful employment of text message style abbreviations. To mark the year, the government planned a number of events and launched an extensive 'Accra beautification project', whereby public circles and monuments were to be enhanced and decorated for the yearlong festivities. Because the budget of \$20 million USD was considered low, a great deal of the re-constructions of monuments was turned over to private enterprise, underscoring the social power of commerce and commodity culture in Ghana.⁵⁰⁰ Companies like the Guinness Brewery and Koala supermarket were given a number of historic roundabouts to redecorate. Apart from turning the monuments within their jurisdiction into extended billboards for their produce, these companies did, in some cases, commission new statues of the founding fathers, rendered in cheap metallic plastic modelled to resemble copper, with the words 'GUINNESS IS GOOD FOR YOU' written on placards strategically placed at eye-level for drivers.

In stark contrast to the crude commercialisation of public monuments by Ghana's captains of industry, its citizens spontaneously adopted new codes of dress to reflect the national spirit,

⁵⁰⁰ The subsequent government launched an inquiry in response to multiple accusations of corruption and embezzlement in regard to the lack of evidence as to where the beautification funds had been spent. See *Daily Guide*, October 14, 2009. 'Tarzan Grilled Over Ghana@50': <https://www.modernghana.com/news/243563/tarzan-grilled-over-ghana-50.html> [last accessed 14/01/2019].

although many of the textiles worn were mass produced in China. In ‘the Essential Art of African Textiles; Design Without End’, Alisa LaGamma describes the dynamic ability of textiles “to seamlessly adapt to change and newly emerging social realities”, an observation that found form in the almost immediate creation of a new independence celebration dress code.⁵⁰¹ As the year’s independence celebrations unfolded, they engendered a great sense of national pride. Citizens throughout the country took to wearing outfits comprised solely of the national colours: red, gold, green and black. After a few months, people began to appear in public throwing a full-size flag over one shoulder as if it were a traditional cloth. This fashion, adopted by both men and women in all walks of life was referred to as ‘draping the flag’.⁵⁰² People literally became walking monuments, wrapping the fabric in the traditional manner of kente or adinkra cloth to exaggerate its capacity to create “immense architectural elements that enliven and define interior space”.⁵⁰³

The constant display of national colours increased the national mania for the flag. In terms of public monuments, the recurring motif of the year was the covering of all public monuments with Ghanaian flags, covering lampposts, pillars and, more disturbingly, sculptures of prominent public figures. The latter were covered in a way that implied they were recently deceased corpses. The shrouding of monuments was originally begun in anticipation of a series of official unveilings, but the public ceremonies scheduled to reveal the newly rehabilitated monuments were never realised during the year’s festivities. As the anniversary year progressed and the draping of the national colours across bodies, buildings, pillars, post and cars became more frenzied, it became clear that

⁵⁰¹ See Alisa LaGamma, ‘The Essential Art of African Textiles; Design Without End’, *African Arts*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (Spring, 2009), p.88.

⁵⁰² See Carolina Lentz and Jan Budniok, ‘Ghana@50 – celebrating the Nation: An eyewitness account from Accra’, *Working Papers Nr. 83*, Department of Anthropology and African Studies, Johannes Gutenberg University, Forum 6, Mainz, Germany, 2007; Catharina Moh, ‘Independence Day’, Diary 9, *BBC News*, 28/03/07, http://www.bbc.co.uk/southerncounties/content/articles/2007/03/28/surrey_ghana_diary_9_feature.shtml, (last accessed 20/01/2019).

⁵⁰³ LaGamma, *ibid.* p.88.

the shrouded monuments, rather than meeting criticism, encapsulated something essential to the celebrations.



Figure 29. Monument of President Akuffo at 37 Circle in Accra during the year-long Ghana@50 celebrations 2007. Film still: Senam Okudzeto

The shrouding of the flag itself became seen as an act of celebration as it echoed the joyful way in which people draped their own bodies, cars and homes in the national colours.

How can one read the treatment of these monuments in the context of Nora's *lieux de mémoire*? If anything, they suggest that national unity might come at the price of collective forgetting or, at least, the putting aside of history to make way for celebration; remembering the staunch divisions and hostilities between Ghana's historical political parties and the never-ending debate over the role of the founding fathers. In the context of these recurring battles to assert the validity of one political party over the other, the continued veiling of the statues could be read as representing a

popular consensus for a hiatus in political division. Their uniform lack of visibility allowed citizens to enjoy the markers of nationhood without the difficulty of having to address contested monuments. The covering of historical figures (of contention) brought about a greater sense of national unity by cutting across social and political divisions; reducing history to nothing more than national sentiment.



Figure 30. Monument of Ghana's founding fathers, Kwame Nkrumah, E. Obetsebi-Lamptey, E. Arko Adjei, W. Ofori Atta, Dr. J.B. Danquah and E. Akufo Addo, known as 'The Big Six', Airport Circle Accra. Ghana @50 celebrations 2007, sponsored by Guinness Brewery Ltd. Film still: Senam Okudzeto

During the 50th Anniversary celebrations there was need for only one monument and that was the national flag, its repetition both reiterating and affirming the existence of the nation, whilst

nullifying any outlets for social critique. The flag resists deconstruction in a way that historical figures do not.⁵⁰⁴

In a sense, the flag was the only motif that could mobilise a new nation of varied tribal and ethnic diversity, but its ubiquitous presence became a construction against memory, displacing history with a never-ending sense of the present and allowing the past to become a confused blur. Perhaps there was a collective sense of relief brought by the wrapping of monuments, freeing citizens from the difficult task of having to face a complex history of independence that encompassed failed and overthrown governments, military coups, dictatorships and fragile democracy.

Although these events occurred more than ten years ago, it is perhaps too soon to analyse the meaning of the momentary fashion of enshrouding public monuments. There will need to be another major centennial marker in the nation's time-line with which to compare these events. However, in the decade since *Ghana@50* celebrations, an increased interest in using sculptures and monuments has evolved, even though the prolonged shrouding of the aforementioned monuments suggests that, at the time, such structures were not fully functional in terms of engaging public awareness.

*It is just as if unity must be established by the removal of conflict and the liquidation of all opposition. Once it is decided that national unity is a necessary condition for economic and social development, the exercise of basic freedoms is erased from daily life.*⁵⁰⁵

These observations come from Cameroonian theologian Jean Marc Ela's *African Cry* (1986), a book that posits a uniquely West African model of 'liberation theology' grounded equally in an

⁵⁰⁴ Although Adzedze reminds us that even the design of Ghana's flag was changed after Nkrumah was removed from office. Adedze, Agbenyega. 'Ghana at Fifty: A Review of Ghana's Official History Through Stamps', *CODESRIA* conference paper 07-11/12/2008, Yaounde, Cameroon.

⁵⁰⁵ Ela, Jean Marc. *African Cry*, Mary Knoll N.Y., Orbis Books, 1986, p.67.

analysis of social development, Christian eschatology and the failed potential of both to unify contemporary African nationhood. Ela's writing returns to the importance of religious faith in constructions of nationhood:

The church must invest the liberation project of the African man and woman with an evangelical content. For disciples of Nkrumah, for readers of Césaire, Fanon, Sembene Ousmane, or Mongo Beti, it will no longer be enough to hear that Jesus has not come to destroy traditional values but to perfect them (Matt. 5:17).⁵⁰⁶

While Ela reflects upon the suppression of dissent in totalitarian regimes, his observations bring a strange perspective to the *Ghana@50* Anniversary celebrations: the contradictory position between previous epochs, and between 'traditional' and contemporary values. What if Ghanaian nationalism mirrors these specifically West African forms of evangelism, which require more than a leap of faith, but rather a consolidation of different historical political, religious and moral value systems? The liquidation of all opposition might simply be realised through the liquidation of historical narratives. In reflecting upon the year's covered statues, the renovated monuments sponsored by different stakeholders at political and commercial levels, we might ask how was it that a contemporary democratic nation, celebrated for its freedom of speech and of the press, spontaneously and uniformly adopted an anti-historical form of monumentalisation, exhibiting a disturbing atavism that cannot help but recall former regimes of censorship. The national flag was capable of functioning as a *lieux de mémoire*, but the manner in which it was employed, indiscriminately wrapped on every surface available, appeared to remove much of its possibility to speak historically. Everything became one indiscriminate national moment. In the case of the sculptures, the flag crystalised the silencing of history.

⁵⁰⁶ Ela, Jean Marc. *African Cry*, Mary Knoll N.Y., Orbis Books, 1986, p.100.

The concept of Africa as stuck in a tedious cycle of historic erasure is a persistent prejudice held against it that demands contradiction. Contrary to this negative image, Felwine Sarr (2019) insists that Africa is in the process of “actualizing its own syntheses of the religious, political and cultural spheres.”⁵⁰⁷ In search of affirmative forms of ‘cultural mutation’ in African modernities, how might this strange moment of erasure as celebration be read in a more constructive light?⁵⁰⁸

Perhaps it is not such a struggle to find a justification for the never-ending chain of flags, wound tightly around the city’s sculptures like multi-coloured mortuary shrouds, or, more importantly, the lack of public outcry, or opinion—if, when reviewing this moment, it is done with the understanding that these events took place in a culture where funerals are the greatest form of collective celebration.⁵⁰⁹ Marleen de Witte (2001, 2003) has worked on the analysis of Ghanaian funerary cultural practices; examining their flamboyance and contemporary hybrid practices that draw away from traditional rites, her work gives particular attention to social tensions brought to family members through “the commodification of death” as funerary culture becomes increasingly commercialised.⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁷ Felwine Sarr, *Afrotopia*, University of Minnesota Press, 2019, p.23.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁹ The international understanding of how important these events are has been profoundly re-iterated in recent years through the loss of several prominent public figures such as Kofi Annan and the Queen Mother of the Golden Stool of Asante. The *Ghana Guardian* described the “Thrilling Cultural Display at Asantehemaa” Nana Afia Kobi Serwaa Ampem II funeral rites. She was recognised nationally highest-ranking Queen in, Asante, Ghana’s largest kingdom and “passed away at the age of 111 in November 2016”. Her main funeral rites took place over several weeks and were not scheduled to take place until the following year. The extensive media response to the rites in both national and even international press was comparable to international media coverage of recent British Royal weddings. See <https://ghanaguardian.com/thrilling-cultural-display-asantehemaas-burial-rites-photos> (last accessed 14/01/2019). See various news articles from local and international press. CGTN Ghana, <https://africa.cgtn.com/2017/01/19/ghanas-queen-mother-laid-to-rest-after-a-week-of-burial-rites/> [last accessed 16/12/2018].

⁵¹⁰ Marleen de Witte, ‘Money and Death: Funeral Business in Asante, Ghana’, *Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 73, No. 4 (2003) pp.531– 559, p.540. See also, Marleen de Witte, *Long Live the Dead! Changing Funeral Celebrations in Asante, Ghana*, Amsterdam, Aksant Academic Publishers, 2001.

Even when not pertaining to public dignitaries, funerals in Ghana remain the most popular form of public celebration. In part, this might be attributed to the many decades of draconian military rule and austerity, when public displays of wealth were harshly punished. At the height of the nation's poverty, the military enforced strict curfews and large gatherings were forbidden. During this period, funerals became not only the only legitimate way to gather but also the only permitted form of public celebration. While the traditional demands and solemnity of funerary events made it impossible for the military regimes to restrict their practice, funeral goers were only too happy to embrace the opportunity to distribute alcohol (pouring libations with often imported schnapps); and embrace the drumming and dancing that are integral to the mourning process. Therefore, funerals provided not only a much-needed social outlet, but also a cover for business meetings and political exchanges. It could be argued that the effect of these difficult years was to ensure that funerary culture in Ghana became all the more deeply engrained in the national psyche.⁵¹¹

Knowing that for more than three decades funerals were the only allowed form for public gathering, it may not be simplistic to argue that in Ghana it might be difficult not to have a national celebration that does not in some way resemble a funeral.⁵¹² This perspective informs the strange aesthetic of the *Ghana@50* celebrations—in particular, the national mania for shrouding sculptures, national monuments and buildings as if they were military coffins lying in state. This effect is illustrative of what Pierre Nora (1988, 1992) has described as a “transformation of memory”, illustrating a “decisive shift from the historical to the psychological”.⁵¹³

⁵¹¹ Funerals are of such importance that traditionally Ghanaians plan their own funerals for many years advance.

⁵¹² Sam Dolnick, ‘Dance, Laugh, Drink, Save the Date: It’s a Ghanaian Funeral’, *New York Times*, April 11th, 2011: http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/12/nyregion/12funerals.html?_r=2&emc=eta1 (last accessed 14/1/2019).

⁵¹³ Nora, *Realms of Memory*, p.10.

The aforementioned veiled sculptures, viewed on their own, appear sinister and ahistorical, rendered mute by invisibility, but they cannot be taken out of the context of the greater *Ghana@50* celebrations. Their silence was due more to the fact the 50th Anniversary celebrations turned the entire nation into a site of memory and perhaps, due to the years of political turmoil and military discord, their visibility could only be read through their failure to achieve lasting political stability. But other forms of unexpected nostalgia emerged. Throughout the year, the media produced rare photographs and never-before seen news footage from their archives; old songs and films were played. Radio and television sought interviews with ageing citizens, able to give detailed accounts of the euphoria of early independence. Fifty-year-old historic wax-print textiles were brought out of storage and worn by the families that had the tenacity to preserve them, and all around, the people of Ghana proved themselves to be the greatest archive of the nation's history. When citizens 'draped the flag', they made themselves into living monuments of national pride, illustrating how textiles could be used to construct "immense architectural elements that enliven and define interior space."⁵¹⁴ The shrouded sculptures appeared to affirm, yet poorly mimic the popular form of dress and faded into a quieter, less visible role in the context of an active living history.

It should also be noted that it was the private- and foreign-owned companies who were responsible for the renovation and subsequent veiling of these public monuments. They did not necessarily represent the popular consensus of Ghanaians. The veiled sculptures might ultimately represent the redundancy, or lack of function of such Western-style monuments in a society that still actively finds alternative ways to encode history. Popular music, styles of dress (in particular fabrics), folk songs and oral testimonies invoke a sense of history much more than the monument does. The

⁵¹⁴ See LaGamma, *African Textiles*, p.88.

brand new, yet covered statues look desolate and irrelevant on their plinths in contrast to the many planned and more spontaneous celebrations that occurred during the year.

Monuments are a relatively new form of architecture in Ghana. This new form of memorialising still seems out of place in a society that resists static public memorials, not only because they are external to family and clan structures, but also because contemporary Ghana is a place where history is something collectively *performed*. Just as oral historical archives continue to bear great value, Ghana's material history is performance based and inseparable from function. Ritual and ceremonial performances of history are always accompanied by an active material culture. This is particularly apparent in the popular historic use of wax-print textiles to commemorate social and historic events. The following images show photos taken of a woman during the *Ghana@50* inaugural celebrations. She wears a commemorative cloth, printed with the date of its production, 1961, marking the meeting of Nkrumah and Queen Elizabeth during her controversial visit to Ghana. The visit was controversial, not because Queen Elizabeth was a colonial sovereign, but rather due to a number of perceived potential terrorist threats to her safety.⁵¹⁵ The imagery on this commemorative cloth is remarkable as Nkrumah and Elizabeth appear as a middle class married couple rather than two Heads of State. This is hardly an image of revolutionary revolt: its iconography confuses the idea of Ghanaian national independence as a distinct end of British colonial rule and suggests something different. Why would such a historically defiant moment be recorded in such mutely domesticated imagery?

⁵¹⁵ The fabric the lady wears commemorates the Queen's 1961 visit to the newly independent Ghana, which happened against the wishes of the British Parliament. Several bombs had gone off in the weeks prior to her departure and it was decided to postpone the visit. However, Macmillan decided that it would be a diplomatic disaster to do so, and so the trip went ahead. The local press in Ghana hailed the Queen as "the greatest socialist monarch in the world." Source: PBS website: http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/commandingheights/shared/minitextlo/prof_kwamenkrumah.html [last accessed 06/08/2018].

In fact, this image is a concrete reminder of the now often-overlooked fact that until the establishment of the first Republic of Ghana in 1960, Queen Elizabeth II was still the official Head of State of independent Ghana.⁵¹⁶ This was explained and perhaps even celebrated, by Ghanaian academic K.B. Asante in a conference paper published in 1958 by the Royal African society:

*Until March 6th this year, however, Dr Nkrumah's Government did not enjoy full autonomy, for certain powers were in the hands of the British appointed Governor-General, the representative of the Queen of Ghana, H.M. Queen Elizabeth II. The fact that the Queen of Ghana happens to be the Queen of Britain is to us a mere coincidence, and we naturally play the Ghana National Anthem when the Queen of Ghana or her representative is at a function in Ghana. The Governor-General today performs functions similar to the Queen in Britain, and the responsibility for the management of the country's affairs rests with the Government, which is responsible to the National Assembly.*⁵¹⁷



Figure 31. Commemorative cloth from 1961 depicting Kwame Nkrumah and Queen Elizabeth. Accra 2007. Photo: Senam Okudzeto

⁵¹⁶ A lot of young contemporary Ghanaians are unaware that as Ghana joined the Commonwealth, Queen Elizabeth was in fact the first official head of state. See Razak El Alawa's article in the Ghana State run newspaper *Daily Graphic* 'Republic day, 1960 and the times', 15 July 2017.

<https://www.graphic.com.gh/features/opinion/republic-day-1960-and-the-times.html> (last accessed 20/01/2019).

⁵¹⁷ See K.B. Asante, 'Towards the Future in Ghana', *African Affairs*, Vol. 57, No. 226, (Jan., 1958), pp.54–55.

Contemporary Ghana remembers 1957 as the establishment of its independence and the overthrow of tyrannical colonial rule. However, this commemorative cloth underscores a different reality—that of a slower transition and, indeed, perhaps even a popular respect and affection for the foreign sovereign who remained the nation’s supreme leader. This affection for Queen Elizabeth seemed to spread across both spectrums of Ghana’s political divide to the extent that there was a national uproar when, in 1957, Nkrumah decided to replace the image of Queen Elizabeth on the national coins and stamps. Agbenyega Adedze points out that a bill was actually drafted in the Ghanaian parliament to remind Nkrumah and the nation that “Queen Elizabeth was the Queen of Ghana.”⁵¹⁸ But although Nkrumah clearly wanted the prestige of replacing the Queen as symbolic head of state, neither was Nkrumah against the Queen. His own writings repeatedly defend his position to join the Commonwealth after establishing independence from Britain and are filled with pages of surprisingly gushing respect towards the British Royal Family; something quite strange when reviewed in the light of his marked scepticism over the reliability of Ghana’s own chieftaincy, whom he regularly excoriated for being in the service of colonialism and therefore reluctant to push for independence.⁵¹⁹ Throughout *I Speak of Freedom* (1960) he fawns over Queen Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh, suggesting their relationship was so close that in 1959, he believed that he was “the first person outside of the immediate royal circle” to be informed of her pregnancy and is delighted to be surprised by the “great honour” of being appointed to become a ‘member of

⁵¹⁸ Nkrumah caused an outrage when he replaced national stamps depicting an image of Queen Elizabeth with those showing his own head, it was considered the first sign that he would become a dictator. See, Agbenyega Adedze, “Ghana at Fifty: A Review of Ghana’s Official History Through Stamps”, *CODESRIA* conference paper 07-11/12/2008, Yaounde, Cameroon. See Also, Harcourt Fuller, *Building the Ghanaian Nation State: Kwame Nkrumah’s Symbolic Nationalism*, New York: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2014, p.48.

⁵¹⁹ Nkrumah wrote “The chiefs found strength in the (colonial) Government and so they naturally leaned towards it. But as soon as the people were organized and strong the chiefs would probably return to them, if they did not, they could pack up and follow the Europeans out of the Gold Coast.” See *I Speak of Freedom*, pg. 5. Also see Richard Rathbone, *Nkrumah and the Chiefs: The Politics of Chieftaincy in Ghana, 1951–1960*. Athens: Ohio University Press; Oxford: James Currey, 2000.

the Privy Council'. Nkrumah relays that “we in Ghana, men, women and children shall rejoice when the new member of the Royal Family is born – a sentiment that the Queen greatly appreciated.”⁵²⁰



Figure 32. Ghanaian woman wearing commemorative cloth from 1961 depicting Kwame Nkrumah and Queen Elizabeth. Accra 2007. Photo: Senam Okudzeto.

The anniversary year saw a number of commemorative cloths on display, and the wearing of such materials sparked spontaneous conversations between wearers and observers. The emergence of so many historical artefacts further increased the collective performance of living and lived history, particularly in the euphoria of those lucky enough to exchange previously unheard accounts of the years immediately following independence. The excitement produced by events such as these,

⁵²⁰ Nkrumah, *I speak of Freedom*, pp.178–179.

produced an alternative understanding of history that, at the moment of its ephemeral performance, displaced the functions of static historic archives, whether monuments, statues or written historical texts. Staring at statues was irrelevant when everywhere history belonged to, and was being continually re-constructed through dialogue amongst the nation's people.

While the different forms of monuments and memorialisation presented in this chapter are tied to pre- and post-colonial political experiences, they also assert the idea of commodity culture as an archive of social relations. A narrative of commodity and economic concerns runs through almost all monuments, be they relics that relate to the failure of a political regime, or an ennobled marker of a revolutionary past. The material culture of Ghana's experiences in the Second World War is bridged in unexpected ways by the fantasy coffins of La and national monuments commemorating the war veterans. Both examples of Ghanaian material culture evolved – directly and indirectly – through military service, and underscored the founding of the contemporary nation.

These artefacts argue that the Second World War was pivotal in shaping Ghana's modernist identity, not only in the understood failure to honour ex-service men that resulted in the nation's independence, but perhaps because knowing that fantasy coffins were first made in the shape of allied airplanes shows that this failure was an even deeper affront to a relationship that was arguably affectionately forged through a series of strategic Afro-European alliances. The artefacts on the Asante Swords and Ntoma fabrics suggest that the memory of these alliances may have been in the process of being forged since the first Europeans landed in the mid-1400s. The obfuscated history of African wax-print textiles in relation to the illegal Dutch slave trade underscores a social history that, although forgotten, lays encoded in fabrics and their, at times, melancholily commemorative function.

In any instance, the artefacts presented in this chapter illustrate how the objects and iconography of celebration and mourning in Ghana are sometimes interchangeable, and both underscore the importance of public performance and ceremonial participation in any historic event. Static monuments have very weak public resonance in a culture where communal participation and people in their numbers are considered a true gauge of how important any event might be. Public spaces only remain important if activated through use. Historic memory is enlivened by public events and gatherings. Objects and artefacts are a compulsory accessory in public forms of display; if none exist, as with draping the flag, the culture will appropriate them spontaneously. Dutch wax-print fabrics illustrate how imported objects can be used as mnemonic devices to ensure that memory remains tied to the cultural traditions of performance and display, at times becoming imbued with profound social and spiritual significance. Like the mass-produced national flags of *Ghana@50* they are, technically speaking, another cultural import. Nonetheless, these commodities became seamlessly incorporated into traditional practices. The speed with which new traditional practices were invented during the 2007 Independence Celebrations, like the outmoded squeeze bulb horns of Por-Por music, illustrate the way in which (often imported) material culture and objects have become essential to the public processes of memory, mourning and celebration in contemporary Ghana.

CHAPTER IV. CONTEMPORARY LEGACIES OF THE TRANSATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE

This chapter seeks to highlight tensions between different locales of knowledge production regarding the transatlantic slave trade, taking extant scholarship as a departure point to review the historical impact of monuments and material culture in contemporary Ghana. It departs from the previous chapter's examination of public monuments relating to nationhood and the memorialisation of war veterans to examine tensions brought about by local and diasporan experiences of the monuments of Ghanaian heritage tourism. It questions whether local power identifications wilfully mimic the vestiges of empire that infiltrate and prejudice constructions of history, whether European, African, or capitalist, or if they adopt a new morality in response to a growing awareness of historic injustice, or if indeed the concept morality is itself a latent form of currency. It explores the sometimes conflicting, sometimes complementary, and yet always mutually informing discursive formations produced by Ghanaian and diasporan scholarship in discussion of slavery—and attempts to prove that a new cultural space has opened up in which Africans themselves, and a contemporary transatlantic generation, are generating new discursive statements, which construct narratives about their past and offer a genuine engagement with the past. Relegating outdated responses to the taboos of slavery to 'the field of memory', these new narratives offer an escape from the stigma of slavery, and a shared sense of regret and empathy in relation to the difficult legacy of the transatlantic trade.⁵²¹ This chapter also explores the ways in which identity can inform processes of memorialisation and construction of history; following through from the previous chapter's discussion of public monuments, it continues its exploration

⁵²¹ The term used by Foucault to determine the place of discursive statements that no longer define a domain or a body of truth', but nonetheless inform present discourse. See *Archeology*, p.64.

of ideas put forth in Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* regarding the contemporary "psychologization of memory" reflecting upon the different ways in which the identity of informants influences the records of history, responding in part to the Pierre Nora's insistence that memory in relation to modernity has an existential element that entails "a completely new economy of the identity of self, the mechanics of memory and the relevance of the past", implying that identity is itself a currency whose fluctuating values influence the exchange and construction of memory.⁵²²

In 2009, the Dutch government returned a macabre heirloom to Ghana. This was the head of Badu Bonsu II, "the late king of Ahanta who was captured and beheaded in 1838 by the Dutch who lived in Dutch Sekondi, over his fortitude to fight against heinous crimes committed by the Netherlands, including the slave trade."⁵²³ The complex histories of the slave trade in Africa in which Badu Bonsu II, remembered as "one of the great African chiefs who resisted the domination and exploitation of Africa by European powers," played his role, and the politics of how that history is being remembered today merit closer analysis than they have as yet received.⁵²⁴

The memorialisation of Badu Bonsu II in the present helps to ground the discussion with an example of indigenous resistance to the transatlantic slave trade that is illustrative of new narratives of *The Black Atlantic* and has yet to be incorporated into wider discussions of contemporary black and African identities. These newly emergent discourses reflect an emergent consciousness that has developed in relationship to diasporan narratives about the meaning of the slave trade and civil rights. While deliberately confronting extant African taboos on the discussion

⁵²² Nora, *Realms of Memory*, p.10.

⁵²³ The late king's head was held at the Leiden University Medical Centre for over 170 years, preserved in formaldehyde. See Emmanuel Opoku, 'Ahantas Fix Date,' *Daily Guide* (Ghana), 4 April 2012, p.18.

⁵²⁴ Ibid.

of histories of slavery, these discourses differ from dominant narratives of slavery, as they are for the most part generated in the local vernacular and reflect local social realities. Nonetheless, these new discourses are sometimes met with scepticism, especially as researchers in the field are often confronted with multiple and conflicting retellings of local histories.

This chapter investigates a range of new narratives of the transatlantic slave trade being authored in Ghana by indigenous Africans, and by diasporans of African descent, and aims to expose the different ways in which the desire to rewrite history in the framework of a moral imperative shapes constructions of collective historical experience in the context of collective memory (as experienced through legends and folklore), public memorials (which mark and officially commemorate memory) and material culture. In *Culture and Imperialism* (1994), Edward Said argues for the importance of new forms of scholarship that investigate the role of knowledge production in historical formations of power and cultural constructions of empire.⁵²⁵ Within this framework of thinking, an undue and unbalanced authority is often given to European and American scholarship relating to former sites of colonial conquest relating to the African continent over scholarship produced within the continent's territorial bounds. The dominance of this scholarship suggests a remainder of what Mudimbe (2018) Sarr, (2019) and Desai (2001) describe as the 'colonial library'; comprising the large body of texts on Africa written by missionaries, ethnographers and anthropologists, particularly in the 18th and 19th centuries, which are read as constitutive of colonial practice exercised in thought forms.⁵²⁶ Due to the magnitude of the colonial archive, the dominant discourse of Africa has been shaped outside of its territories by non-African

⁵²⁵ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, Vintage Press, 1994

⁵²⁶ See Valentin Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa; Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge*, Indiana University Press, 1988, p.211. Also, Gaurav Desai, *African Self-Fashioning and the Colonial Library*, Duke University Press, 2001; Achille, Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, Berkley; University of California Press, 2001; Felwine Sarr, *Afrotopia*, 2019.

thinkers. Academics based in African universities are often at a disadvantage in finding international platforms for scholarship, yet local archives are an essential tool in establishing new positions and perspectives.

Questions of contemporary black and African identity and have created ground-breaking work in relation to narratives of modernity and exclusion. Paul Gilroy's work *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), charts the genesis of contemporary black political and social identities in relation to the alternative experiences of modernity created through the experiences of African peoples in relation to the vectors of the transatlantic slave trade.⁵²⁷ The framework of Gilroy's investigation presents contemporary black music, early modernist literature and pan-Africanist history in relation to historical data relating to the economic structures of slavery to explain how the transatlantic slave trade may be understood as the prime progenitor of European modernity and how this modernity's attempt to exclude black subjects has led to a still on-going, and yet productive culture of emancipation and resistance. Gilroy's book also presents the experience of slavery as creating the basis for capitalist consumption that thereby led to industrialisation, making it all the more important to examine the ideological racism that led to the exclusion of black subjects from the narratives of modernist discourse.

One part of Gilroy's investigation centres this exclusion in relation to the dismissive position towards Africans expressed by important Enlightenment thinkers, such as Kant and Hume, a position countered by thinkers such as W.E. Du Bois, whose overarching project was to insist upon the central place of black identities in the post-Enlightenment discourse of the universal rights of

⁵²⁷ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic, Modernity and double consciousness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

man.⁵²⁸ Gilroy's book sees the discourse of *The Black Atlantic* as emancipatory, highlighting ways in which music and literature create a vibrant culture that finds dignity through eulogising and overcoming a historic narrative of suffering. This analysis of 'Black Atlantic Cultural production' sees the African continent primarily as an origin site from which diasporan blacks departed, and only through figures like W.E Du Bois, Marcus Garvey and George Padmore, that emancipatory pan-Africanist ideas were returned.⁵²⁹ Gilroy's work therefore lacks key examples of *Black Atlantic* cultural production performed within the African continent by non-diasporan peoples of African descent. It is, therefore, important to seek out new 'contrapuntal ensembles' to help illustrate how the exchanges of *Black Atlantic* vectors remain vibrant and active.⁵³⁰

Said (1960) observes that identities, no matter how concrete they may appear, are never fixed.⁵³¹

Here is a case in point:

An example of the new knowledge would be the study of Orientalism or Africanism and, to take a related set, the study of Englishness and Frenchness. These identities are today analyzed not as God-given essences, but as results of collaboration between African history and the study of Africa in England, for instance, or between the study of French history and the reorganization of knowledge during the First Empire. In an important sense, we are dealing with the formation of cultural identities understood not as essentializations (although part of their enduring appeal is that they seem and are considered to be like

⁵²⁸ The mainstay of Enlightenment discourse has been charged by Africanist scholars with excluding people of African descent from its project; see Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, pp.134–135. For further reading, see Achille Mbembe *African Modes of Self-Writing*, which outlines how the “presupposed ontological differences between European and African were used to deny Africans “complete human citizenship”, pp.245–251 and Omotade Adegbindin, ‘Critical Notes on Hegel’s Treatment of Africa’, *OGIRISI: A New Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 11, 2015, University of Ibadan, <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/og/article/view/121673>, [last accessed 26.01.2019], Barbara Camara, “The Falsity of Hegel’s Theses on Africa”, *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 36 No.1, (Sept. 2005). pp. 82–96. However, Ghanaian philosopher Anthony Appiah has worked to contradict this position; see ‘On the Kidnapped Boy who became a German Philosopher’, Literary Hub; <https://lithub.com/on-the-kidnapped-african-boy-who-became-a-german-philosopher/?fbclid=IwAR0DTmjCljZD9BKjZTX7TkPsaB3OsEeBZbq1P-pVLaLVdIpiptZrgxfYOt0> [last accessed 26.01.2019].

⁵²⁹ Remarkably, these three figures were key to the ideological and political genesis of contemporary Ghana. Du Bois, who eventually died in Ghana, and Padmore, were essential advisors to Kwame Nkrumah and helped develop the structure of the post-independence nation.

⁵³⁰ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, Vintage Press, 1960, p.60.

⁵³¹ *Ibid.*

*essentializations) but as contrapuntal ensembles, for it is the case that no identity can ever exist by itself and without an array of opposites, negatives, oppositions.*⁵³²

The struggle to define African identities in relation to modernist discourse and the exclusions of Enlightenment thinking is also present in the work of my second thinker, Achille Mbembe (2000), whose essay, *African Modes of Self-Writing*, discusses the difficulty African historical discourse has in escaping narratives of “autonomy, resistance and emancipation”, which are framed within “three historical events, broadly construed: slavery, colonization and apartheid”. These epochs of historical racism become epistemes; canonical events through which both inter- and intra-national portraits of the African continent are constructed. The recurring tropes they engender in turn create a “zone of non-being and social death characterized by the denial of dignity, heavy psychic damage and the torment of exile”.⁵³³ Mbembe argues that this shame of exclusion is the reason for the difficulty that African societies face in creating a historical discourse that fully comes to terms with the past—because in order to do so, such societies must recognise hegemonic complicity in ancient class struggles. Put another way, “the colonial advance across the interior of the continent could be said to have taken the character of a creeping slave revolt.”⁵³⁴ Frederick Cooper (2005) agrees that it was the very institution of slavery that encouraged low-ranking and oppressed African subjects to overthrow traditional leaders in favour of European colonial powers.⁵³⁵

Complex positions such as these have led to the emergence of contemporary taboos around discussing the narrative of the slave trade, which has yet to be fully overcome. Mbembe’s text, also helps to augment an understanding of how the perhaps more conservative academic discourses

⁵³² Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, Vintage Press, 1960, p.60.

⁵³³ Mbembe, *African Modes*, pp.241–242.

⁵³⁴ Ibid. p.262

⁵³⁵ Cooper, Frederick. *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge and History*, University of California, Berkeley, 2005 pp.28–29.

of post-colonialism in Africa have failed to create the same sense of hopefulness as the theorised emancipation projects produced by scholars such as Gilroy in *The African Diaspora*. African-centred discourse is, by and large, plagued by what Manthia Diawara (2000) has coined as “Afropessimism”.⁵³⁶ Perhaps, as with the narrative of *The Black Atlantic*, it is through the theorisation of cultural tropes of emancipation and identity in relation to African political history that the solution to this pessimism can be found. This chapter will chart new vectors of *Black Atlantic* culture generated in West Africa, examining recent scholarship in relation to three cases in which objects, artefacts and material culture are bound up with historic tensions. It asks if diasporan narratives of emancipation can erase or successfully confront contemporary cultural taboos over accounts of historic slavery.

The Joseph Project

In 2005, the Kufour Government in Ghana created the position of Minister for Tourism and the Diaspora, illustrating a perhaps overly practical understanding of where the majority of Ghana’s tourism income is generated.⁵³⁷ In 2007, as part of Ghana’s 50th Anniversary of Independence celebrations, Jake Obetsebi-Lampety, the then Minister for Tourism and the Diaspora, launched The Joseph Project,⁵³⁸ a fascinating and ambitious initiative to encourage diaspora blacks to return to Ghana and contribute to its cultural development.⁵³⁹ As part of the project, which derives its

⁵³⁶ Manthia Diawara, *In Search of Africa*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2000 pp.39–58.

⁵³⁷ Tourism has recently become a crucial part of Ghana’s economy. According to the Ministry of Tourism, revenue for 2008 was \$1.4 billion USD, making it the country’s fourth largest source of income for that fiscal year: http://ghana-net.com/Ministry_of_Tourism_Ghana.aspx

⁵³⁸ Obetsebi-Lampety was Minister for Tourism under the NPP government of 2004–2008. Since the end of his term in office, the new NDC government’s work on the project has slowed down. It still exists, but all official documentation dates from the 2007–2008 period of its inauguration. The original website

<http://www.thejosephproject.com/> no longer exists; see the Ghana National Commission for Culture website: <http://www.ghanaculture.gov.gh/index1.php?linkid=65&adate=16/02/2007&archiveid=1091&page=1>

⁵³⁹ See Katharina Schramm, ‘The Transatlantic Slave Trade, Topographies of Memory in Ghana and the USA’, *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, New Series, 9 (2005) p.132.

name from the biblical story of Joseph, who was sold into slavery by his brothers, several new locations were added along the heritage tourist route from the capital to the castles at Cape Coast and Elmina, including two sites where slaves are said to have had their “last bath” before being taken out to sea.⁵⁴⁰ More symbolically, in 1998 two bodies of slaves from the diaspora were shipped back to Ghana and interred in a site along the slave route near the “last bath” at Assin Manso.⁵⁴¹ The Joseph Project aims to incorporate continued discourse and an expanded awareness of slavery and the diaspora both within and outside of Africa. It also has a long-term objective of issuing diaspora blacks with some sort of African passport, which will allow them to settle and work in Ghana with reduced red tape.

The website (now expired) of the Joseph Project played a famous 1976 song, “Welcome Home,” from the legendary 1960s Ghanaian Afro-rock band Osibisa. The track, with its lyrics “Don’t forget you are welcome home,” seemed the perfect vehicle for the project’s aims, with its fusion of rock and Afro-beat conjuring a seamless incorporation of shared legacies, harking back to an idealised past of Ghanaian-diasporan relations, a period when African-American and Caribbean blacks were remembered as playing a definitive role in Nkrumah’s Government and the development of the emerging pan-Africanist nation.⁵⁴² Beyond the clear message of its lyrics, Osibisa’s prog-rock sound played over an image of the nation’s beloved Independence Arch,

⁵⁴⁰ See Akosua Perbi, *A History of Indigenous Slavery in Ghana from the 15th to the 19th Century*. Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2004, p.152.

⁵⁴¹ On the topic of ‘homecoming’, See Schramm, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade*, pp.132–3.

⁵⁴² The period of Ghana’s move to independence brought a renaissance of Afro-diasporan/African relations. Nkrumah’s economic policy advisor for ten years was the St. Lucian Nobel Prize-winning economist, W. Arthur Lewis. Figures such as W.E.B. Du Bois, George Padmore, Maya Angelou, architect Max Bond and many others moved to Ghana and actively worked in support of the Nkrumah Government. See Kevin K. Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006, pp.161–162.

recalling the 1971 *Soul to Soul* concert held in Ghana's Black Star Square.⁵⁴³



Figure 33. Screen-grab, <http://www.thejosephproject.com/> [now expired, last accessed 12/11/2006]

This concert was a momentous and popularly remembered event, but with little surviving material other than a rarely-screened documentary by Denis Saunders (1971).⁵⁴⁴ The concert featured American soul, rock and rhythm 'n' blues stars such as Roberta Flack, Ike and Tina Turner, the Staple Singers and Santana, who flew to Ghana to commemorate independence in collaboration with Ghanaian musicians.⁵⁴⁵ The lyrics "Don't you know you are welcome home?" ask a valid question, for Ghanaian/African-American relations soured in the period following Nkrumah's overthrow, when many of his foreign supporters were forced to leave.⁵⁴⁶ As the website broadcasts the lyrics, sung in a musical ascent, just at the point when the catchy chorus should start, the song

⁵⁴³ For an account of the concert, see Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana*, pp.280–2 and the documentary by Denis Saunders, *Soul to Soul*. 1971. Produced by Richard Bock and Tom Mosk for Nigram-Aura Productions.

⁵⁴⁴ Denis Saunders, *Soul to Soul*. 1971. Produced by Richard Bock and Tom Mosk for Nigram-Aura Productions.

⁵⁴⁵ Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana*, pp.280–2.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid.

was brutally cut, looping the words “don’t you know you are welcome home” through an unartistic break. There was a staccato crackling noise as the song rebooted. With each repetition, its tinny echoes become increasingly annoying, a broken record with ambivalent promise. While the *Soul to Soul* concert brought a brief hiatus of renewed cultural and diplomatic ties between the two communities under President Busia, the military rule of the period following 1972 dissuaded many would-be returnees, and eventually pushed Ghana into an economic marginalisation that would last over two decades.

The text of the Joseph Project website contained quotes from leading diaspora civil rights leaders on the subject of emancipation, and listed a number of important black historical figures from the diaspora, named “Immortal Josephs” and defined by the words, “These are the men and women who have made a significant contribution to the black race and humanity in general.”⁵⁴⁷ Underneath these words were a series of photos, depicting figures such as Sojourner Truth, Louis Armstrong, Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. The website urged visitors to aspire to become “Living Josephs.” Deciding to call the enterprise the Joseph Project is, in itself, an illustration of the difficulty some Ghanaians have in separating diasporan identity from the slave trade, and the awkwardness surrounding slavery. It also points to a contradictory contrapuntal ensemble where the very pious, Christian self-image of Ghana may not necessarily match the unabashed economic intentions that underscore the welcome of returnees. The metaphor of Joseph, sold into bondage by his brothers, being employed on a coastline that houses not only the descendants of historical slave traders but also the descendants of the indigenous trade, is somehow appropriate. But labelling potential returnees to Ghana under the scheme “Living Josephs” underscores that returnees must do public service, insisting that there is a price, or at the very least, high expectation,

⁵⁴⁷ <http://www.thejosephproject.com/> (link now expired). See note 7.

put on their return. While somewhat contrived in its message, the project's website offered a curious, if not unorthodox and underpublicised, admission of responsibility on the part of Africans for complicity in the slave trade. Furthermore, underneath the section of the website on "Josephs," was a link entitled "Reconnected." "Reconnected Josephs" were directed to a link for Avis car rental, several local tour operators and a bizarre link labelled "Farming and Manufacture." Clearly the Josephs had better bring the intention to make some financial contributions to Ghana; the journey home need not only be spiritual and educational.

Still, the Joseph Project continues to symbolise an unusual idealism and warmth towards diasporan relations. It stands in contrast to a second, quieter culture that subordinates itself to the values of old Europe, identifying with a lineage of power and wealth, and which finds many of the elite coastal families throughout West Africa tracing their lineage back to famous European slavers, such as Geraldo the Slaver and the De Souza family.⁵⁴⁸ What makes this lineage even more complex is that many historical families who were in the trade were freed slaves who, knowing little else, began trading themselves.⁵⁴⁹ Some of these families remain powerful in politics and the shipping industry, and many have become immensely wealthy, having branched out into international trade. These were the first African families to attend prominent African and European schools and universities, and their ascent to the status of a cosmopolitan elite meant that many of these families were in the front line for power when the colonial powers finally left post-independence West Africa. Many ministers, government officials and even presidents have

⁵⁴⁸ Geraldo de Lima, a Brazilian/Portuguese slaver who became a local chief. He was said by the Anlos to be a white Portuguese and by English historians such as Moxon to be a freed slave who took over his master's wife and identity. This ambiguity hints at the prevalent habit of identifying mixed-race people as non-black or white in West Africa. See James Moxon, *Volta, Man's Greatest Lake: The Story of Ghana's Akosombo Dam*. Revised edition. London: Deutsch, 1984, p.30.

⁵⁴⁹ On 23 November 1864, *The African Times* reported that "members of the Brazilian Tabon community controlled a flourishing trade in slaves from Krepi, who were readily bought as farm workers." See Parker, *Making the Town*, p.91.

emerged from such lineages, families that often have ambiguous histories as both slave traders and enslaved and whose trajectories often include several nations.⁵⁵⁰

Kristin Mann (2007), has charted a fascinating study of a post-slavery culture and the emergence of a West-African metropolitan elite who are descendants of both slavers and slaves.⁵⁵¹ West Africa remains an environment in which, by and large, extended families, common religions and language construct a sense of belonging. In addition, the slave trade is displaced in the imagination of most Ghanaians by the more recent struggle against colonial occupation in the drive for independence, perhaps highlighting why it is that until very recently diasporans of African descent were viewed by the majority of Ghanaians (and West Africans in general) as foreigners, more like white people with brown skin.⁵⁵² Nonetheless, there is a newly emergent understanding of the historical traumas and repercussions of the slave trade. This new understanding, arguably a by-product of heritage tourism, is creating a new culture of memorialisation. Its emergence is in part tied to the economic benefits of heritage tourism, which alter the meaning, value and judgements of a slaving past. This newly emergent understanding is in a state of flux, presently functioning within the confused understandings of identity, belonging and atonement.

⁵⁵⁰ Sylvanus Olympio, the first president of Togo, was the grandson of an Afro-Brazilian trader Fransico Olympio Sylvio who was a prominent trader in Keta and Atorkor, Ghana. See also Emmanuel Akyeampong, 'History, Memory, Slave-Trade and Slavery in Anlo (Ghana).' *Slavery and Abolition* 22 (2001), p.6. The Da Souzas in Benin have produced several ministers and important government officials. See Verger's book *Flux et reflux de la traite des nègres entre le golfe de Bénin et Bahia de Todos Os Santos, du XVII^e au XIX^e Siècle*. Paris: Mouton, 1969.

⁵⁵¹ Kristin Mann. *Slavery and the Birth of an African City: Lagos 1760–1900*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007.

⁵⁵² For the story of African American sailor Robert Adams, who was viewed as white by his Moorish captors, see Alan Rice, *Radical Narratives of the Black Atlantic*. London: Continuum, 2003, pp.15–16. and for diasporan reactions to such mistaken identities; Edward Bruner, 'Tourism in Ghana: The Representation of Slavery and the Return of the Black Diaspora.' *American Anthropologist* 98, No. 2 (1996), p.295.

The Slave Monument at Atorkor

The monuments to the transatlantic slave trade that have been created in the past two decades, in combination with revenue generated from diaspora pilgrims, have directly influenced rural Ghanaian communities' understandings of themselves in relation to the trade. This new-found understanding of identity and lineage breaks extant cultural taboos on the discussion of slavery, and has authored new narratives in communities that, until recently, appeared to be unapologetic about this difficult history. These new narratives are grounded in a culture of remorse and empathy towards the difficult legacy of the transatlantic trade.

In the late 1990s, under the Rawlings government, the national Tourism Development Committee authorised several new structures and monuments to be erected in Ghana's Volta region to commemorate the slaving past.⁵⁵³ The new monuments were initially set up with the primary objective of encouraging tourism and not to satisfy any local urges to memorialise historic events. One of the more notorious products of this program is the Slave Monument at Atorkor, completed in 1999, and located in Anlo, an Ewe-speaking area of coastal Ghana that was known for its intense involvement in the trade.⁵⁵⁴ Created to historicise a local legend, the memorial tells the story of a popular 'white' trader who lived in Atorkor for years:

One day, the Trader announced a dancing competition for the best dancers and drummers amongst the youth on his ship. The best dancer in the village was a beautiful young girl, but her parents forbade her from attending the party, as she had not completed her chores for the day. All the other young people in the village went to the dancing competition on the boat, where they were plied with rum before being shackled and sold into slavery.⁵⁵⁵

⁵⁵³ In 1998 the government issued a directive asking every district to form a committee to identify tourist sites for development. See Akyeampong, 'History, Memory, Slave-Trade,' p.17.

⁵⁵⁴ Atorkor is a small Ewe town of 6,000 inhabitants on the eastern coast of Ghana.

⁵⁵⁵ The original link where this description was found in 2007 has now lapsed. See the new Atorkor Development Foundation website: <http://www.adfatorkor.org/adfc.html> [last accessed 12/3/2013].

There are many versions of the story. This particular one corresponds with the official government version and was sourced from a website put up by the present chief of Atorkor, Samuel Adjorlorlo, who runs the Atorkor Development Foundation (ADF), an NGO for the development of the region.⁵⁵⁶ The architectural structure of the slave monument typifies an awkward aesthetic common amongst many new monuments built under the 1997 government-building schemes. Perhaps due to security reasons as its subject is controversial, from the outside it appears as nothing more than a high walled circular enclosure with a small wooden gate. The narrow entrance leads to a bizarre memorial, put together in a crude slapdash manner. A tall figure representing a European slaver brandishes a whip over two kneeling figures of Africans. The softened edges and slightly plump features of the sculptures are unable to convey any sense of gravitas, appearing more as cartoon characters poised on the verge of play. The interior walls of the monument narrate the capture and imprisonment of the drummers, which is depicted in a three-dimensional relief with additional dough-like figures. The overall effect is a panorama, which appears more to commemorate a favourite Disney cartoon than a historical tragedy. There is an element of crude sexuality in the depiction of the figures, particularly those of the sculptural depiction of chained women and those women depicted on the reliefs, which stand in contrast to the two-dimensional portrayal of male figures, adding to the discomfort viewing the monument brings.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid.



Figure 34. The Slave Monument at Atorkor, photo by Senam Okudzeto, 2012

African-American historian Anne C. Bailey centres her book *African Voices of the Atlantic Slave Trade: Beyond the Silence and the Shame* (2005) on the historical events that led to the creation of the Atorkor memorial.⁵⁵⁷ Bailey's book attempts to redress the imbalance between the plethora of African diaspora accounts of the transatlantic slave trade and the undeniable lack of such accounts by African communities within the continent. The monument at Atorkor constitutes a rare example of a community willing to address its past relationship to slavery. For her investigation, Bailey conducted an intensive study with citizens of the surrounding Anlo area and

⁵⁵⁷ Anne Bailey, *African Voices of the Atlantic Slave Trade: Beyond the Silence and the Shame*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2005.

collected a number of testimonies about the historical events that led to the construction of the monument.

As with many oral histories, accounts of the events that led to the construction of the monument vary considerably. Bailey presents three variations, which differ from the official line published by the Paramount Chief of Atorkor on the ADF website. The significant difference in Bailey's account of the story is that the band of drummers who were lost were also slavers, and there are no dancers in her account. In his essay 'History, Memory and Slave Trade in Anlo (Ghana),' (2001), Ghanaian historian, Emmanuel Akyeampong, Professor of African Studies at Harvard University, presents another version of the story.⁵⁵⁸ In his account, it was also band of drummers, but the suggestion here is that they were from the neighbouring villages of Whuti and Srogboe, two kilometres away, and that they were framed by the Anlo chief of Whuti, who was irritated that their leader was attracted to his wife. In this version, a drummer manages to jump ship and return to shore to relay the story.⁵⁵⁹ Both Akyeampong and Bailey interviewed chiefs and queen mothers from the area, many of whom claimed to be relatives of those who sold slaves or were sold themselves. The way these accounts were presented to the two historians and their interpretations of events are quite different. Bailey focuses on the story of villagers being tricked into slavery by a devious white trader, interpreting the incident as an "awakening" for Anlo Ewes to the fact that no one was immune to the transatlantic slave trade.⁵⁶⁰ Akyeampong, by contrast, describes the incident as being the result of an angry chief, Togbui Tamakloe, exacting revenge on Dogbe, the chief drummer of Srogboe, for having the audacity to desire his wife. The severity of the

⁵⁵⁸ Emmanuel Akyeampong, 'History, Memory, Slave-trade and Slavery in Anlo, Ghana', *Slavery and Abolition*, 22 (2001), pp.1–24.

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.* p17.

⁵⁶⁰ Anne Bailey, *African Voices of the Atlantic Slave Trade: Beyond the Silence and the Shame*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2005, p.35.

punishment suffered by the drummers hints that perhaps a greater offence than simply desiring the chief's wife may have taken place. Although unremarked by Akyeampong or Tamakloe, historical accounts in the Danish botanist Dr. Paul Isert's (1788) travelogue, indicate that it was common practice for 'noblemen' to demand the payment to the value of three slaves for those that would dare to sleep with their wives and for kings (chiefs) to demand the sale of the offender's entire family.⁵⁶¹ The one point that Akyeampong (2001) and Bailey (2001) agree upon is that Atorkor housed a major slave market and that its inhabitants were traders.

The erection of the slave monument of Atorkor has done nothing to consolidate historical accounts of the legends. The three central figures (a figure in European dress and the figures of a man and woman in traditional African clothing chained at the neck) and the narrative frieze (showing a sitting couple, then a man with a drum approaching a white man and followed by people in chains) remain open to interpretation (Figure 34.). The sculptural rendering of the seated figures is particularly uncomfortable. The vagueness of the monument is inspired; the circular structure of its narrative relief implying a temporal discussion of events happening in sequence, but also embodying the circular nature of the multiple narratives of the incident.

⁵⁶¹ The Tamakloe chiefs remain high ranking rulers belonging to a division of war kings that ruled Anlo state alongside the appointed Bate/Adzovia Awoamefia supreme King of Anlo (see footnote 40). In this context, it does not seem implausible that the entire clan of Srogboe drummers would be sold as punishment. Paul Isert travelled extensively in the region during the late 18th century. His reports of the punishment for adultery are quite severe. "Adultery is punished more severely here than robbery. When an ordinary Black is caught with the wife of another, the latter has the right to sell him, or the guilty man can redeem himself by paying money amounting to his own value (as a slave). But if the wife was that of a grandee or a nobleman, he must pay the value of three slaves. If it was one of the king's wives, the culprit is executed and his family sold. The king and the elders often deliberately possess so many wives as a form of commercial enterprise, with the intention of profiting by adultery". Excerpt from, Paul E. Isert, *Letters on West Africa and the Slave Trade, Paul Edermann Isert's Journey to Guinea and the Carribean Islands in Columbia (1788)*, trans. Selena Axelrod Winses, British Academy; Oxford University Press, 1992. p.134.



Figure 35. The exterior Slave Monument at Atorkor, photo by Senam Okudzeto, 2012

Ominously, the gate to the memorial is often locked. Akyeampong sees the monument as supplementary to the oral histories in the region: his version of the story was told by the grandson of Togbui Tamakloe, also named Chief Tamakloe, an Anlo divisional chief who originally supplied the story to the national committee for erecting monuments to slavery and subsequently received the grant to execute the memorial. As Akyeampong writes, “[t]he committee concluded that this is a story unique in the annals of Ghana. It arranged for the recording of *adekpetsi* songs by the drumming groups at Srogboe”.⁵⁶² The format of *adekpetsi* songs show a difference between

⁵⁶² Akyeampong, ‘History, Memory, Slave-Trade,’ 2001, p.18.

idiomatic encodings of history and memory. A blurred space between ‘historical experience’, ‘collective historical memory’ and ‘collective memory’, the tensions that were identified within the ‘class framework of experience’ become censored through the restrictions of direct speech to certain social positions.⁵⁶³ Memory theorists often distinguish ‘official history’ from personal or subaltern ‘memory’; here the subaltern position in tension with that of a chiefly educated class exists within a tightknit local community.

Akyeampong focuses his accounts on the performed memorial of this event, present in local proverbs, songs and drum sequences. He goes on to analyse a series of local dirges, which are said to memorialise the abduction at Atorkor: “These songs are filled with innuendo, and underscore the use of indirect speech by commoners in their critique of the slave trade and its patronage by their chiefs.”⁵⁶⁴ Akyeampong insists that the descendants of the kidnapped are critical of the memorial, because of class tensions. The community prefers to eulogise the events through songs and drumming, mindful that this history told by the memorial represents an exercise of power on the part of feudal lords over their vassals.

Conversely, Bailey interprets the incident as a cautionary tale directed at the entire community. The accounts told to her insist that relatives of the chief were taken captive, and according to this interpretation the monument represents the first time that all Anlo inhabitants were able to see themselves as vulnerable to the effects of the trade. Bailey’s stories put agency in the hands of European traders scrabbling for business at the end of the trade. Her interpretation is somewhat flawed since the threat of slavery was never far away for the poor (it was commonplace for debtors

⁵⁶³ Joseph Fracchia, ‘Subaltern Studies and Collective Memories in Piana degli Albanesi: Methodological Reflections on a Historiographical Encounter’, *Asian Journal of Social Science*, 2004, Vol. 32, No.2, Special Focus: Religion in the Local-Global Matrix (2004), p.248.

⁵⁶⁴ Akyeampong, ‘History, Memory, Slave-Trade’, 2001.

to place themselves in pawn), but more so since there are many reports in Anlo, particularly Atorkor, of disobedient children and criminals being sold into slavery as punishment.⁵⁶⁵ Her insistence that these events mark the first Anlo experience of being enslaved ignores the very foundation of Anlo identity, which is based on the myth of their migration as an escape from slavery. Traditionally, it is believed that during the late sixteenth century, the Anlo nation was enslaved inside a walled city by an evil king in Notsie, Benin. Whilst indentured, they suffered greatly and were forced to perform tortuous tasks such as mixing mortar ground, thorns and sharp rocks with their feet.⁵⁶⁶ Their escape and subsequent migration to Anlo in the 17th century is a core part of Anlo Ewe identity, memorialised annually in an elaborate annual festival named Hobestosto.⁵⁶⁷

Akyeampong also contradicts Bailey by insisting that, although the kidnapped slaves were loaded at the beach in Atorkor, they were, in fact, drummers from the neighbouring villages of Whuti and Srogboe. His interpretation sees the white trader who kidnapped the Anlos as little more than an instrument of Togbui Tamakloe's anger, and because the story becomes about an exercise of feudal power, he insists that the people of Whuti and Srogboe prefer that the story "remain in the private domain,"⁵⁶⁸ again illustrating a social taboo against discussions of slavery. Akyeampong compounds this hypothesis by emphasising that Chief Tamakloe himself related the story in order

⁵⁶⁵ Bailey also presents a version of the story told to her by Chief James Ocloo of Keta, which states that the events happened because the town of Atorkor was in debt. For a discussion of pawning, see Lovejoy, Paul. E, Lovejoy, Toyin Falola,(Eds). *Pawnship, Slavery and Colonialism in Africa*. Trenton NJ: Africa World Press, 2003.

⁵⁶⁶ The Dogbos (the name of Anlos prior to migration) were required to do a number of cruel and seemingly impossible tasks in the construction of Agorkoli's Palace. See Sandra Greene, *The Past and Present of an Anlo-Ewe Oral Tradition. History in Africa*, Vol.12, (1985): p.12.

⁵⁶⁷ The escape from Notsie is so integral to Anlo identity that it is memorialised in what is known popularly as the Ewe national dance, the Agbada, a war dance in which the movements recall the way in which the Ewe/Dogbo escaped their captivity.

⁵⁶⁸ The Tamakloe family remain a prominent family regionally and nationally. It is interesting to note that although Bailey collected several versions of the story, she was never given one directly naming the Tamakloes as responsible. For further discussion, see Akyeampong, *History, Memory, Slave-Trade*, 2001, p.18.

to demonstrate his ancestor's power. A subsequent interview with another chief in the area confirms the reluctance of Anlo elites to view slave trading as immoral:

Descendants of these slave traders today pride themselves that they are the descendants of slave merchants, because to be called a slave in Anlo is an insignia of shame. So, people pride themselves that their great grandfathers rather kept slaves, and were not among the numerous slaves that abounded in pre-colonial Anlo society.⁵⁶⁹

As a testimony to the importance of rumour in revealing emotive history, the wildly contrasting accounts given by Anlo locals to Bailey and Akyeampong could be construed as a sort of social Rorschach test. Akyeampong, a Harvard Professor, a Ghanaian national, a member of the educated social elite and, in a chauvinist society, a man, was arguably granted more access to information than Anne Bailey. However, the account of events given to Akyeampong – that the drummers of Srogboe were sold for merely flirting with Chief Tamakloe's wife – leaves more questions than answers, since the severity of the punishment suffered echoes Isert's reports that it was common throughout the former *Gold Coast* for an entire family to be sold when adultery with a chief's wife had taken place. Was the contemporary Tamakloe chief's report deliberately prudish in the hopes of supplying a more dignified account of his ancestor's actions to a Harvard professor? Could it be argued that the identity of Anne Bailey somehow influenced the narratives of accounts given to her by informants? An assistant professor at Spelman College, the prestigious black women's college in Atlanta, Bailey was most probably a graduate student at the time of her initial research; more importantly, as an African American, she was obviously a descendant of diasporan slaves. Berger (1972), Bourdieu (1984), Baxandall (1988), and Svašek (2012) have all argued that factors such as personal background and gender directly inform and influence how individuals encounter and understand visual and material culture.⁵⁷⁰ The different dialogues set up by the two historians

⁵⁶⁹ Akyeampong, *History, Memory, Slave-Trade*, 2001, p.20.

⁵⁷⁰ See footnotes 580, 581.

reflect their own identities as much as the historical identity of the community they aimed to investigate. The ability of the monument to trigger and represent multiple cultural identities in its viewers is not lost on the community that houses it. As a *lieux de mémoire*, the site of the slave memorial performs a parallax-induced double consciousness, triggering a culturally informed sense of memorialising that creates both disturbing and dynamic counter-readings of its history.

The third, and arguably most thorough investigation to date, appears in Sandra Greene's publication *West African Narratives of Slavery: Texts from Late Nineteenth-and Early Twentieth-Century Ghana* (2011), Greene is an African-American historian who has been researching narratives of slavery in Anlo for over thirty years. Her fieldwork has recorded several previously unremarked sites central to the history of the slave trade and presents fascinating oral testimonies by descendants of slavers and slaves. She also presents a chapter on the incident at Atorkor.⁵⁷¹ Greene, who knows the area well, raises the question why "an incident that occurred in a small village in 1854 [would] be remembered not only in Atorkor itself and its immediate neighbouring villages but also in many other parts of the Anlo polity." In her view, the answer lies in the identity of a local Christian minister, Rev. F. K. Fiawoo:

*Born in 1891, only some forty years after the Atorkor kidnapping, and raised in the village of Whuti, just 1.6 km from Atorkor, [Fiawoo] would certainly have heard about this history. More important, however, was that he came of age at a time when many in West Africa and the West were enthusiastically embracing and disseminating the tenets of African cultural nationalism and Pan-Africanism.*⁵⁷²

Fiawoo attended John C. Smith University, a historically black college in North Carolina, and returned as an Episcopalian minister in 1933. Greene suggests that he "appropriated the Atorkor

⁵⁷¹ See Sandra Greene, *West African Narratives of Slavery: Texts from the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011, p.184

⁵⁷² *Ibid.* p.191.

oral tradition about the kidnapping and modified it so that those who were abducted were described not just as lost but the ancestors of those who were now known as United States negroes.” Greene then presents an elaborate argument about the role of the “Negro-founded African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church” in the growth of anti-British, anti-colonial sentiment and the development of a diasporan black consciousness throughout coastal Ghana and colonial West Africa.⁵⁷³

Greene’s account, while giving a broad context to the history of the monument and curiously linking the genesis of its narrative once again to the neighbouring village of Whuti, reflects her own particular interest in the history of the African Episcopal church. Her suggestion that Rev. Fiawoo “made the Atorkor story popular” and that the location was “a small village in 1854”⁵⁷⁴ contradicts historical accounts of Atorkor as a significant trading port that attracted ships from America, the Arab countries and Europe.⁵⁷⁵ The town’s founding chief, Togbui Adela Eko, was himself the son of Togbui Adela Adzede, Paramount Chief of Anlo state and the founder of the Anlo Ewe state in Ghana.⁵⁷⁶ These lineages affirm links to the historic rulers of Anlo State and the right to high stools office.⁵⁷⁷ There is a popular saying in Ghana that “all Ewes are related,” which speaks to the close family ties and intermarriage throughout clans and families regionally. Anlo citizens regularly travel up and down the coast on weekends for weddings and funerals and the closeness of communities within the Ewe nation could be a key factor in the popular dissemination

⁵⁷³ Oral testimony from traditional rulers in Atorkor tells the story of its importance as a trading post.

⁵⁷⁴ Greene, *West African Narratives*, pp.191–92.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid. Greene, *West African Narratives*.

⁵⁷⁶ Atorkor was originally called Adela Kope (Adela’s village). Legend has it that it was gifted to him by his father Togbui Adzede, the *awoamefia* or king of Anlo State, as a reward for warning of a large army of invading foreigners spotted whilst hunting in the grounds. The town became an important outpost for the Anlo nation, interview with the present Paramount Chief, 4 April 2012, Atorkor, Ghana.

⁵⁷⁷ The Adjorlorlo Chiefs of Atorkor are direct descendants of Adela Adzede and therefore eligible to the office of *awoamefia*, or Paramount Chief of Anlo State. Adela Adzede is central to the Ewe migration mythology. When the Ewes escaped the kingdom of Notsie, their king, Togbui Sri I, forgot his royal stool. His son was sent to retrieve it and failed, but the second attempt made by his nephew, Adela Adzede, was successful. As a result the king declared that the royal succession would rotate between his direct descendants, the Royal Adzede Clan, and those of his nephew, the Royal Bate Clan.

of the Atorkor myth.

My interest in the slave monument at Atorkor came through the discovery of the aforementioned scholarship, which contradicted historical accounts told to me by relatives of my father whose family are from Atorkor, and are as its traditional rulers. The history of the monument given by these relatives also differs from published narratives. Some family members have expressed exasperation because one relative, who holds the keys to the slave monument but is not the Chief of Atorkor, habitually introduces himself falsely to tourists as the Chief of Atorkor. Sandra Greene mentions the starkly different character of interviews conducted by herself in 1988 and then Anne Bailey in 1992–1993 (through a translator) with a person called Togbui Awusu II, who claimed at that time to be the “chief of Atorkor” and the grandson of Ndorkutsu. Awusu’s tone was “matter-of-fact” in 1988, while in 1992-1993 expressing “horror” at the incident.⁵⁷⁸ My relatives do not know who Awusu II might be, but his claim to chieftaincy seems doubly false, since the chiefs of Atorkor are distinguished as direct descendants of Adjorlorlo I (not his brother Ndorkutsu).⁵⁷⁹ The current Paramount Chief of Atorkor, Togbui Samuel Akume Geli Adjorlorlo III, and his Regent, my paternal uncle the Agbotadua Chief C.P.K Okudzeto, have been in office since 1978.⁵⁸⁰ Visiting them in April 2012, I asked these two relatives for their opinions on all the different historical accounts I have compiled. Both knew the official version but disagreed on the authenticity of the varying accounts. Togbui Adjorlorlo III, who was enstooled at the age of fourteen in 1978 but grew up in the UK, found that “they all sound plausible,” and excused himself for only knowing the official version presented by the Ghana National Tourism Development Board. He added, however, that there were rumours that it was “some chiefs or some elders from

⁵⁷⁸ Greene, *West African Narratives*, p.214.

⁵⁷⁹ But, it should be noted that Grand Uncle and Grand Aunt are translated as Grandfather and Grandmother.

⁵⁸⁰ Togbui Samuel Adjorlorlo is a second cousin.

the area who invited the community into the ship. But as to the authenticity of that, well, we aren't really sure." Adjorlorlo was unaware of the legend of the captured drummers from Whuti, but wondered if it explained why no chiefs, or other members of the village, were consulted in the construction and final execution of the monument:

Togbui Adjorlorlo III [TA]: "Yes, you see I was surprised that it was channelled through Tamakloe and not the chief in Atorkor. The way I understood it was that because he, Tamakloe, is a divisional chief (you know the Anlos have three divisions) it was done through him because he was a senior chief, you see? But I wonder, because of what you said about that version, I wonder if that is the reason why it was channelled through him, because he had nothing to do with Atorkor, he is the chief of Whuti. Tamakloe is not a chief here."

Senam Okudzeto: "Ah, he is from Whuti, which is where he also said the drummers were from."

TA: "Exactly, so I'm just wondering if that's why that money was channelled through him. I have never understood why".⁵⁸¹

Chief Adjorlorlo's account differs from that of the Agbotadua chief, C.P.K Okudzeto, who was the senior acting chief of the village from 1978 onwards. The Agbotadua tells an entirely different story, insisting that no one from the village was ever sold and all the previous accounts were untrue. More shockingly, he asserted that the ruse of "drumming and dancing for the white-man" took place with every sale; it was merely an easy way to get the slaves onto the trading ships:

What took place is that when the whites came, they could buy and negotiate with Ndorkutsu. They bought the slaves, but they would not tell them where they were going. So, they would take a drum and tell them, 'Go and take this drum and dance and entertain the white men on board the ship.' So as they were entertaining the people on board of the ship, the ship would move slowly, slowly and before they realise it, the ship is gone...according to our mothers or great-grandfathers, you see, they were not telling the truth to the slaves, that 'you are being sold', or 'you are sold, so go on board'. No. That was the way.⁵⁸²

C.P.K. Okudzeto's account throws an entirely different light on the previous descriptions of the

⁵⁸¹ Interview, 4 April 2012, Atorkor, Ghana.

⁵⁸² Interview, 2 April 2012, Accra, Ghana.

historical event; it suggests that several such incidents occurred at Atorkor over time, rather than only one. Some support for this suggestion can be found in Sandra Greene's account. Although Greene describes only one such incident as taking place, two of the oral testimonies she collected ambiguously indicate that multiple incidents took place: as she writes, "[Ndorkutsu] would go to the interior, ask people to come and drum, and the whites would take them away."⁵⁸³ Historical evidence repeatedly points to Whuti as being somehow involved. Perhaps the government recordings of the drumming songs of Whuti, if found, may add another layer of evidence to the history of the event. As Michael Rowlands has cautioned in *The Role of Memory in the Transmission of Culture* (2009), a belief that cultural memory is linear has been and still is basic to many Western senses of personal and group integrity and coherence, "this urge towards linearity can lead to the erasure of multiple, conflicting or contrary experiences in the interests of constructing a coherent collective memorial experience".⁵⁸⁴ Possibly the existence of so many versions of the 'incident at Atorkor' indicates not so much that oral culture is prone to embellishment, but, rather, a tendency in historians towards collapsing multiple oral narratives into a single verifiable account.

The monument has allowed the Atorkor community to reinvent its history to remarkable effect. On 11 February 2002, Ghanaian newspapers reported that the "*MV Duke Offenwi*, a Nigerian registered vessel, which had its engine off completely, had to be drifted ashore at the Atorkor Slave Memorial park, near Anloga".⁵⁸⁵ Although the incident was reported in only a few newspapers, word quickly spread as far as the capital that the impoverished fisherman of the Atorkor and the

⁵⁸³ Greene, *West African Narratives*, p.216, p.219.

⁵⁸⁴ Michael Rowlands, 'The Role of Memory in the Transmission of Culture', in *World Archeology*, Vol. 25 (2), Taylor and Francis, 1993 p.143.

⁵⁸⁵ The ship was in fact named the *Duke of Nnewi*, misprinted by the Ghanaian press as the *Duke Offenwi*. See '33 Survive Shipwreck Off the Coast of Ningo Prampram.' *General News* (Ghana), 11/2/2002; <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/artikel.php?ID=21641>

neighbouring villages first rescued the sailors and then looted the vessel, which had run aground. Petrol was siphoned from the engines and everything from light bulbs to electric wiring was removed from the ship, leaving only the bare shell. Although the local authorities were unable to locate the individuals involved in the theft, the villagers were strongly cautioned. In response, the villagers pointed out that the ship had eerily run aground directly opposite the slave park, suggesting that it was their ancestors who had brought the ship to shore in order to seek repayment for their children kidnapped by “the white-man.” As Marcel Mauss stated in *The Gift*, “Sacrificial destruction implies giving something that is to be repaid”.⁵⁸⁶ The Ghanaian state authorities pointed out that, since the pilfered ship was a Nigerian vessel, it was most definitely the property of “the black man,” but the villagers refused to give up their symbolic interpretation of the ship as a gift of atonement.

⁵⁸⁶ Marcel Mauss. *The Gift* p.10

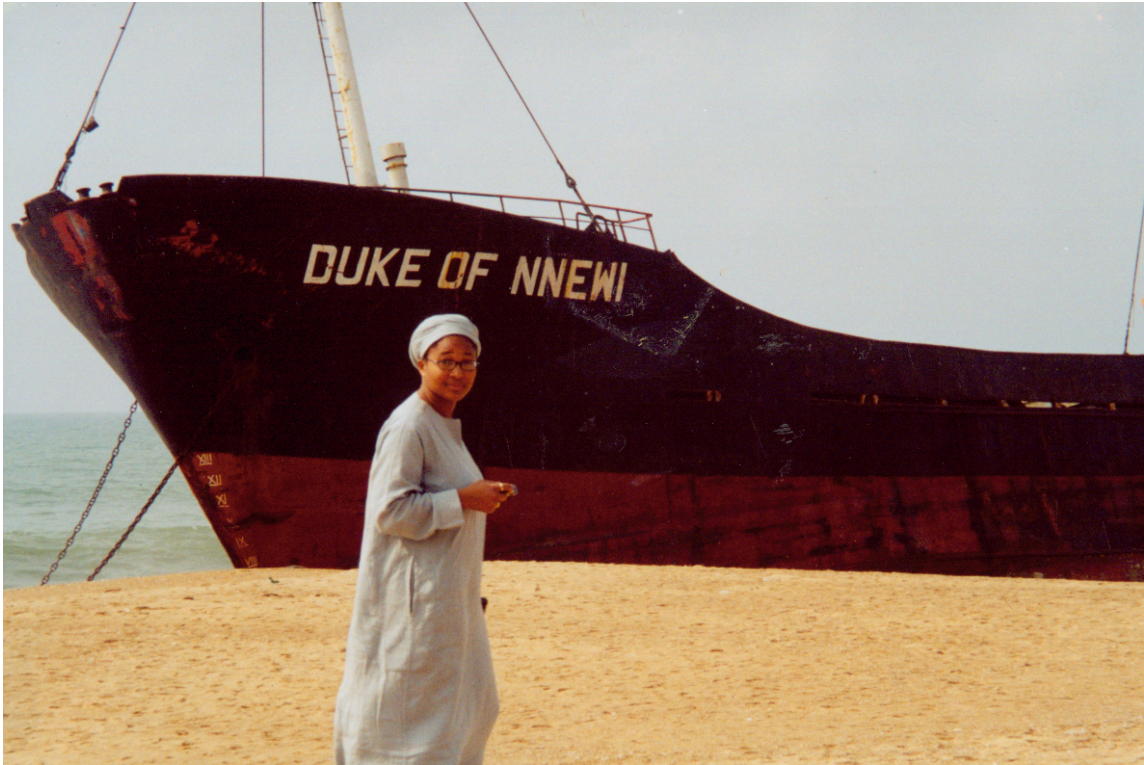


Figure 36. Senam Okudzeto in front of *MV Duke of Nnewi*, Atorkor Beach, 2002

The fanciful inventions of the villagers regarding the wreck's social role invoke Alfred Gell's concept of 'object agency', which describes how a work of art may be imbued with the power to influence society but also suggest how "culturally specific aesthetic intentions" might be played out.⁵⁸⁷ In this instance, Gell's theories of social resonance of the 'artwork' are easily adapted to any object with aesthetic appeal. As Gell writes, "It may be said that a work of art can be defined as any object that is aesthetically superior, having certain qualities of visual appealingness or beauty".⁵⁸⁸ The immediate creation of a fantastical, yet conversely normalising narrative incorporating the wreck of the Duke of Nnewi into the existing landscape and psycho-spiritual

⁵⁸⁷ See Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*, Oxford Clarendon, 1998 p.1 (Also in Buchli, *Material Culture Anthology*, p.196) and, Gell, *Keywords*, 1998.

⁵⁸⁸ Gell. 'Vogel's Net; Traps as Artworks and Artworks as Traps'. *Journal of Material Culture*, Vol. 1, Issue 1. 1996, p.15.

cosmologies not only serviced the justification of theft under the duress of poverty, but also imbued the ship with a strong locally cultured aesthetic appeal. No doubt initially oozing engine oil, rather than appearing as a blight on the landscape, this harsh industrialised and clearly modernist object, became a source of local pride and endearment.

This ability for seemingly alien objects to be seamlessly brought into local mythological cosmologies is strangely mirrored by a similar story relayed in the autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah (1961), where a similar Nigerian shipping vessel ran aground in 1913 along the beach at Half Assini, and was said to have been wrecked by the local river god of Ama Azure who wanted a ship to be able to faster “visit his goddess of the neighbouring river Awianialuanu”.⁵⁸⁹ Recalling Appadurai’s *Social Life of Things* (1988), Alfred Gell (1998) has called for greater investigation into the possibilities for an anthropological theory where “*persons* or social agents are in certain contexts, substituted for by *art objects*”.⁵⁹⁰ In both cases the wrecked ships were seen to represent the will of the gods and/or the ancestors. In so doing they became aestheticised in such a way as to be first reconciled and then incorporated into the local landscape and religious cosmologies, becoming a source of divine and ancestral intervention and resolution, rather than an awkward blight on the landscape.

Nicholas Argenti (2006) and Ute Röenthaler (2006) have argued that “the past” in relation to slavery is socially constructed, and that this (re-)construction is a reconstitution from disparate fragmented elements, which nonetheless carry great weight.⁵⁹¹ This means that historical events as

⁵⁸⁹ Kwame Nkrumah, *The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah*, Ghana: New York: International Publishers, 1957; Edinburgh: Nelson. Reprinted 1961, (4th edition) p.2.

⁵⁹⁰ Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency* in the chapter ‘The Problem Defined, The Need for an Anthropology of Art’ p.5 and also reprinted Buchli, *Material Culture: Critical Concepts*, 2004, p.200.

⁵⁹¹ See Nicholas Argenti and Ute Röenthaler, ‘Introduction: Between Cameroon and Cuba: Youth, Slave Trades and Translocal Memoryscapes.’ *Social Anthropology* 14, No.1 (2006), p.33.

they are “remembered” are constantly undergoing a process of reflection, re-evaluation and interpretation. In the context of the transatlantic slave trade, this constant, socially mediated re-evaluation of the past is seen as a productive and meaningful way of dealing with the social and historical traumas of the slave trade. As Argenti and Rösenthaler point out,

European culture emphasises “memory work” as an explicit means of coming to terms with traumatic pasts, allotting responsibility and expiating guilt as a means of closure, while the American descendants of African slaves continue to revitalise inherited, remembered and reconstructed ritual practices and to elaborate a verbal discourse on the African origins of the Atlantic diaspora. But Africa itself remains doggedly silent on the issue of slavery.⁵⁹²

In view of the existing taboos on direct discussion of the slave trade, one wonders how the citizens of Atorkor process the inexorable fact of their town’s decline from its heyday at the turn of the 19th century into a sleepy underpopulated village. Nowadays its fishing population lies idle, struggling with depleted stocks due to industrial trawlers and general unemployment. The markers of their past are evident not only in the structures of a few grand villas dating from the 1940s, and in the slave monument, but also in the very name of the town—Atorkor being a bastardisation of the Twi name that visiting Akan traders gave to an important market notoriously infested with mosquitoes, “Mê tô, mê kô,” translated roughly as “Buy quickly and go.” In the case of the villagers of Atorkor, reconstructed ritual practices represented in the construction of the slave monument and its anticipation of heritage tourists visiting in order to mourn the history of the trade, have been appropriated by individuals who are an ambiguous mix of the descendants of local slave traders and slaves alike. Since African discourse is, by and large, “doggedly silent” on slavery in the absence of any official counter-history, it seems somehow apt that the citizens of Atorkor should appropriate the African-diasporan discourse as their own shared history: hinging their new

⁵⁹² Argenti, pp.33–34.

collective memory on the material presence of the slave monument at Atorkor and remembering themselves as victims of the trade, rather than as collaborators, provides them with a fitting explanation of their present economic decline.

The taboo over the discussion of origins is invoked across Ghana when appropriate, and was encountered by Saidiya Hartman in her 1997 trip to the country. Hartman travelled along the nation's slave routes with the express intention of tracing the legacy of slavery, including the search for contemporary Ghanaian descendants of slaves. *Lose Your Mother* (2008) is a cross between history and biography, charting the cultural tensions between diasporan blacks seeking resolution with historical slavery and an unsympathetic African host culture. The book underscores the sense of alienation felt by the diasporan heritage tourist as the journey to find selfhood is marred by ever-present costs.⁵⁹³ Hartman writes:

*There was nothing exceptional about my journey. Any tourist with the willingness and the cash could retrace as many slave routes as her heart desired.*⁵⁹⁴

Hartman's account is repeatedly self-conscious of the fact that her sense of alienation is tied directly to her known descent from the transatlantic slave trade;

As I travelled through Ghana, no one failed to recognize me as the daughter of slaves, so the few stories people shared were kinder and less severe than they would be otherwise. No one said things like slaves were a bunch of stupid and backward people, or confided they were fit for manual labor that only required strong arms. If you believed slavery was a benign institution in Africa, then you certainly would not expect to hear such things, but in fact, masters and traders spoke about slaves in exactly those terms and people continue to do so today. In my company, the polite refrained from such remarks and instead made jokes about how I had found my way back home, or teased me about searching for my roots. They were used to Americans with identity problems. None openly expressed surprise or amazement that nearly two centuries after the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade, I was still hoping to find a hint or sign of the captives. If they experienced a twinge

⁵⁹³ Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2008.

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.* p.41.

*of remorse, no one let on. And even if I was indiscreet enough to mention my slave origins, most refused to follow me down this dangerous path and responded with studied indifference to all my talk of slavery. But silence and withholding were not the same as forgetting.*⁵⁹⁵

Hartman's book is a difficult and yet honest chronicle of disappointment; not only disappointment with her alienation as a foreigner, but also in the lost dreams of Nkrumah's pan-Africanist Ghana. As she travels, her sense of alienation becomes increasingly pronounced, as does her frustration with the invisible wall of cultural memory that separates her from the Ghanaians she encounters. The chapter entitled 'The Dead Book', draws upon historical sources to narrate the true story of African women taken aboard *The Recovery* (a slave ship), who were repeatedly raped, then contracted venereal disease and were strung up from the ship's mast, whipped and repeatedly dropped to the ship's deck as a 'cure for the pox'.⁵⁹⁶ The construction of Hartman's book provides a practical recovery of the "silence and withholding" that frustrates her journey through Ghana. Her biographical writing is punctuated with detailed chapters narrating historical records of unimaginable cruelty inflicted on captive slaves, underscoring the emptiness of the public narratives of slavery available to the heritage tourist in Ghana.

D. Massiasta (1999, 2006), presents a rare discussion of the moral and spiritual consequences of slave trading from indigenous perspectives, arguing that Ewes believed that the slaves they traded brought their gods with them, and therefore traditional rites needed to be undertaken to appease the gods of the slave. A 'slave stool' needed to be created to be a conduit for the angered gods of the slave. It was also believed that if a slave was killed or harmed in some way, that the slaver

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid. p.154.

⁵⁹⁶ Hartman extrapolates from a famous legal case presented for the abolition of slavery. See *Lose Your Mother*, pp.136–153.

must then take on the culture of the slave as an appeasement. Massiasta also notes that greed and the scale of operations meant that traders became less observant of such rituals. An interesting interpretation of a lost spiritual morality, which demanded an acknowledgment of a perhaps unfamiliar, ethics relating to slavery. These loss of these rituals add new meaning to the observations of Bailey (2005), who interprets the ‘incident at Atorkor’ as a moral turning point in the local history and memory of the slave trade, leading to a radical paradigm shift in the understanding of slavery as inherently wrong.⁵⁹⁷ In any case, be it due to an old moral duty that was neglected, as argued by Massiasta, or a new ethics brought through the educational discourse of diasporan black culture as argued by Bailey, the idea of the ancestors seeking reparations for slavery has entered the contemporary cultural mindset, and gels well with the local inhabitants’ urgent need for social development. This new-found discourse of reparations was in concert with an increasingly popular movement headed by organisations such as the Ghana-based Afrikan Reparation and Repatriation Truth Commission (AWRRTC) and illustrates a move on the part of Anlos away from seeing slavery as a sign of previous economic wealth, towards an understanding of it as gross social injustice.⁵⁹⁸ It also indicates a willingness to forget complicity with the trade when the price is right, which echoes the ambiguous morality of the heritage tourism industry. This confusion is also increased by the obvious poverty of local inhabitants in comparison to heritage tourists who come with First World incomes and foreign passports. It is a simple and logical step for the impoverished villager to identify with a locally-housed public monument that commemorates cultural theft and suffering. Like many slave monuments and other heritage sites

⁵⁹⁷ Dale Massiasta, *Slavery and Spiritual Reparation*, Lissavi Print, 2006 and *The Case of the Krachi Dente Worship*, (1999);

<http://www.hypertextile.net/blakhud/dente/dente3.htm> [last accessed 10/02/2015].

⁵⁹⁸ The debates for compensation for slavery have been ongoing for decades. Conflict has arisen over who to compensate, especially in the light of African complicity in the trade. The AWRRTC has suggested the sum of 777 trillion US dollars, in order to organise repatriations of diasporans to the African continent, and to compensate Africans for Third World debt. See Schramm, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade*, p.130.

in Ghana, the Atorkor Monument aims not only to create historical dialogues, but also to revitalise the economies of the communities that house them. Although Edward Bruner's 1996 essay 'Tourism in Ghana: The Representation of Slavery and the Return of the Black Diaspora' is, in some respects dated, his observation that "what most Ghanaians want from tourism is economic development, including sources of income, better sanitation and waste disposal, and improved roads" is still relevant today.⁵⁹⁹

Aside from these socio-economic developments, the positive effect of such initiatives is the creation of African-authored narratives of the trade and its effects, an escape from the social taboos on slavery, and a shared sense of regret that creates unity within African-diaspora and indigenous African communities. A less clear effect of heritage tourism is that this new understanding of history revolves around the commodification of historical suffering, not just in reparations debates, but also in the economic agenda of tourism. Stories and legends become potential units of currency, and it is the tellers of the stories and not necessarily the descendants of the enslaved who expect to profit, suggesting that the slaves sold during the trade have suffered multiple sales, first physically and then through the commodification of their histories.

The debates over heritage tourism and its flaws highlight a strained and ambiguous tension between Africans and African-diaspora blacks, in particular African-Americans, who seem to many West Africans no different in wealth, appearance and manners from white Americans. Bruner explains one of the awkward misunderstandings that arise from this confusion: "When diaspora blacks return to Africa, the Ghanaians call them *obroni*, which means "white-man".⁶⁰⁰ In

⁵⁹⁹ Bruner, 'Tourism in Ghana,' p.291.

⁶⁰⁰ See Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2008, p.3; and Bruner, 'Tourism in Ghana', p.295.

Manthia Diawara's 2000 documentary on the slave forts on the West Coast of Africa, featuring African-American actor Danny Glover, Glover at one point is seen sitting on a small dhow with a Senegalese fisherman, returning from visiting the former slave quarters at Goree Island.⁶⁰¹ As Glover looks back he starts to tear up, and the fisherman asks him, "Why are you sad?" Glover replies, "My ancestors were possibly taken from such a place under terrible conditions to be slaves in America." The fisherman retorts, "I wish my ancestors had been taken as slaves to America, then I would have an American passport and money like you."⁶⁰²

Glover, to his credit, ponders this comment un-offended, with a new-found understanding of his privilege, but it is a difficult understanding to achieve. African-diasporan visitors to the forts of Ghana resent having to pay a "tourist" price to visit a site they see as an ancestral home, saying that "they didn't pay to leave here, so they shouldn't have to pay to come back".⁶⁰³

Nonetheless, this paradoxical and contested situation is in stark contrast to the post-independence portrait of Ghana painted by American academic Kevin Gaines in his book *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates in the Civil Rights Era* (2006).⁶⁰⁴ For Gaines, the Civil Rights movement and the independence struggles of emerging African nations were directly tied to one another, each culture being buoyed by the other's successes and critical acts of solidarity. Gaines's contentions are echoed in the writing of Paul Gilroy who reminds us that there are deep historical links between the political scholarship and struggles of diasporan Americans and Caribbean citizens. The early African independence movements, in confronting colonialism, drew support from the parallel

⁶⁰¹ *Diaspora conversations from Gorée to Dogon*, Dir. Manthia Diawara. New York: Third World Newsreel, 2000. DVD

⁶⁰² Ibid.

⁶⁰³ Bruner, 'Tourism in Ghana', p.298.

⁶⁰⁴ Kevin Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana; Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.

struggles of the Civil Rights movement; yet could these early solidarities have diminished within a few short generations?

In some ways, the curious figure of Ghanaian Roland Cole, a 39-year-old holistic masseur, political blogger and former Rastafarian, exemplifies an emerging new ‘black Atlantic’ perspective. In his late teens, Cole moved to London, not returning to Ghana until his early thirties. The Coles, like many families along the coast, have a complex lineage of immigrant ancestors, but they are well-known as the descendants of creole merchant sailors from Freetown, Sierra Leone. This extended family has produced a number of historic figures, spreading across the west coast from Nigeria through Togo, Ghana, Liberia and Sierra Leone.⁶⁰⁵ In spite of the social and economic vicissitudes of the once-rich seaside community, the Ghanaian branch of the family still owns a series of crumbling but nonetheless impressive properties in historic Jamestown, Accra. Cole lives with his mother, a Jamestown Queen Mother, and other relatives in one of the old family houses: a large villa bordering other family lands that include decaying turn-of-the-century structures and merchant houses. I met him through a mutual friend, and on hearing of my research he contacted me and invited me to tour his family home. Cole believes he has found a forgotten slave dungeon under his family home, but his family seem uninterested in further excavations. The supposed dungeon is merely referred to as “a well”.⁶⁰⁶ It was first exposed when a cement truck fell through the ground revealing the underground caverns. Cole explains:

...my uncle was trying to do some renovation work, so they brought in a truck full of sand, and while he was parking, one of the tyres went into the pavement, and there was a well. It's just covered but I think when we're ready and we've got the paper[work] we'll dig it again. It was held with heavy steel and metal, you could see it was a well that was

⁶⁰⁵ Roland Cole's great-grandfather and namesake was the first black Postmaster General in British colonial West Africa.

⁶⁰⁶ Private wells were the common source of water in the houses of Jamestown until the early twentieth century. Many of these wells still exist, although structurally unsound and prone to collapse, most famously at the Akoto Lante Tragedy of 1985, when one such well collapsed, drowning the fourteen school children who fell into its depths.

*commercially used or whatever, and when you look inside you can still see structures in there. I don't care what anybody says, I still got to take that as there is still life beneath this place.*⁶⁰⁷

Cole claims to have explored within the cavern as much as he could, and is convinced he has found holding cells of some sort or another; his family on the other hand chose not to investigate the “structures” further, but instead quickly covered the well. Cole continues:

*It's only me that could have gone down that well, it was my generation that I'm talking about. I have yet to get people who are interested and want to know more about it. My uncle is not, he is not interested. When I saw it was covered again I was really disappointed. I said, 'Don't they know they have to get some people to come and look at this?'*⁶⁰⁸

Maruska Svasek has discussed how “emotions often function as evaluative judgements” in relation to material culture.⁶⁰⁹ This observation is echoed in the theories of Bourdieu, Berger and Baxandall who have all made cases for vision and perception being directly informed by the cultural background, gender and experiences of the observer.⁶¹⁰

⁶⁰⁷ Excerpt from video interview with Roland Cole, 24/4/2007.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁹ Maruska Svasek, (ed.) *Moving Subjects, Moving Objects; Transnationalism, Cultural Production and Emotions*. Berghahn Books: New York: Oxford, 2012, p.248.

⁶¹⁰ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, BBC Television Series, 1972; *Ways of Seeing: Based on the BBC Television Series*, Penguin Books for Art, 1972; Michael Baxandall. *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy, A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style*. (2nd Ed.) Oxford University Press. 1988; Pierre Bourdieu, (trans. Richard Nice). *Distinction; A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Harvard University Press, 1984.



Figure 37. Screen-grab, video interview with Roland Cole, Jamestown Accra. Senam Okudzeto, 2007

In this case, Cole has a decidedly circumatlantic sense of identity, in part because of his creole roots, but even more so I suspect because of his time spent living in England. Moreover, his former identity as a Rastafarian may have contributed to his taking a relatively radical stance. He represents an, as yet, unwritten narrative in ‘black Atlantic’ culture, that of the contemporary African citizen who seeks a conscious dialogue with diasporan culture and history.

This polyvalent cultural fluency and identity is indicative of the “translocal solidarities, cross border mobilisations and post-national identities” that Appadurai (1996) identifies in new readings of modernity under globalisation.⁶¹¹ Cole is an interesting figure to be viewed in the context of *The Black Atlantic*, as Gilroy’s ground-breaking study tends to neglect culture from the African continent as a locus of contemporary narratives in its set of exchanges. Africa is seen as a starting point, but Gilroy does not manage to successfully incorporate its cultural production into his

⁶¹¹ Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, p.21.

discussion of modernity and contemporary cultural exchanges. Cole himself speaks in a striking rolling patois of Ghanaian English peppered with British-Afro-Caribbean slang:

*I've come all this way on my own trying to find out...If I don't do this, it's over. So yes, if they have good interest, come on, if...[becomes impassioned] ALL THIS SLAVE BULLSHIT AND PEOPLE GOT SOLD AND PEOPLE GOT BOUGHT, and all that, let's put it right, man, for once, we are the forefathers of the future generation because we are in the 21st century and we are heading it, so we became forefathers in 1900; they will say that these guys are responsible for the final sale of Africa. I don't want to go down in history with that!*⁶¹²

Cole's sense of responsibility begs analysis. He admits a fragmented understanding of his family history, knowing that his ancestors came from Freetown and knowing their names, but not knowing how it was that they got there. Although the homes on his family compound were definitely built by the Coles, the dungeons on the grounds possibly predate their arrival as Sierra-Leonian creoles, but this will remain uncertain until the site is analysed by archaeologists. As the Cole family house is a short walk from Usher Fort, which still houses many underground slave cells, perhaps the underneath structures belonged to the greater complex of the castle.

Such is the taboo surrounding the issue that the majority of the Coles want no investigation to take place, even if it were to absolve them of complicity in the slave trade. At present, Cole's knowledge of family history does not present any historical discrepancy between his family's arrival in Jamestown in the mid-nineteenth century and the British authorities' 1875 abolition of slavery in the *Gold Coast* colony.⁶¹³ Perhaps most descendants of prominent trading families do not know precisely what their ancestors traded in, which would partly explain the strange detachment locals have towards debates about the trade. In any case, there does not seem to be much effort to find

⁶¹² Excerpt from video interview with Roland Cole, 24/4/2007.

⁶¹³ Slaveholding was outlawed for British subjects in 1868 (prior to the 1875 ban on slavery). The Coles, as Creoles from Sierra Leone, would therefore have been declared British subjects rather than members of local clans and tribes who were considered subjects of their local traditional rulers. See Parker, *Making the Town*, pp.84, 87.

out more about it. Cole himself informed me that the subject of slavery was never discussed in the national curriculum when he was a schoolboy in both the UK and Ghana in the 1980s, whereas today groups of school children frequently visit the slave forts. Nonetheless, Cole is actively engaged in trying to correct the wrongs of the past through reclaiming lost histories. He represents a new generation that is engaged with a transnational black consciousness and that diverges from the official narratives of slavery in or outside of Ghana.⁶¹⁴ His actions are representative of a growing neo-pan-Africanist sentiment, a new impulse that inserts the proscriptions of immediate African family values into the context of larger shared kinship amongst people of African descent, putting the knowledge of the former into the service of the latter.

Lineage vs. Heritage

The slave monuments of Ghana's coast seem to serve multiple and contradictory functions. The drive towards memorialisation has awakened a new interest in culture, enlivening oral histories and traditions, but there is an invisible line that draws a distinction between how Ghanaian and diasporan communities choose to approach and articulate these histories. For example, the converse side of the 'door of no return' at Cape Coast Castle has been marked with a plaque labelling it the 'door of return', indicating that passing through the door for diasporans is a form of ritual healing, but one may wonder if it has the same emotional significance for Ghanaians. At the entrance to the castle is another plaque, which reads:

IN EVERLASTING MEMORY OF THE ANGUISH OF OUR ANCESTORS
MAY THOSE WHO DIED REST IN PEACE
MAY THOSE WHO RETURN FIND THEIR ROOTS
MAY HUMANITY NEVER AGAIN PERPETRATE

⁶¹⁴ Holsey contrasts commonplace Ghanaian ambivalence towards the legacy of slavery with a growing identification with diasporan black identity, addressed as 'black cultural citizenship' in Bayo Holsey, 'BLACK ATLANTIC VISIONS: History, Race, and Transnationalism in Ghana.' *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 28, No. 3, 2013, pp. 504-18.

SUCH INJUSTICE AGAINST HUMANITY
WE THE LIVING, VOW TO UPHOLD THIS

This plaque was donated in 1992, the year of the first Panafest festival, which essentially marked the beginning of more intense diaspora tourism in Ghana. Immediately across from the 1992 plaque is another, which reads:

THIS PLAQUE WAS UNVEILED BY
PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA
AND THE
FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA
ON THE OCCASION OF THEIR VISIT
TO THE CAPE COAST CASTLE
ON THE 11TH DAY OF JULY 2009

The 2009 plaque, placed there to commemorate Barack and Michelle Obama's visit is the same size and format as the emotive eulogy to lost slaves, its domineering presence seems to overwrite the message of the earlier plaque, a gesture that further grounds the site in the broader history of diasporan blacks at the expense of local African experiences of the slave trade.⁶¹⁵

Ghanaian poet and critic Opoku Agyemang argues that the horrors experienced during the period of the transatlantic slave trade created a "victim society". The "real and constant threat of enslavement" produced an inability to confront a history of slavery and complicity in the slave trade, a form of cultural and psychological denial that continues in present-day Ghana.⁶¹⁶ The historical silence surrounding slavery is augmented by the fact that slave descent continues to be

⁶¹⁵ See also Kwesi, J. Anquandah, *Castles and Forts of Ghana, Casca*: Ghana Museums and Monuments Board, 1999, p.50.

⁶¹⁶ Opoku Agyemang, 'Cape Coast Castle: The Edifice and The Metaphor.' In *FonTomFrom: Contemporary Ghanaian Literature, Theatre and Film*, ed. Kofi Anyidoho and James Gibbs, pp.23–8. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000, p.26.

a source of shame in most Ghanaian traditional tribal cultures.⁶¹⁷ Commenting on this problem in an interview with Katharina Schramm, Agyemang paraphrases a question raised in Ama Ata Aidoo's *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, a 1980 play about a family's struggle to accept an African American daughter-in-law: "How do I report that under my watch a child of slaves is accepted back into the house?"⁶¹⁸ As Agyemang and Ama Ata Aidoo attest in their writings, slavery remains a site of trauma for the diaspora and Ghanaian alike.

Earlier discussions of the function, or dysfunction, of public monuments in Ghana, remind us that most Ghanaians, like many West Africans, still revere their ancestors. In a culture in which ancestors are still often buried as close to the family home as possible and are clearly associated with the land, the claims of the members of diaspora cultures seem illegitimate. A foreigner whose ancestors are buried abroad has few claims to the land. Understanding the importance of ancestors in relation to the construction of African identities helps to explain the fact that, in spite of the history of colonialism and slavery, some coastal West Africans maintain a much greater pride in their links to Old Europe and their "trader" ancestors who lived, died and were buried within their towns, than sympathy to distant relatives long lost to the transatlantic slave trade.

On 14 September 2006, I attended the 'Outdooring' ceremony of Togbui James Ocloo V, Dufia (Chief) of Keta in the Volta region.⁶¹⁹ This ceremony marked the formal presentation of the new paramount chief of Keta to the public.⁶²⁰ In a section of the day's programme entitled "Tourism in Keta", I read of the "many relics, which bear testimony to the historical

⁶¹⁷ Despite the stigma surrounding slavery, historically slaves could inherit certain royal and political stools, but not those that required "one to be in possession of one's father's gods or the gods of one's ancestors." Perbi, *History*, p.134.

⁶¹⁸ Schramm, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade*, p.137, p.30.

⁶¹⁹ "Outdooring" is the term used by Ghanaians for a child's naming day or any important public inauguration; in this context it means the first public presentation of the newly enthroned Chief of Keta.

⁶²⁰ Any kind of public inauguration in Ghana is referred to as an 'outdooring'.

links between the area and Europe. The earlier European traders married the native women and left many European names such as Amarin, de Souza, de Lima, Karl, Lutterodt, Van-Lare, Quist and Risch. The descendants of these families still bear with great pride these names as testimony to earlier contacts and lineage.”⁶²¹ The pamphlet detailed a history of the chieftaincy, one of the most important ones in the region, and its early progenitors’ partnerships with various European ‘merchants’, underlining the value placed upon early relations with Europeans. It celebrated a history of ‘trade’, but neglects to say who were being traded. The first Togbui James Ocloo worked with a Portuguese merchant partner, and in 1863 was forced “as a result of conflict in the Anlo area, to relocate the business to Ebe Beach in Lome, Togo.”⁶²² The underground slave trade of Anlo flourished throughout the 19th century in spite of the Danish abolition of the transatlantic slave trade in 1803. Therefore, there was obviously only one kind of business that would need to be relocated to Togo in 1863.⁶²³ As Akyeampong writes, “Anlo slave marts were all located between sea and lagoon, facilitating the smuggling of slaves along the lagoon and shipping from ports other than Keta, since Danish vigilance at the other ports was negligible.”⁶²⁴

The Outdoorings pamphlet gives a detailed account of the history of the region but strictly upholds the taboo on slavery. The historic traders in the region are all mentioned, but without reference to their participation in the trade. The pamphlet relates, for example, that, “The market still operates at the original site. In 1885, Chief Geraldo de Lima and Chief Tenguey Dzokoto II were accused

⁶²¹ The Outdoorings Ceremony of Togbui James Ocloo V, Dufia of Keta and Mama Awoameshie James Ocloo I, Queen Mother at Keta in the Anlo Traditional Area, 14–17 September 2006. Pamphlet: authors and publisher unlisted, p. 9.

⁶²² Ibid. Outdoorings.

⁶²³ See Emmanuel Akyeampong, *Between the Sea and the Lagoon: An Eco-social History of the Anlo of Southeastern Ghana c.1850 to Recent Times*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001, pp.53–62.

⁶²⁴ ‘The slave trade flourished in Anlo in the first half of the nineteenth century.’ Akyeampong, *History, Memory, Slave-Trade*, p.6.

of waging the Teletu and Trekume wars against the British Administration.”⁶²⁵ Geraldo de Lima was a Portuguese/Afro-Brazilian ancestor of the present Chief James Ocloo V and the most feared (or revered) slaver in the history of Anlo.⁶²⁶ In the pamphlet, however, he is miraculously remembered as a freedom fighter against colonial rule. Clearly, the Ocloo Outdooring programme strictly adheres to the official line of what stories are to be told outside of the clan. The majority of the people present at the event had access to the more detailed oral histories that accompany the skeletal history presented. It is still known amongst the coastal communities which ‘traders’ were trading what, and it is understood that the descendants of slave traders, often members of royal clans and the educated elite, retain a superior social position.⁶²⁷

In material terms, this superior position is often marked by objects and heirlooms that underscore a long history of Afro-European relations. The James Ocloo Outdooring pamphlet affirms this tradition with a list of awards made to the Royal Ocloo stool. These are akin to diplomatic gifts given the stool holder by foreign dignitaries, and held by the custodians of the stool:

1901, Union Jack with Coat of Arms on it by Queen Victoria of England
1908, German Military Officers Cap and Sword from the German Government
1918, King’s Medal for African Chiefs by the British Government
1925, Member of delegation of Anlo State Council to meet the Prince of Wales of the British Royal House in Accra.⁶²⁸

Historian Anne Bailey encountered a similar reverence for such objects. Her account exhibits a thinly-veiled exasperation with West Africans’ European “acculturation” and the unquestioned pride that these family relics bring. She recounts that Anlo elites she interviewed were often quick

⁶²⁵ Outdooring Ceremony, p.10.

⁶²⁶ See note 14 on the contested identity of Geraldo de Lima.

⁶²⁷ It is difficult to measure markers of class in contemporary Ghana. As a general rule, education is considered key, so, for instance, if your grandparents or great grandparents were educated in one of the foreign schools, such as the Basel Mission School or the Danish school, it is likely that you are a part of a patrician family. Education remains highly revered as a marker of social status and can transcend any background.

⁶²⁸ Outdooring Ceremony, p.11.

to impress her with ‘gifts’ that had been given to chiefs and others from Europeans, usually mentioned with great pride. For example, in my interview with the Elder Mr. Benedictus Tamakloe in 1993, he enthusiastically showed me a top hat that was reportedly given to his ancestor by Queen Victoria in recognition for his bravery and valour.⁶²⁹ My great-grandfather Togbui Adjorlorlo, Paramount Chief of Atorkor, had a similar hat also gifted to him by Queen Victoria. While the hat has gone missing, a photo of him wearing it remains. The image also shows another revered foreign object, his famous ‘Syrian’ pipe (Figure 38).⁶³⁰ It is not stated what ‘bravery’ was exhibited on behalf of the crown, remembering that he is mentioned several times in Akyeampong’s accounts of the region as a key player in the post-abolition slave trade.⁶³¹

The history of gift giving between Europeans and West African elites is a topic in material culture that begs greater study. Often, gifts can become acculturated in such a way as to lose distinction from ‘traditions’. Akyeampong (1996), has illustrated the manner in which imported Dutch Schnapps became seamlessly incorporated into the symbolism of royal and priestly authority during the period of the transatlantic slave trade, eventually working its way down to less privileged members of society, and thereby losing its prestige when used (or abused) socially.⁶³² It exposes the ambiguous and sometimes contradictory nature of diplomatic relations between Africans and Europeans, especially since many of these gifts were exchanged during a period when the British ban on the international slave trade was being strictly enforced, and many of those who received gifts openly violated the new anti-slave trading rules. Marcel Mauss’ seminal 1925 text

⁶²⁹ Bailey, *African Voices*, 1356.

⁶³⁰ See Greene, *West African Narratives*, p.219: “He was the only one who smoked the pipe and was carried around by slaves.”

⁶³¹ See Akyeampong, *Between Sea and Lagoon*, p.53, p.58. In fact, Akyeampong’s account may be slightly incorrect. Togbui Adjorlorlo, although a trader, did not directly engage in the slave trade, but allowed his brother Ndorkutsu to do so at the port in Atorkor. Oral testimonies from the current two senior chiefs of Atorkor, grandson and great-grandson, respectively, of Adjorlorlo, 2/4/2012, Accra, and 4/4/2012, Atorkor, Ghana.

⁶³² Akyeampong, *Drink, Power and Cultural Change*.

The Gift, asks “What is the principle whereby the gift received has to be repaid? What force is there in the thing that is given which compels the recipient to make return?”⁶³³ According to Mauss, gift giving always infers an unspoken sense of obligation upon the receiver of the gift. One can speculate about the context of these gifts; perhaps they were an attempt to establish diplomatic relations in order to halt the illegal slave trade, or perhaps they were an attempt to curry favour in order to gain access to the lucrative West African trade routes outside of slavery. Eighteenth-century West Africa was famous for the wealth and consumption of its financial elites; the British and Danes fought continuously to gain a monopoly over the coastal trade and, without the support of the local chiefs, such a monopoly would have been impossible.

The wealth of 19th century coastal traders and their sometimes-larger-than-life antics have inspired a fascinating body of historical fiction. Thorkild Hansen’s novel *Coast of Slaves* (1967) and its exploration of Afro-Danish relations provide an imaginative rendering of what social relationships between African, European and the many mixed-race families that inhabited the coast may have been like in the late 18th century.⁶³⁴ The novel is considered important enough to be required reading in the history department curriculum at the University of Ghana. Similarly, Bruce Chatwin’s novel *The Viceroy of Ouidah* (1980) provides a fictionalised biography of the region’s most famous slave trader, Francisco Felix de Souza, who is renamed Francisco Manoel da Silva in the novel, but who, like the original de Souza, was “best friend” to the king of Dahomey.⁶³⁵ Outside the realm of fiction, Ekow Eshun’s 2005 memoir *Black Gold of the Sun* relates the story of a Ghanaian who grew up in Great Britain and who upon his return to Ghana had to face up to

⁶³³ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, London: Routledge, 1992 (1925), p.1.

⁶³⁴ Thorkild Hansen, *Coast of Slaves*. Accra, Ghana: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2002.

⁶³⁵ Chatwin spent some time researching in Benin, but abandoned his original project to write an actual biography of da Silva when he found out that Verger’s *Flux et Reflux* (1966) gave a very thorough account of his life. Bruce Chatwin, *The Viceroy of Ouidah*. London: Vintage, 1998.

the discovery that his ancestors were slave traders.

Investigating the history and collaboration between African and European remains awkward territory in West Africa.⁶³⁶ In the 18th and 19th centuries the lines between African, European, slave and freedman were often blurred.



Figure 38. Togbui James Agbedanu Adjorlolo, Paramount Chief of Atorkor. He was said to have had 102 children, the last born was Keli Adjorlorlo, Queen Mother Amexleti I of Atorkor (seated with pipe on the head). c. 1920

Slaves or pawns sometimes became traders themselves, as sometimes did the mulatto children of European slave traders and African slaves.⁶³⁷ Often, these children were not recognised as

⁶³⁶ Ekow Eshun, *Black Gold of the Sun: Searching for Home in England and Africa*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 2005.

⁶³⁷ It was commonplace for people to pawn themselves or a relative when unable to pay a debt. “The pawn was a

legitimate heirs under European laws (unless certain steps were made by fathers to legitimise their claims as heirs), but nonetheless, in many cases such children enjoyed a major share of European business on behalf of their white fathers.

This is particularly evident in the case of Heinrich Richter, whose father was the head of the Danish trade administration on the coast; he eventually became one of the wealthiest men in the region and an esteemed statesman.⁶³⁸ The old families of traders were careful to marry into one another, and in Anlo it was joked that you could not marry women from the Baeta family if you “did not eat butter or bacon.”⁶³⁹

The trader class always had access to goods from Europe, and knowledge of such goods was a clear marker of social status, but nonetheless members of this class did not enjoy complete privilege in African political circles. Throughout the 19th century, Anloga, the political capital of Anlo state, retained a strict ban on European clothing, which was intended to prohibit the presence of foreign traders and underscores the strong nationalist identity in the region.⁶⁴⁰ The value that was and is still placed on these historically gifted foreign objects derives specifically from their being not African, but that in itself becomes an affirmation of a sense of Africanness. The top hats

person given to a creditor by a debtor as security for what he or she owed on the understanding that on repayment the person would be returned to the original owner”. See Perbi, *History*, p.3. On the practice of pawning, see also Dylan Penningroth, ‘The Claim of Slaves and Ex-Slaves to Family and Property’, *A Transatlantic Comparison. American Historical Review* 112, No. 4 (October 2007): pp.1049–50.

⁶³⁸ See Justesen Ole, ‘Heinrich Richter 1785–1849: Trader and Politician in the Danish Settlements on the Gold Coast.’ *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, New Series, 7 (2003), pp.93–192. For a detailed account of the Afro-European families of Danish Osu, see the book by H. Nii-Adziri Wellington; *Stones Tell Stories at Osu: Memories of a Host Community of the Danish Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade*. Accra, Ghana: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2011.

⁶³⁹ Trading families often enjoyed imported goods. My grandfather ran a store for the Basel Mission in the 1940s and my father reminisced about growing up in Atorkor eating “the cheese with the holes” (Swiss cheese). Similarly, my relatives, the Baeta family, who are descendants of a well-known Portuguese trader who settled at Atorkor in the 1800s, were noted for having attractive mixed-race daughters spoilt with imported foodstuffs. The history of the original Baeta trader, but not his eating habits, are recorded in Greene, *West African Narratives*, p.190.

⁶⁴⁰ The Ban was repealed in 1903 by the newly enstooled Eurocentric king of Anlo, Togbui Sri II.

and medals of Togbui's Tamakloe and James Ocloo are kept safely and are revered, but they are not worn. Although contact with Europe is valued as a marker of wealth and cosmopolitan history, the owners of these objects do not wholly identify with Europeans. Rather, they enjoy a relationship with Europe that constructs them as people of note, worthy of gifts and adulation—as prominent Africans, not as proto-Europeans.

Not all descendants of traders are without critical reflection. Some Benin de Souzas openly acknowledge their family history and have been active in the establishment of historical sites in Ouidah, allowing for a more complex historical discussion to evolve.⁶⁴¹ The present Chief, James Ocloo of Keta, is actively involved in the effort to preserve regional histories and raise funds for the renovation of Fort Prinzenstein.⁶⁴² In Anlo, like elsewhere in Ghana, the taboo surrounding the discussion of the slave trade remains active, in part because the ancestors of powerful members of the community were involved. Consequently, it would seem that the right to articulate these histories openly remains in the jurisdiction of community and clan leaders. In view of the perceived difficulty that the community of Atorkor has in relation to its historical role in the slave trade, it should be noted that the present Queen Mother of Atorkor, Lois Okudzeto—MamaGa Amexleti Dunyo II, enstooled in February 2002, is an African American descendant of slaves, married to the son of the previous Queen Mother.⁶⁴³ As an African-American she has been actively engaged

⁶⁴¹ It is also noted that Francisco da Souza's descendant, the eighth Chacha, has actively promoted the memory of his ancestor as merely a trader and innovator; he is now celebrated as the man who brought the lucrative cultivation of palm oil to the region. See Ana Lucia Araujo, 'Political Uses of Memories of Slavery in the Republic of Benin.' *History in Focus: The Guide to Historical Resources*, (Spring 2007), p.12: <http://www.history.ac.uk/ihr/Focus/Slavery/articles/araujo.html> (last accessed 12/3/2013).

⁶⁴² The James Ocloo stool has a website dedicated to the family history and fundraising efforts: http://www.torgbuijames-ocloo.org/Dufia_of_Keta.htm [last accessed 12/3/2013].

⁶⁴³ The current Queen Mother of Atorkor, Lois Okudzeto is my mother. Her enstoolment follows the culture of appointing foreigners to chiefly offices in the hope that they will bring economic opportunities to their jurisdiction. Such foreigners are usually enstooled as "development" chiefs regardless of race and cultural backgrounds. Although such a specific stool name does exist amongst the Ewe, in Akan they are called Nkosuohene; The British Television producer Humphrey Barclay is Nkosuhene of Kwahu Tafo, See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humphrey_Barclay. Also see '11-Year-Old American Boy Enstooled as Chief' in the

in running the Atorkor Development Foundation, building schools and organising educational programmes and scholarships in the region. She continues to support the present chief in developing an ambitious plan to preserve and augment the slave monument at Atorkor with the creation of a museum dedicated to the history of the Anlo.⁶⁴⁴ Significantly, the present chief, Togbui Adjorlolo, is a diasporan Ghanaian who works as a dentist in North London, whilst also serving his duties on the stool. Ewe traditional stools require belonging to a correct lineage, but the final appointment is one made by a council of chiefs or clan elders. The appointment of an African American and a British Ghanaian to the ruling Atorkor stools marks the speed with which diasporan-Ghanaian relations are changing, although this phenomenon has yet to be addressed by other scholars who study Atorkor's relationship to the slave trade.

The objects and artefacts discussed in this chapter are in a state of evaluation, authorship and dispute. Material culture relating to slavery remains bound up and fragile in its ability to speak, even when appearing to present a clear narrative, unless tested through interrogation of local and diasporan narratives of class, gender, slavery, struggle and emancipation. These contradictions present complex and contradictory narratives of identity that encode overlapping social tensions—indicative of power structures within the discourse of knowledge production, political and economic citizenship and social history. Their relationship to the social, economic and psychological demands of diasporan and local African cultures produces a different kind of double consciousness, one restricted to black experiences where each culture is read as 'other' within a community of shared heritage. Although unresolved, new and emerging Ghanaian 'Black Atlantic'

General News, *Ghana Web*, 29/2/2012:

<http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/artikel.php?ID=230862> , (last accessed 12/3/2013).

For an academic study, see George M. Bob Milliar, 'Chieftancy, Diaspora, Development: The Institution of Nkosuohene in Ghana'. *African Affairs*. Volume 108, No.433 (Oct, 2009), pp.541–558.

⁶⁴⁴ <http://www.adfatorkor.org> [last accessed March 12 2013].

voices are capable of incorporating the values of diasporan culture into those of traditional Ghana without overwriting locally based narratives. There is an ongoing need to source new vectors of 'Black Atlantic' culture generated in West Africa and this is one of the new vectors of 'Black Atlantic' discourse to emerge; it underscores the importance of presenting new narratives of history in Africa that resist utopian desires to edit African realities by presenting difficult truths that are contradictory and sometimes conflicting for the black identities they represent.

CONCLUSION: NYIMPA NA WO YE FIE BE YE EDAN

With the Akan concept of *ahom*, all material culture is inextricably bound to human life through breathing. To be alive you must breathe, and in breathing, without effort the material culture of everyday life becomes animate. “Nyimpa na o ma edan ahom,” or “It is the human who gives breath to a house,” can also be expressed by through the corollary phrase ‘Nyimpa na wo ye fie be ye edan’, which means “it is human beings who make a home and not a building”.⁶⁴⁵ This latter phrase underscores the importance of use, activity and human agency. It suggests that human activity will determine the form and identifications of material culture, not necessarily its physical form or physical properties alone.

These Akan phrases reveal how the link between humankind and the material world is clearly underlined in traditional cultural cosmologies, asserting that first it is humans who literally animate things into motion through their life force; and secondly it is humans who construct, determine and maintain the purpose of the built environment. Such a worldview can never remove agency from humans (no matter what their circumstances), for whatever the social conditions of humankind, each has *ahom*, and this *ahom* animates every substance in life. This worldview gives human beings agency in all manner of circumstances that would appear beyond their control, and as this thesis has attempted to illustrate how both good and bad can come from these actions. As human lives change, so does the value ascribed to objects, which is never constant. Therefore, the analysis of such artefacts must take into account changing narratives and social relations.

⁶⁴⁵ I learned this phrase from Nana Kobina Nketsia V, the Omahene, or Paramount Chief of Essikado (British Sekondi), and former Chair of the Ghana Museums and Monuments Board. Private conversation, 2021.

I have argued that culture is indistinct from economic and political processes; objects are capable of encoding latent historical narratives because their exchange is a social process that has residual charge. The objects that most powerfully contain latent memory are themselves rooted in a history of trade. The relation between these objects reflects the way in which a relation between men does, indeed, become ‘a relation between things’, where the objects become things with ‘social lives’.⁶⁴⁶ As explored in the discussion of *Ntoma*, textile fabrics become receptacles for proverbs and local wisdom; symbolic markers of rites of life passage, and capable of reflecting relations between the living and dead; between ancestors and contemporary life.

Ghana Must Go indicates the fragile practice of archiving of landmark historic events in the period prior to the democratisation of mass media. Both the plastic bag *and* its trajectory function as an archive that shows how culture is an inevitable by-product of social experience, even traumatic or violent historic events. Material culture therefore produces a latent form of prosthetic memory, embedding historic events in idiomatic nomenclature. These events were recovered in part through the discourse of a translocal digital community of Nigerian and Ghanaians in the diaspora. Their interactions through internet blogging culture in the early 2000s show how access to social media is radical in its ability to create new imaginary landscapes, not only for future and possible selves, but for the recovery of past experiences. These recoveries in turn have enforced new solidarities across communities that maintain a tense relationship with each other. As the events of the Nigerian expulsions continue to remain largely overlooked in academic discourse, their strongest archive remains that expressed in idiomatic fora, such as the internet blogs discussed, slang, and the archive of the bag’s nomenclature, which is itself not fixed.

⁶⁴⁶ Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things*; Marx, *Capital*, p.31.

The Ghana Must Go bags illustrate how there are forms of meaning generated through material culture that are both seemingly obvious *and* overlooked. This meaning may be evidenced through examination of how value is produced in forms of economic exchange—because the production of value is *in itself* ultimately a social activity. Because value is ascribed through social interaction, the very forms of economic exchange in material culture go beyond simple monetary units of currency. Economics is not a scientifically quantifiable set of units, but rather a field of social relations.

Within this thesis, there is a recurring theme of exploring alternate forms of currency, be they social, material or historical. Most tellingly, new iterations of one of the most horrific forms of currency, that of human life, continue to be re-invoked through the commodification of heritage tourism. There are overlooked modes of exchange to do with slavery that must be revisited in order to do this history justice and in doing so, escape the cyclical re-commodification of both the past and human experiences.

Political agency underlines exchange, and objects as units of exchange are indicative of political agency, its tensions, struggles and failure. There is a strong Marxist idea that the means of production inform the production of meaning. While Marx felt that those in charge of the means of production were the controllers of society/culture, this thesis argues that, in fact, the production of meaning is often authored across society, as both the foundation of exchange and its cultural by-product.

Significantly, artefacts that originate in global trade become synonymous with local identities – whether one considers the Ghana Must Go bag or African wax-print fabric – their geographic origin is obfuscated; their identity tied to ritual and social use. Fantasy coffins are themselves

newly commodities, but tie the life of the deceased entirely to their commercial labour. Again, labour is represented in an abstract form; a marker of the commodity and the commodity fetish.

As the chapter on heritage tourism and the slave memorial at Atorkor argues, access to the artefacts of history and collective memory are socially and culturally determined, so that conversations about them reflect social power relations contingent on factors such as gender, culture, and national and social background. These factors inform how historical narratives are created and relayed. The background of the researcher is inextricable from research; it colours access and information. The mythology of Atorkor, with its youth tricked into being sold into slavery, may in fact reflect a common cultural practice for tricking slaves who may never have seen the open ocean into boarding ships. The analysis of these events provides evidence that the search for a universalising ‘truth’ may unwittingly destroy or overlook evidence of a more complex past.

It is the human who gives breath to a house; it is the things in motion that illuminate human lives. Capital is a relation between people, realised through a relation between things.⁶⁴⁷ That breath animates humans, and subsequently the breath of a human illuminates and animates things. These things, in turn, shed light on human existence. That capital is not an entity but rather a series of relationships manifest through things, and that these things are not only inextricably linked to human existence, but are in some way animated through human contact, and that all of these processes are in constant flux and not easily read, are thoughts that drove the impetus for this research. One might ponder again Timothy Morton’s words, ‘*[h]ow everything is interconnected is also a thing*’.⁶⁴⁸ On a communal and social level or on an individual level, it becomes increasingly

⁶⁴⁷ Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things; Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, 1986. p.5; Marx, ‘The Modern Theory of Colonization’, *Capital*, p.379.

⁶⁴⁸ Timothy Morton, *Being Ecological*, Pelican Books, 2018, p.78.

problematic to view ourselves as things; there is a tension between the histories of making people into things to be sold, the residue of inculturated things from these histories, and the modernist imaginary of things as animate, ambient, ever-shifting and in complex relationships with humans. As a planet, or a solar system, it is easier to imagine ourselves as a collective thing, but imagining on that scale is beyond the empirical capabilities of ordinary human perception. Whether to accept or reject thingness, as humans our sense of self is most easily affirmed through each other, and with encounters with the material world. It is affirmed through the senses (smell, sight, taste, touch, and feeling) and, beyond that, through something as simple as the air we breathe—*ahom*, so to speak. This thesis takes inspiration from the idea that there are latent qualities in objects that are often in the process of receding, but that can be recovered through interrogation. Everything is ambient—be it the flora of a city, its buildings, its monuments and open spaces; its citizens and social structures; its objects and artefacts of material culture describe the very fabric of society. The interrogation of the artefacts of African modernities has produced narratives that often expose shared histories reaching beyond the national boundaries of the continent. I ultimately hope to prove that we are indeed interconnected, as a planet, but more humanly perhaps, as a giant social entity or thing, contingent and beholden to each other.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 10 (Luis Vuitton Blog)

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“Ghana-Must-Go” Bags On The Runway!

Nairaland Forum | Entertainment | Fashion | 'Ghana-Must-Go' Bags On The Runway! Pages: (1) (2)

Author Topic: 'Ghana-Must-Go' Bags On The Runway! (Read 2473 views)

2fine4u (f) **'Ghana-Must-Go' Bags On The Runway!**
« on: February 28, 2007, 06:57 PM »

Louis Vuitton Takes It Back All The Way To Africa With Ghana-must-bags

<http://www.style.com/fashionshows/collections/S2007RTW/review/LVUITTON>
yall gotta check this out, it's hot. matter of fact, am comin back to naija to tell my grandma to gather all her ghana-must-go-bags. it's on baby, time to make some bucks 😊



Author

Topic: 'Ghana-Must-Go' Bags On The Runway! (Read 2423 views)

2fine4u (f)

<http://www.style.com/fashionshows/collections/S2007RTW/review/LVUITTON>

yall gotta check this out, it's hot. matter of fact, am comin back to naija to tell my grandma to gather all her ghana-must-go-bags. it's on baby, time to make some bucks

bluenubian (f)

are u f^cking kidding me, louis is a thief, sh^t am calling my sister now now

2fine4u (f)

girl no kiddin fo real. we invented this shyt u kno. how they gon rob us and not even give credit, they better give us some credit. shuuu am going to be rockin some mini ghana-must-bags soon. who would hav that i can afford louis vuitton, now all my friends will be trippin

bluenubian (f)

this not fair, wow twill be wierd rocking a ghana must go back, they prolly trick it out too, with some studs and glitter and stuff

naijacutee (f)

So now I can proudly carry my Ghana-must-go to the airport without people pitying me. . . .

toshmann (m)

so you only value what you have when some capitalists say so? then there's a problem b/c these capitalists are not like you and if they don't value you, you may have problems even trying to value yourself.

swing

sup bluenubian
your pix is full of xpression

bluenubian (f)

what expression?

swing

re we going to call this an old school style or what

bluenubian: hmm ya noe ,jst like d name goes & d pix speaks
jst wondering

bluenubian (f)

oh swing tell me more, fascinating, what about my name now?

neways am going off topic.

as per the ghana must go bags, i got a really big one in my closet now, i tried posing with it, dint look all that sexy

swing

naijacutee : baby i don feel anyone is pitied when dy carry such bag
bt dy re seen as old school ,
i think its necessary to chk out hw acceptable d style wil b before taking urs' to da airport lol

swing

hey do u think we can really make any sense styling wit this bag

superman (m)

na abomination

Icon (m)

LOL @ pix!!!

Well, ladies, we could try it. What was that about a prophet not being valued in his home town. Same with Ghana must go.

Afokeakpo

Guys you have to be as real as possible. And yes, it commodities\items\persons never is valued were it or that one is readily available.love ya all!!!!,

chatman (m)

I think they are called East West bags.

The largest size is about 1500 pounds. I wont have believed it if i hadnt seen it in a magazine. I think it was cosmo or GQ mag. Luis Vuitton Advert.

I heard that the government is going to ban them from selling Ghana must go bags so you better go and get yours quick.

Man-eater (f)

i'm going to get me one, asap :d

naijafresh (m)

Don't you all think the term 'Ghana must go' is very derogatory and demeaning to the Ghanaians?
We all complain of Tribalism, nepotism, racism and the like but we are all equally as guilty as the next person

The same Ghanaians who were unceremoniously deported without attention to international law are having to deal with Nigerians coming to make a living in their country.

We will soon be hated the world over just like the Arrogant Americans are today

I am yet to see a bag called 'Nigerians must go' in all my travels and if there were such a thing I'm pretty sure there would be an uproar

So please wake up and smell the coffee and lets give other people some of the respect we too readily demand too

Have a good day

beemudee

hmm! na wa oh. imagine ghana must go logages in airports chai!

akara (m)

a new export oppourtunity for interested businessmen in the land. Imagine the prices they are going for (anyone know?)

I dey go ordefr some from Aba to sell o for hard currency. The original one!

Blow (m)

Man, that french company is sure creative,
Can you imagine Ghana-Must-Go bag being so fashionable,
Simply Inspirational!

Nigerians should learn from this,
We can make our simple products into
internationally accepted comodities if we use them and present them appropriately

Our fashion designers should think in this direction!

1forall (m)

Blackman Know Yourself!

Word **toshmann**, tho is seems none of these fashion+vanity struck women care bout your stance. Big lesson in there for us all: we've had these bags for ages and nobody gave a sh*t bout 'em, now LV uses them and they become a fashion statement! Not entirely our fault sha, its bound to happen when our fashion sense (and much more) is largely derived from the west.

Was the bag was patented? I guess not, or it wouldve been time to make big bucks (and a name) for someone!

eniola1310 (f)

now they are going to make ghana must go expensive !!!

2fine4u (f)

guys! guys!! what are we arguing here? the deal is done, Louis Vuitton has exploited us, it doesn't matter if we neglected ghana-must-go bags before what matters now is that the bags are makin huge wave in fashion world and we need to find a way to benefit from it u can bootleg em if u want to, use ebay if needs be just don't sit here and argue when u could be makin millions

queen2 (f)

The bag is the talk of the world now, ghana must go becoming a designer bag.
But they going to make it popular i suppose
Thats it we neglecting the bag but they are going to promote it and everyone will love it

hot-angel (f)

Imagine ooo. . . .

Mehn, just imagine. The bag that we have neglected is now on the RUNWAY. Abeg im calling my cousin to buy it in bulk for me. Different sizes self.

On the reals though, this is INTERESTING!!!!!!!

Christino (m)

Ah see nigerians o

Before opting to buy **GMG** bags, please be informed that nigerian policemen will stop you at any point in time because the general belief here is that GMG bags are for transporting cash and "body parts".

To avoid being harrassed, you are better off with Bagco Super Sacks or Shaka Shaka or Apo Garri. GMG can land you in trouble. You could get hit by spray bullets because if a police man thinks there's heavy cash in it, you could get shot.

BE WARNED!!!

But wait a minute, are you guys sure that's not a remix of Burberry Bags?

funkilicious (f)

that is so wrong! whoever produced Ghana's must go' in Nigeria should be paid money for 'copyright' we are definately bein exploited, if this was to happen in a westennized country-Loiuse Vuitton will be sued/compensate. How can we people ensure that this msg gets across to fellow Nigerians n d marketin people of Ghana must go?

diyobdw (f)

that is so wrong! whoever produced Ghana's must go' in Nigeria should be paid money for 'copyright' we are definately bein exploited, if this was to happen in a westennized country-Loiuse Vuitton will be sued/compensate. How can we people ensure that this msg gets across to fellow Nigerians n d marketin people of Ghana must go?

Are u sure it is a 9*ja thingy or imported at the time ghanians were told to return to their homes?
not sure too

Seen a china wed'g long ago were it was said to be "the bride's bag "
Dont ask me about the source it was a document over 10yr ago so i can't place the fact

But really fashion is not what you wear but how you wear it!

Radiant (f)

Ah see nigerians o

Before opting to buy **GMG** bags, please be informed that nigerian policemen will stop you at any point in time because the general belief here is that GMG bags are for transporting cash and "body parts".

To avoid being harrassed, you are better off with Bagco Super Sacks or Shaka Shaka or Apo Garri. GMG can land you in trouble. You could get hit by spray bullets because if a police man thinks there's heavy cash in it, you could get shot.

BE WARNED!!!

But wait a minute, are you guys sure that's not a remix of Burberry Bags?

Rofl You damn right!

I would never carry a GMG bag (anywhere in this world) in the name of fashion That's just gross plzzzzzzzzzz!

ronnie-slimz (f)

gawd!! this is f**kn suprising . . just imagine what we regard as old school has now turned to sumffin wanted by popular demand, shame!!

Pages: (1) (2)

Reflections of ME! Enigmatic SGL Nigerian Fella!

Online musing of a young ambitious fellow! Whatever, however and whenever blog just as a reflection of his present state of mind!

Reflections of ME! Enigmatic SGL Nigerian Fella!

Online musing of a young ambitious fellow! Whatever, however and whenever blog just as a reflection of his present state of mind!

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2007


STOP! Dont throw out that "GHANA-MUST-GO-BAG" as yet!!!

Whoever that says sexy is being brought back didnt lie , I could only be surprised to see how Louis Vuitton is bringing back that ghana-must-go trend...


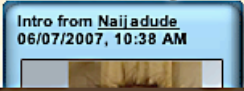
LOUIS VUITTON

"For you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." 1 Peter 2:9

NaijaBlogger Bachelor!!



Leave a message!



Thursday, February 22, 2007

STOP! Dont throw out that "GHANA-MUST-GO-BAG" as yet!!!

Whoever that says sexy is being brought back didnt lie , I could only be surprised to see how Louis Vuitton is bringing back that ghana-must-go trend...

Well save for those of you that went to Atlantic Hall and stuff,....that average Nigerian sure took this to with them to their boarding house in high school.....

As you can see it comes in a portable, easy to carry version!

I just wanna know why you aint spotting your ghana-must-go right now.. Well its the fashion trend, thanks to Louis Vuitton. Unfortunately I dont own one, heck the hell am I gonna do with it sef?

Posted by Naijadude at 10:45 PM

Labels: Fashion, february

17 Chatting with Me!:

Nkechi said...

bella posted about this on her blog a while back,some ppl will call anything 'fashion'.yuck!
Fri Feb 23, 07:47:00 AM EST

UnNaked Soul said...

LOL... am posting this on cooldigest with ref to you.. *wink*
Fri Feb 23, 09:22:00 AM EST

fluffycutething said...

And imagine this trend having roots in our very own Naija!!!!!!

Gosh,I've thrown away so many....

I'd better start a franchise in Lag asap (lol)

Fri Feb 23, 09:49:00 AM EST

Nilla said...

LOL!!

Fri Feb 23, 11:19:00 AM EST

Discombobulated Diva said...

LOL... wow, Ghana-most-go bags on the run way... these people are so unoriginal... and yes o, when i was younger and would travel with my momsy, she would ALWAYS pack things in that Ghana-most-go bag, which yelled AFRICAN all over and wasn't it always a coincidence that we got that extra search at the airport once they saw that bag in our hands...

Fri Feb 23, 12:32:00 PM EST

DiAmOnD hawk said...

um...too funny...ghana must go...i dont think so...

why oh why have u taken my picture off eh? o ya put it back quickly....

Fri Feb 23, 04:06:00 PM EST

Overwhelmed Naija Babe said...

The first time I ever have anything bad to say about Marc Jacob... what was he thinking when he designed this crap?!?!? I wouldn't carry it for free!!!

Fri Feb 23, 10:28:00 PM EST

bibi said...

Imao..funny fashion

Sat Feb 24, 03:36:00 AM EST

londonnajibachic said...

eeeeeeeeewwwwwwwww! its all i can say.

Sat Feb 24, 10:18:00 AM EST

April said...

Lol!

Sat Feb 24, 05:58:00 PM EST

Naija Vixen said...

LOL...saw it sumwhere on facebook...wuld luv to see Victoria Beckham rawkin' this!!!

Sat Feb 24, 09:00:00 PM EST

Diary of a Mad Soulful Sista said...

heyyyyy! now is de perfekt time to go charter all those bags from isale eko for naija oooo! i go jes bring dem come "abroad", dey sell dem for chaina town!

Sun Feb 25, 03:55:00 AM EST

Omodudu said...

Interesting...thanks for stopping by my blog.

Mon Feb 26, 09:26:00 PM EST

Ondo Lady said...

Yep I saw this in the London Paper back in January and blogged about it. Good to know that us Naijas are style stoppers.
Tue Feb 27, 11:55:00 AM EST

The Life of a Stranger called me said...

noooooooooo - refuse to believe Ghana must go is in fashion....loved this post.
Tue Feb 27, 04:32:00 PM EST

Bébé's History said...

Ghana-must-go really MUST GO!
Thanks for visiting my blog :)
Enjoy your week.
Wed Feb 28, 12:18:00 AM EST

iaspapi said...

No matter how fashionable this might be in America and Europe, it's never gonna catch on here. Ghana-Must-Go as an accessory? Never in Naija
Thu Mar 01, 07:35:00 PM EST

Appendix 13 (Luis Vuitton Bag)

<http://koranteng.blogspot.com/2007/04/bags-and-stamps.html>

Koranteng's Toli

toli: *n.* 1. A juicy piece of news. 2. The latest word or gossip. 3. The talk of the town, typically a salacious or risqué tale of intrigue, corruption or foolishness. (*Ga language, Ghana, West Africa*)


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Friday, April 13, 2007

Bags and Stamps

Let's talk about bags if you please. Bags are in the news these days. I don't mean **San Francisco's ban on plastic shopping bags**. Rather I'm thinking about this type of bag. In Ghana and most of West Africa we call it the "Ghana must go" bag.




Alternatively in Ghana, and humourously, they are called "Efiewura Sua Me", literally "help me carry my bag". Indeed there's always someone at the bus or train station who needs help moving such bags. (And yes, I did help that young lady after taking a surreptitious snap with my dodgy cell phone. Chivalry isn't dead even at midnight at the bus terminal).

Last year Sokari Ekine revealed her own **bag woman tendencies** and opened the discussion - she's a connoisseur. In response, Georgia Popplewell noted that "in Trinidad I've heard those bags called Guyanese Samsonite". We learnt that in Germany, per contra, they are known as "Tuekenkoffer" or Turkish suitcase. In Boston I've heard them referenced as Chinatown totes, and called Bangladeshi bags in England, presumably after the 1970s influx of Bangladeshi immigrants.

The "Ghana must go" designation resulted from the various expulsions of immigrants that Ghana and Nigeria engaged in between the 1960s and 1980s. Many were only able to pack their belongings in such bags before fleeing, expelled with barely hours or days notice. Thus Ghana must go is ironic at best, and has mocking overtones at worst.

During the Rawlings Chain lean years in the 1980s when it wasn't simply a matter of returning immigrants and the whole country was facing political and economic difficulties (Revolution! Ghana), they were simply called "refugee bags". We were all refugees then.

About Me



Koranteng Ofosu-Amaah
From Ghana by way of
France and England,
technologist, omnivorous
reader, sometime writer and
music lover... oh, and I'm
writing two books of toli

[View my complete profile](#)

Toli Things

- [About the Toli](#)
- [The Book of Toli](#)
- [The Things Fall Apart Series](#)
- [The Toli Technology Series](#)
- [Places and Spaces](#)
- [Observers are worried](#)

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Friday, April 13, 2007

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In any case, the trend in naming is clear, these utility bags designate immigrants, refugees, or those down on their luck. They are emblems of hardship, relative poverty and exigency. I'll argue here that they are object lessons about the fluidity of ideas.

Pattern Matching

Let's first discuss the pattern. The majority of these bags are produced in China and it is fitting, given the interesting history of the pattern that covers them.



from: c r i s

The plaid pattern is thought to originate in the Taklamakan area in Xinjiang Uyghur in China perhaps between 100-700BC and certainly by the 3rd century. The **Scots** have the most famous claim to it however. The Falkirk tartan in 1707 is thought to be the Scottish debut of the tartan, the rich tradition of the Scottish plaid kilt that various families and clans adopted (this pdf shows a visual timeline of tartan). The Scottish colours are typically rich shades of red and green and only occasionally is the main colour white as in the bags.

The word plaid means a blanket, from the Gaelic plaide. In North America people use it interchangeably for **tartans**. The etymology of the word tartan is itself in dispute. The French word tiretaine (an amount of material), and the Spanish word tartana (a fine quality cloth) are the main contenders.

Now of course tartans were adopted wherever the British empire cast its wings. Bagpipes and kilts can be found from Ireland through Sierra Leone to India. I need only point you to this piece about **tartans and turbans** which lovingly traces their legacy in the Indian subcontinent and beyond. Amongst other things Ennis notes that Sikhs in Scotland have even commissioned family tartans; the headline for that episode reads: Singh Adds Spice To The History of Tartan. So: spice, the silk road and the Highlands.

Typically **plaids** have been woven textiles, used for clothing or decoration. The little plaid skirt evokes many associations. Like all patterns used in visual design, plaid has been applied to all manner of objects. Which brings me back to bags...

Bag Lady



The Ghanaian artist **Senam Okudzeto** has very personal knowledge of the history of "Ghana must go" and has incorporated its iconography into her work. If you look at the fragments of her recent exhibitions, you'll be exposed to a history of dislocation, of fractured, sudden enforced exile.

The question she raises is one of historical memory. Our plaid bags are the physical proof of the way in which the boundaries that meant nothing in our pre-colonial past now loom large in Africa. Indeed their name stems from the 1983 Expulsion Order giving illegal immigrants 14 days to leave Nigeria. But more broadly the bags refer to repeated upheavals in our lands and sub-Saharan Africa knows upheaval all too well. Still, there's a sort of existential defiance in her reclaiming these objects of loss. Divisions are embodied in the cheap, practical and functional bags.

There is considerable wit in her work although it is always combined with a wistful displacement. Note the slogan, Capitalism and Schizophrenia, and some of the quotes she highlights: "deception is fundamental to the system".

Resilience

Plastic bags then. Plastics are the great innovation of the past century and a half and well they are sources of alienation and comfort, pollution and practicality. The famous scene from **The Graduate** comes to mind

"I want to say one word to you. Just one word."
"Yes, sir."
"Are you listening?"
"Yes, I am."
"Plastics."

If you are confronted with packing up your entire possessions in a hurry for fear of your safety, a Ghana must go bag will undoubtedly be a source of comfort. If you're trying to pack tins of corned beef and sardines, rice and sundry spare parts along with the clothes your relatives back in Ghana lack, you will gravitate towards the Ghana must go bag. At such times, volume and weight is everything. Ghana must go bags are about the most practical and lightweight luggage that exists.

Plastic, rugged and functional, you can even wrap them with tape to ensure additional sturdiness so that they don't split when they are manhandled by underpaid bag handlers. You can place all sorts of foodstuffs in them: smoked fish, yams, meat and spices. And heck they are distinctive: plaid, woven and plastic. As such, they are fixtures in many routes serving the developing world.

I can remember the scene at JFK airport waiting in line for a Ghana Airways flight, watching a market woman and the fifteen young men who would be taking the trip with her wares - all in huge fully packed Ghana must go bags. They had brought a big truck to the airport and were blocking the entrance causing a stir as their cargo was unloaded. This was even after 9/11 but she wasn't minding the Homeland Security folks that approached. Mama Trader wasn't travelling herself but had come to supervise the dispatching of her consignment of goods home. She made it clear that she wasn't planning for any of her workers to pay any excess luggage fees. I'm almost positive they didn't; she must have had a 'business arrangement' with the airline (or at least those manning the counter). Incidentally Ghana Airways went out of business shortly thereafter. Moving right along...

Fashioning Bags

I wrote the foregoing to connect a few dots raised by a recent stir in Ghanaian newspapers. The headline read: **Louis Vuitton sells "Ghana Must Go"**.

The images of models bounding down the catwalk at Marc Jacob's 2007 collection for Louis Vuitton raised the ire of a few commentators. An example:



credit: fashionaddictdiary

The expensive shoes the model was wearing, indeed her entire outfit, stand in sharp contrast to the utility bag she was wielding. A **typical review** of the show mentions

a funny cheap checked shopping bag that carried a big, passport-style Louis Vuitton stamp...

the collection was a complex refraction of the many inspirational sparks that go into the work here: pieces synthesized to project the simultaneous multinational appeal this brand must maintain

The language of the style section is too clever by half but they captured the incongruousness and appeal of the image. A complex refraction indeed. A close look at a **full slideshow** of Marc Jacobs' creations shows that the bags of our tale were a leitmotif of the collection.

This is nothing new in fashion; slumming is a trope in the rarefied heights of haute couture. In recent years we have seen much appropriation of the sort and things like service uniforms (UPS, McDonalds etc.) have gained a fashion quotient.

This is run of the mill piracy and the kind of tongue-in-cheek sentiment we applaud our designers for.

The author of the article was incensed that Ghanaians hadn't capitalized on the Ghana must go iconography and that others were now about to make hay out of a designer bag frenzy.

Having an idea stolen can be more difficult to deal with especially when the other party makes a bigger name and money off the idea than what it was originally worth...

A tempest in a tea pot in short.

Of course I could have pointed out that a proud Ghanaian artist was blazing these trails long before Marc Jacobs got there. Indeed there is an element of theft in this episode. If you look at Senam's work, you'll also see that she focuses on the passport stamp along with the Ghana must go bag. She highlighted not just the bag, the few personal mementos, photos and such, but also the passport stamp. Those who didn't have the requisite stamp on their residency papers or passports were the ones who were forced into upheaval with only these bags to carry their belongings into the unknown. Thus issues of legitimacy and exile are part of the questions she poses in her ongoing series.

In many ways, Jacobs's shtick was only a high-profile plagiarism. I expect Senam would be tickled by the nexus of commercialization and piracy that she likely provoked. The **Akan proverb**, humanity knows no boundaries, is one she would have been steeped in. Not to mention that the plaid pattern comes and goes used by all and sundry. The Wife notes incidentally that plaid is in this season in all the fashion magazines and stores. It was inevitable that others would latch on to it.

In any case, what claim does Ghana have to Ghana must go? Shouldn't the Nigerians, who ironically coined the term, have first cuts of any royalties? Heck these bags aren't even produced in Ghana, we are mere buyers and users. Our Chinese friends manufacture them using their native pattern. And, as we have seen, our local name for the bags is not widely known outside of West Africa. We're not the only refugees, immigrants or attendees of the school of hard knocks.

Still like Marc Jacobs, and in the spirit of Senam, I thought a juxtaposition would be appropriate and, rather than link to the original images, I thought I'd perform a **creative theft** with the following image. The title should be evident:

Ghana must go versus Louis Vuitton



Bags and Stamps: a plagiarism in plaid

So to recap, a Ghanaian, by way of France and England, living in the USA, creates a collage starting with an image of Chinese-produced plastic utility bags taken by a Nigerian living in Spain - a 'theft' of the "Ghana must go" imagery, born of the interlocking episodes of reciprocal deportation and sundry exile between their two homelands, both former British colonies. The plaid pattern on said bags is originally Chinese although it is most celebrated in Scottish fabrics, and the subject of English schoolboy fantasies. Said pattern was transmitted in recent centuries over the corners of the British empire and is rightly part of Indian and especially Sikh heritage.

The symbolism of the bags is the signal subject of the work of a American-Ghanaian artist who grew up in Ghana, Nigeria and the UK (yes I should have mentioned Senam's Nigerian connection - isn't that a complication? And doesn't that explain the resonance of the Ghana must go iconography in her boundary-straddling life? Not to mention her focus on the passport stamp of approval. Sidenote: this modern traveller now has a very sensible Swiss connection, whither neutrality?)

This image is juxtaposed with a recent appropriation by an American fashion designer working for an France-based luxury company whose ironic contribution is to place a seal on the bag, contrasting the pennies on the dollar cost of the bag with a logo that is renowned for its deleterious effects on even the fattest wallets - a logo, moreover, that is often counterfeited by Chinese manufacturers in a global shadow economy of knockoffs that are sold all over the world. The significance of the logo or stamp of approval is iconic in expressing authenticity, legitimacy and belonging, demarcating the boundaries separating countries at once, and luxury status symbols delineating the rich from the poor.

Incidentally this note was prompted by a posting by an Indian American, who is arguably more Ghanaian in sensibility than me from his few years in Ghana, said posting focused on the celebration of National Tartan Day by Scottish Americans and its implications for the desi community and diaspora.

The mind reels.

I have just booked a trip to England. My ostensible purpose is to get a stamp in *my* passport that will keep my notional residency in Her Majesty's lands legitimate. I am hedging my bets against this American episode; the stamp is my soul insurance if you will. Refugees all, we in Africa are no strangers to dislocation, in many ways it is our close friend. As the song goes, wherever I lay my hat, that's my home.

Modern travellers
Packing our bags
Seeking out stamps
The mementos of exiled souls

Bags: A Playlist

As usual, some music for the exiled soul...

• De La Soul - Shopping Bags (She got from you)

The percussion on this song, a stark array of milk bottles, proves that the boys still have it, appropriating whatever beat is expedient to get the message across.

• Freestyle Fellowship - Inner City Boundaries

The inner city griots expound

Who is that surrounding me?
Enemy enemy you crossed the wrong boundary
Wicked witness wizardry
Disappear from here and end up in a tree
Crossed the wrong boundary

• Milt Jackson - Bags' Groove

Milt Jackson's nickname was Bags. He is most famous as a pillar of the **Modern Jazz Quartet**, Django being only one of their numerous standards. Bags' Groove is a heavyweight encounter with Miles Davis, Sonny Rollins, Thelonious Monk, Horace Silver, Percy Heath and Kenny Clarke. He played his vibes and the rest is history.

• Milt Jackson and John Coltrane - Bags & Trane

Bags and Trane is a more delicate affair, the two great soloists respected each other and are all empathy. I think Milt comes off better than Coltrane, much as Sonny Rollins came off fiercer in his Tenor Madness conversation with Trane.

• Bob Marley - Exodus

Movement of Jah people. 'Nuff said.

• The NPG - The Exodus has begun

A Prince album in all but name, the title track is sprawling like Bootsy and George would have done it. Oh identity.

• Digable Planet - Nickel Bags

Their **reunion** in 2005, after 10 years apart brought such joy. (I still have a review in the draft pile). Let's hope they head back to the studio. I want some more nickel bags of funk.

• Herbie Hancock - Three Bags Full

Herbie Hancock's contribution to this playlist is from the aptly titled *Takin' Off* album, an affair featuring Freddie Hubbard and Dexter Gordon mind you. This is hard bop at its best. Most airlines only allow two bags but when you fly Air Herbie, you get extra allowances for your baggage, and a bigger plane.

• Erykah Badu - Bag Lady

I'll end with the bag lady herself. Ms Badu's Ghanaian heritage is only obliquely referenced these days, if at all; Texas claims her. Still, her musical iconoclasm is plainly mid-Atlantic, her sensibility is that of one who knows no boundaries, a musical refugee in her creative prime. This was the lead single from her last soulful album, the title of course: *Worldwide Underground*.

A parting question: I wonder if this note could pass as a **Things Fall Apart** affair. Would it be a case of social living, a comfort suite or rather that rough beast? What say you dear reader?

[Update June 5, 2007]

See also: **A plagiarism in plaid**

Bags and Stamps - the photo set

File under: bags, plaid, art, culture, globalization, fashion, immigration, exile, memory, Ghana, Nigeria, Africa, authenticity, design, history, collage, identity, loss, China, India, Scotland, commercialization, boundaries, plagiarism, theft, naming, Ghana Must Go, Things Fall Apart, Social Living, toli

Posted by Koranteng at 2:12 PM

Labels: **Africa**, art, authenticity, bags, collage, culture, exile, fashion, Ghana, globalization, history, identity, immigration, loss, memory, Nigeria, plaid, Social Living, Things Fall Apart, toli

10 comments:

sokari said...

Here in SA they have a new variation on these bags so instead of the boring old stripes we have bags with shiny maps of Africa, elephants, soap powder and all sorts. Your post just reminded me that I must go and buy a couple before I leave - if I make it will take some photos and post them up:)

1:30 PM, April 17, 2007

Nii said...

Congratulations you have been **labelled** a thinking blogger :)

6:46 PM, April 17, 2007

Kwaku said...

This was a fun read; thanks!

Erykah Badu has a Ghanaian heritage? I looked into it once (because of the "Badu")but never found anything that suggested as such...even obliquely. Her last name was Wright before she changed it...not to say that being called Wright per se is anathema to Ghanaianhood! :)

1:51 PM, April 23, 2007

senam said...

koranteng,

I've been working on these bags for 7 years, read your blog and was blown away, I always thought Louis Vuitton ripped me off, but thought it was my fragile artistic ego taking over... Sent the link to an academic friend. Her reply was , " who is this guy, he has a day job? I'm giving up academia to be a pastry chef! "

Looking forward to the next installment..

11:40 PM, May 07, 2007

Koranteng said...

Cheers Senam,

For some reason I omitted to send a link to you, I'm glad you came across this bit of toli. And yes, "we wuz robbed" and quite blatantly too. The thing these days is that Google is **the great equalizer**. We're all telling our stories in whatever medium. The conversation cannot fail to move in our direction.

2:09 PM, May 08, 2007

AfricaLive said...

This is interesting Koranteng. It would be one thing if the 'ghana must go back' was appropriated by Louis Vuitton, but the fact that Senam did similar artwork prior makes it even more frustrating and sinister. Intellectual property- who owns it? Modern Travellers: Ideas, People, Cultures, Plants, Objects moving in Markets.

12:08 AM, May 14, 2007

Hans said...

I have seen these types of bags in Chile, Peru, Argentina, Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Thailand, the Philippines, Vietnam, and China.

Over the several decades, that material in various stripe and plaid patterns has become so common in China. I have seen it there used to shade market stalls, made into large sacks to carry fish and crab, used as boat covers, draped over the back of cargo trucks and even as curtains in windows of shops and homes. Luggage made from that material is seen in every train station and airport in China.

I see the Louis Vuitton bag as an artistic statement on the global ubiquitousness of this patterned material.

9:23 AM, June 13, 2007

Koranteng said...

These bags are indeed increasingly ubiquitous, as is their pattern. But even in China, it was the peasants that were the

initial users, the promoters and the inevitably stereotyped. It's almost like a low end theory with an inexorable move up from the bottom of the pyramid of our societies.

The naming is a very interesting matter. The bags only acquire their distinctive names as ironic commentary on immigrants or downtrodden. Elsewhere, they are nameless and merely functional.

Historical memory is a funny thing, at climactic moments we latch onto symbols that resonate in their ubiquity. These bags are great repositories in this respect. I wonder if they do have other names in Latin America and East Asia or if they are simply without identity.

For further fodder, I've noted some more bags to add to the photographic collection: **Elia** and Georgia P.

And on a different angle, I came across another bag lady this past weekend, one who fashions her bags out of recycled banners and garbage, the artist, **Jenny Hurth**. It's not plaid but it is a similar rescuing of memory. I hope she can connect with Senam at some point. They should have much to discuss.

10:06 AM, June 13, 2007

Anonymous said...

Very exciting read, thank you so much - merci beaucoup!

I come from Liège in Belgium, where we had so many people coming from Ghana in the late eighties / early nineties; most of them went to live elsewhere, but I'm sure some stayed, even though the English spoken in Liège is quite rustic.

My sister, who is a big user of that kind of bags, calls them "flight cases"; she inherited the name from other people. There is an evident tongue-in-cheek reference to the total incompatibility of the bag with norms of in-flight (cabin) luggage.

Together we even spoke once of the possibility of a future day of glory for this ubiquitous and sad object.

Months ago, when I first saw the Vuitton bag, in a magazine, then on the net, the image of the runway was so small it was impossible to decide whether the bag was a leather version or a real bag, used as a ready-made prop (Thanks Marcel Duchamps!) in a ready-to-wear collection. You guess what I did then: I googled-imaged 'plaid bag', like you do in your post, and I came across so many flight cases, but no allusion to the Vuitton one.

Later on, close-ups of said bag filled the fashion blogs and my question was answered. About 2 square meters made of leather woven in a tight and light sheet, for a bag that rests on the floor when you try to carry it (we're quite short in the family). For a bag that I can hide in! For a bag that always seems too expensive when it's made of plastic! For a bag that even the models already knew!

Thank you for putting the whole thing in perspective, yours is an article well worth a double page in the French paper 'Liberation'. (if only I was the editor there!)

Hélène

8:57 AM, September 27, 2007

Meeshell said...

Greetings from New York. Just letting you know that the local department store Pearl River has blogged about the Ghana Must Go (though we know it by a different name here in the Chinese community). We referred to your analysis of the bag's cultural-historical context. The post is written in a whimsical tone, but we tried to be meticulous about citing your research, in light of the previous scandal involving the infamous Liz Hunt. Good luck!

<http://pearlriver.com/blog/?p=7>

4:45 PM, April 03, 2008

Appendix 14 (Louis Vuitton Ghana Must Go)

http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/entertainment/artikel.php?ID=121506

Louis Vuitton sells “Ghana Must Go”

Entertainment of Tuesday, 27 March 2007

The screenshot shows the GhanaWeb website interface. At the top, there is a blue banner with a yellow warning icon and the text "Do you want a lifetime American Green Card?" with "Yes", "No", and "Cancel" buttons. Below this is a green navigation bar with buttons for "NEWS", "SPORTS", "REFERENCE", "OPINIONS", "CLASSIFIEDS", and "DIRECTORY". A "Home Page Ghana" logo is on the left. The main content area features a breadcrumb trail: "Entertainment of Tuesday, 27 March 2007" and "Louis Vuitton sells 'Ghana Must Go'". The article text discusses how Louis Vuitton's brand has co-opted the traditional Ghanaian 'Ghana Must Go' bag. A sidebar on the left lists various categories like "Entertainment", "Local Ent. Media", and "Real Estate". An image of a patterned bag with a Louis Vuitton stamp is shown on the right. At the bottom right, there is an advertisement for "StL-Apartments.com".

NEW. Watch live television from Ghana, the latest Ghanaian movies and OBE TV.

Having an idea stolen can be more difficult to deal with especially when the other party makes a bigger name and money off the idea than what it was originally worth. Captured on Louis Vuitton's (LV) catwalk was the ever famous 'Ghana Must Go Bag' also known as 'Efiewura Sua Me' (help me carry my bag). The bags many Ghanaians have been using to carry all sorts of stuff – from yam tubers to smoked fish – have suddenly become trade marked items, purportedly designed by Marc Jacobs for LV.

One internet site described Mr. Jacobs' 'creation' as "a complex refraction of the many inspirational sparks that go into the work here: pieces synthesized to project the simultaneous multinational appeal this brand [Louis Vuitton] must maintain." Our very own 'Ghana Must Go' was also labeled as "a funny, cheap, checked shopping bag" (rightly said!) but was only complimentary to LV's clothing collection. It had embossed on it a big passport-style Louis Vuitton stamp. The audacity? Maybe. Maybe not.

LV seems to have merely capitalized on something Ghanaians have totally refused to give any recognition to. In no time, 'Ghana Must Go' might move from being sold on the streets of Makola into boutiques around the world, with prices quoted in dollars.

Hopefully after this exposure, Ghanaians will begin to see variations of the bag – size and color – and, maybe, spice it up as a fashion accessory for Saturday morning shopping at Makola or Sunday morning church service.

The ignominy of carrying 'Ghana Must Go' will be removed and even the most chic ladies and gents wouldn't mind using it. For some, however, no matter what label has been stamped on it – Gucci, Versace or BVLGARI – 'Ghana Must Go' will never be a wardrobe option.

Source : JIVE

All Rights Reserved, 1994-2008, © Copyright GhanaHomePage

Appendix 15 (Luis Vuitton Ghana Must Go).

<http://olawunmi.blogspot.com/2007/03/ghana-must-go-bags-now-in-vogue.html>

Silent Storms in an Ocean of One

in the event that you feel the need to scream at me... ologun.smith@gmail.com

SILENT STORMS IN AN OCEAN OF ONE

IN THE EVENT THAT YOU FEEL THE NEED TO SCREAM AT ME...
ologun.smith@gmail.com

WATCH OUT FOR NAYO

Jesus Christ Loves You
Here is a Prayer That Can Change Your Life
www.Jesus2020.com
Ads by Google

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 07, 2007

Ghana-Must-Go bags now in vogue

It appears that the latest fashion accessory is the humble ghana-must-go bag (or GMG as i like to call them). Coming soon to an LV store near you, at an exorbitant price, and after that, to a high street store.

Coming March 10th to all good record stores

ME

Topic: Ghana-Must-Go bags now in vogue
On: Wednesday, March 07, 2007

It appears that the latest fashion accessory is the humble ghana-must-go bag (or GMG as i like to call them). Coming soon to an LV store near you, at an exorbitant price, and after that, to a high street store.

i have a few GMGs in my store at home, i think its time to do some business. All i need to do now is call TopShop and H&M.

whatever will they think of next?
Posted by Olawunmi at 3:47:00 PM

Labels: Africa, Fashion

8 Comments:

Calabar Gal said...

No way I'm gonna be caught dead with a GMG bag no matter who the designer is or even if its a "designer" handbag.
March 07, 2007 5:13 PM

adefunke said...

First of, do you know ur blog feed is up on 'africanwomenblogs.com'? you are still a guy right? Second the GMG (very cool) bag doesn't look bad at all I mean if one can carry a Burberry bag this one isn't much different the pattern that is!
March 07, 2007 6:48 PM

Pilgrimage to Self said...

This post has been removed by the author.
March 08, 2007 10:01 AM

Pilgrimage to Self said...

You've got to be kidding me!!! These fashion designers are off their trolley. Me carry GMG as an accessory? Like calabar gal said NO WAY.
March 08, 2007 10:02 AM

ijeoma obu iheoma said...

lol.. i agree with calabar girl.. nonsense!
March 12, 2007 2:05 PM

Adunni said...

Ghana Must Go bags. What a laugh. Whoever came up with that idea? I don't think that fad will catch on though i mean Ghana must go bags !!! as a fashion accesory? I don't see that happening. I agree with PTS. NO WAY
March 16, 2007 12:02 PM

Chioma said...

my dear, I have seen and I have heard it all now. When my friend phoned me first thing in the morning the other day telling me about it and how she was puting in an order with her grandma for her own bag i thought she was mad. It turned out she wasn't after all!!! I don't like the classic burbery bags becuse they look like GMG so there is no way in hell I will be caught sporting the actual thing no matter what desinger put their name on it. Moreover I hope we get some credit for their so called new inovation cos come to think of it they stole it from us and now they will be making big money out of it!!! Maybe I should start selling it too!
March 21, 2007 10:42 AM

missmarian1 said...

Wow....classic African mentality...Nigerians lookin down on something the White Man is cashing in on. You can choose not to be caught dead in it my friends, but you cannot stop LV from making an entrepreneurial move! "I will never be caught dead in it indeed." I wonder how U feel about that Nigerian arrogance now!
March 27, 2007 1:31 PM

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Appendix 17 (Ghana Must Go Luis Vuitton)

http://africanshirts.blogspot.com/2007/02/ghana-must-go-no-more.html


African Shirts

African Shirts

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2007

Ghana must go no more...

Ghana must go? Louis Vuitton appear to have other ideas. Pictures from [CoolDigest](#).




internetted by Nkem @ 07:59

5 Comments:

At 26 February, 2007 12:50, **Aba Boy** said...
This bag is surely going places.
There was a time when I almost refused to be identified with a visitor from


About Me

 **Name:** Nkem Ifejika
Location: New Cross, London, United Kingdom

There's a thin line between insanity and genius, and I'm standing on it. Disclaimer: the (few, piffing) views reflected on this blog are in no way representative of any organisations brave enough to employ me...

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Posts of yore

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- [Atiku keeps hope alive](#)

Monday, February 26, 2007

Ghana must go no more...

Ghana must go? Louis Vuitton appear to have other ideas. Pictures from **CoolDigest**.

internetted by Nkem @ 07:59

5 Comments:

At 26 February, 2007 12:50, **Aba Boy** said...

This bag is surely going places.

There was a time when I almost refused to be identified with a visitor from Nigeria at Heathrow because he had two Ghana...bags with him.

At 26 February, 2007 13:10, the flying monkeys said...

Looks like she is heading to Milan Malpensa Airport.

Wonder how much Naira she has hidden in it.

At 27 February, 2007 06:08, Overwhelmed Naija Babe said...

lol... This is high fashion gone horribly wrong!!!

At 27 February, 2007 10:04, In my head and around me said...

Ghana must stay!

At 04 March, 2007 05:58, Count Sky said...

You've got to be kidding me with that Ghana must go bag

Appendix19 (Ghana Must Go)

http://www.blacklooks.org/2006/07/bag_woman.html

Bag woman

Category: Football, Journal

The screenshot shows the Black Looks blog interface. At the top is the 'black looks' logo. Below it is a navigation menu with links for Blog, Archives, Links, About, Video, Podcast, Community Media, and African Women Blogs. The main content area displays the post title 'Bag woman' on July 2, 2006, with the category 'Football, Journal'. A central photograph shows a room filled with numerous plastic bags, some unpacked and some still in their original packaging. To the right of the photo is a text block starting with 'As well as "Moving On" I have been Moving UP - into a new apartment - one with a view - of roof tops that is. This is 1/3 my "load" of plastic bags - some are already unpacked, some stored away with "just in case" stuff. What would we do without these bags? I know what they are called in Nigeria but I wonder what Ghanaians or Kenyans call them? Have you ever carried one on a plane? How many do you have in your house/apartment right now?'. The sidebar on the right contains a search bar, a 'Recent posts' section with links like 'Woman of Color Silenced' and 'Nigerian gay activist threatend with death by church leaders', and a 'Recent comments' section with entries from 'Hathor on Woman of Color Silenced' and 'Sokarl on Action Alert from Sokwanele: What you can do to help'. The left sidebar includes a 'Free Lovinsky Petition' link, a 'Support Black Looks' section with a PayPal donate button, and several other activist links like 'Human Rights Bloggers' and 'STOP the war on women's bodies'.

on July 2, 2006

As well as "Moving On" I have been Moving UP - into a new apartment - one with a view - of roof tops that is. This is 1/3 my "load" of plastic bags - some are already unpacked, some stored away with "just in case" stuff. What would we do without these bags? I know what they are called in Nigeria but I wonder what Ghanaians or Kenyans call them? Have you ever carried one on a plane? How many do you have in your house/apartment right now?

PS: Football - To the English fans: the aim of the game is to put the ball into the opposite goal NOT to stamp on the balls of opposite players -

Les Africaines - VICTORY AGAINST RACISM -

16 Comments so far

1. madame butterfly

July 2nd, 2006 at 10:35 pm

hehehe, you also have one of those bags..i have two huge ones for laundry, i like how big they are, i have no idea what their called, laundry bag? thought about you yesterday while france kicked brasil's ass.. sweet!

2. Koranteng Ofosu-Amaah

July 3rd, 2006 at 4:59 am

"Ghana must go" is what they were called during the various refugee expulsions that Ghana and Nigeria engaged in during the 1970s...

They came back in fashion during the Rawlings Chain lean years in the 1980s but were then simply called "refugee bags".

3. Ms K

July 3rd, 2006 at 7:54 am

Wow, that is a LOT of those bags!! I don't know what they're called in Kenya (and in fact haven't seen one in a while!) but in Ghana they're called Ghana bag. LOL I always thought it was because they're made there.

4. Clair

July 3rd, 2006 at 8:14 am

I know what this is called in English..this are called 'Hey Sokari thats a LOT of bags!'

5. soul

July 3rd, 2006 at 9:26 am

I don't have one of those bags, and it's leaving me feeling a lil un-Nigerian.. I must go and find one lol. You look soo organised nice one Sokari and the new place sounds gorgeous.. I can imagine you putting a mat on the floor and just chilling in the evenings.

Be well

6. Sokari

July 3rd, 2006 at 10:00 am

Koranteng: Yes I know in Nigeria they are called "Ghana must go" or plain "Ghana" for short but thought the Ghanaians might have some other name - but refugee makes sense.

Clair /Ms K - Yes there are a lot of bags:) the new place is great - so much space for so many bags - Soul - we decided not to get any chairs and just have long mat type cushions which is nice and cool. btw - its not me that is the organised one!

7. Aba Boy

July 3rd, 2006 at 2:02 pm

Wow!, quite a lot of bags, Sokari!! I make a conscious choice not to call those bags – Ghana must I hazily remember the events that surrounded the deportation of Ghanaians from Nigeria, and without knowing all the facts; it is something that some of my Ghanaian friends still hold against Nigeria.

The bags are now so popular here in the UK. I even saw them used in a recent episode of Eastenders. Yes, I do watch Eastenders.

"To the English fans: the aim of the game is to put the ball into the opposite goal NOT to stamp on the balls of opposite players" - TELL THEM!!1

8. Sokari

July 3rd, 2006 at 2:07 pm

Aba Boy - that is why I wrote "I know what they are called in Nigeria" to avoid the horrible "Ghana must....." name. Its also why I wondered what Ghanaians call them "Nigeria drove us out"?

9. Beauty

July 3rd, 2006 at 2:24 pm

best wishes with the move"s".

10. Georgia/Caribbean Free Radio

July 3rd, 2006 at 8:22 pm

Here in Trinidad I've heard those bags called "Guyanese Samsonite"....

11. Sokari

July 3rd, 2006 at 11:36 pm

Georgia - almost if not as bad as "Ghana must go". Seems the names of these bags are used to insult other nationalities as well as to pack up one's "load"!!

12. Rosie

July 5th, 2006 at 9:47 pm

I have seven right now. Geez...it's a must have for any African, ya know...

13. fola

July 7th, 2006 at 1:27 am

I know there is connection between women and handbags; however, I didn't realize the connection extend to this type of bag. Wetin you carry Sokari?

14. Sokari

July 8th, 2006 at 6:25 pm

ma load! tings - stuffs - clot....

15. Laptop Must Go at Mama JunkYard's

March 29th, 2007 at 1:53 am

[...] I wish I had taken a photograph of the bag, which is no longer in my possession. It was one of those of raffia/plastic-chequered bags that many African/Caribbean families in the UK use as laundry bags. My brother told me that these bags are called "Ghana-must-go" bags and that certainly appears to be what everyone in here calls them. Sokari has a photograph of similar bags on her blog. I say similar because the one I was given was incredibly tiny; like a medium to small handbag. I am actually tempted to call it cute had it not clashed, both in colour and in style, with what I was wearing. [...]

16. Black Looks

June 4th, 2007 at 9:29 pm

[...] one year ago some readers may remember a post I wrote "Bag Woman" which included the following photo of all my bags during my move to a new apartment. The comment [...]

Appendix 20 (Ghana Must Go)

<http://www.naijarules.com/vb/health-keep-fit-hair-beauty-fashion/21820-ghana-must-go-runway-luis-vuitton-you-go-pay-trademark-jor.html>

Ghana Must go on the Runway!!! Luis Vuitton-you go pay for Trademark, jor!!

kaymax : Master Group

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www.BellyFatIsUgly.net

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Ghana Must go on the Runway!!! Luis Vuitton-you go pay for Trademark, jor!!


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03-29-2007, 02:46 PM #1 (permlink)

 **kaymax**
Master Group

Join Date: Jun 2005
Location: where I fit in
Posts: 2,150
My Mood:  cool
Thanks: 0
Thanked 0 Times in 0 Posts

Ghana Must go on the Runway!!! Luis Vuitton-you go pay for Trademark, jor!!

Onyibos have discovered one of our fashion secrets, no thanks to our brothers and sisters that have been transporting their elubo, melon, stockfish etc abroad in â€˜Ghana must goâ€™ bags. What this means is that you must â€˜insureâ€™ any checked in â€˜Ghana must Goâ€™ bag, as it might just disappear off the conveyor belt because it is now internationally recognized as a prized fashion item. Better still insist on carrying it as hand luggage. Also please feel free to glide gracefully through the lobby of any five star hotel with your prized bag in tow or make an entrance at any hip party in town. Your friends who donâ€™t have your good taste will definitely be green.

Anyway, this just confirms what we have known all alongâ€_that we Africans are very fashionable. Imagine we go shopping in Balogun, Oke-Arin, Alaba, Yaba, and Agege without a care in the world with our Louis Vuitton bags. It must be the oil money that has spoilt us.

Onyibos have discovered one of our fashion secrets, no thanks to our brothers and sisters that have been transporting their elubo, melon, stockfish etc abroad in â€˜Ghana must goâ€™ bags. What this means is that you must â€˜insureâ€™ any checked in â€˜Ghana must Goâ€™ bag, as it might just disappear off the conveyor belt because it is now internationally recognized as a prized fashion item. Better still insist on carrying it as hand luggage. Also please feel free to glide gracefully through the lobby of any five star hotel with your prized bag in tow or make an entrance at any hip party in town. Your friends who donâ€™t have your good taste will definitely be green.

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And good news for the men who always wonder what to get their wives, girlfriends, mothers, sisters, aunties etc â€_this is the perfect gift. It is fashionable, useful for those all day shopping sprees, and shows you are proudly African. Get your bags nowâ€_o while stocks last. Itâ€™s never too early to start buying your presents for Christmas and those birthdays

even for next Valentine. And if you have any friends contesting for any elective post, this will make a wonderful inauguration present â€_after all action speaks louder than words.

Finally let us salute Ghana on its 50th independence anniversaryâ€_ for this unique contribution to the catwalk.

<http://www.style.com/fashionshows/co...eview/LVUITTON>

The only fool bigger than the person who knows it all is the person who argues with him.

Stanislaw Jerszy Lec (1909-)

Appendix 21 (Ghana Must Go, Louis Vuitton)

http://www.naijarules.com/vb/health-keep-fit-hair-beauty-fashion/18887-louis-vuitton-version-ghana-must-go-2.html

The Louis Vuitton Version of Ghana-Must-Go

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The Louis Vuitton Version of Ghana-Must-Go

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10-22-2006, 03:36 PM #16 (permalink)

 **temmy**
Master Group

[Champion!](#) [Lines And Squ](#)
[Tournaments Won: 1](#)

Join Date: Sep 2006
Location: nig
Posts: 1,091
My Mood: Innocent
Thanks: 6
Thanked 5 Times in 3 Posts

we suppose sue for copyright infringement

[Quote](#)

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#16 10-22-2006, 03:36 PM

temmy

we suppose sue for copyright infringement

#17 10-22-2006, 08:40 PM

Misty

Quote:

Originally Posted by **chi**

what i meant is that if they ever start making ladies handbag ,purses using the ghana must go design even with the logo i will not buy.... as per ghana must go bag i 've one i got from naija and i don't mind it for travels
hmmmm.....ok ooooo

Only God can fill the emptiness of an aching heart!

The race of life is run by faith and won by grace!!

Failure is not defeat unless you stop trying!!!

#18 10-24-2006, 05:18 AM

KikisMuffin

You gats to be kidding me!!!

#19 10-24-2006, 05:59 AM

jamaicayute

Quote:

Originally Posted by **KikisMuffin**

You gats to be kidding me!!!

Kiki Are you keeping out of the love threads?

Working on my first book. Due out in 2008. Watch this space

Every man gotta right to decide his own destiny,
And in this judgement there is no partiality.

No more internal power struggle;
We come together to overcome the little trouble.

Mash it up-a in-a Zimbabwe (Zimbabwe);
Africans a-liberate (Zimbabwe), yeah.

#20 10-24-2006, 06:14 AM

KikisMuffin

Quote:

Originally Posted by **jamaicayute**

Kiki Are you keeping out of the love threads?

Nope!

There's so much sex going on in there, i couldnt help myself but have a tiny peek!!!

#21 10-24-2006, 12:01 PM

Asili

This one should be easy for 9ja's to mass proiduce/okrika.

Are they running out of ideas or what?

Wonders shall never cease..

One's destiny can only be **delayed** but never **Denied**.

#22 10-24-2006, 12:53 PM

Atlakos

Quote:

Originally Posted by **bolanle**

Yes I stole this from Nla but this needs to be shared! Haaa...

That bag everybody loves/hates ... apparently, its now the hottest fashion.

Seriously? I thought this was a joke but they are actually a new addition to [Louis Vuitton], LV Spring-Summer 2007 collection.

Out here in san francisco i couldnt believe my eyes when Bloomingdales started handing out ghana-must-go at the check out when they opened their doors Sept 28th.

http://img149.imagevenue.com/img.php..._122_459lo.jpg

http://img135.imagevenue.com/img.php..._122_526lo.jpg

http://www.louisvuitton.com/web/flas...0&langue=en_US

If you dont mind me asking

Why is it called "**Ghana Must Go**"

I really wonder why that title?

GHANA-HOMESWEETHOME-FOTOS OF AFRICA-http://www.facebook.com/photo_search...15974&view=all

"O" FOR CHANGE - YES WE CAN - 1/20/09 @ NOON <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjXyq...eature=related>

No He Cant:[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=moutU...elated\]YouTube](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=moutU...elated]YouTube)

#23 10-24-2006, 01:12 PM

KikisMuffin

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Atlakos**

If you dont mind me asking

*Why is it called "**Ghana Must Go**"*

I really wonder why that title?

Those bags were commonly used by deportee Ghanaians leaving Nigeria to pack their belongings, when some military ruler(I think Buhari) had one brainstorm to deport illegal immigrants in the mid-late 80s

hence the name "Ghana must go" bag

#24 10-24-2006, 01:13 PM

queen2

True dat, someone please explain why its called Ghana must sow as my granny wuld call it

I love U Baby BB....mwahhhhh

Queen2

#25 10-24-2006, 02:38 PM

goseiant

Unbelievable but nice.

Psalm 34 vrs. 19

Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him from them all.

#26 10-26-2006, 04:30 PM

cyndi

That's really funny they finally caught on. As for its name Someone told me that it's bcos when the Naijas asked Ghanaians to leave most Gh used those bags, dunno how true it is though.

You have done it again, Jehovah Jireh, Lord of lords, Prince of peace. I worship, praise and Thank You. You have been soooo faithful. I am sooo grateful.

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Appendix 23

Discussion with Professor Nat Amarteifio, Architectural historian University of East Legon, Accra and former Mayor of Accra. (Conducted February 2008).

SO: So, how prevalent is the history of slavery in the average Ghanaian's consciousness?

NA: In Ghana, Society decided to forget slavery, there has been a deliberate amnesia as to the institutions history and symbolism.

The Akans have a saying. "*No one should refer to anybody's beginnings*". In most Ghanaian families, there is a limit to how far up a slave could rise. In the 18th Century, wealth was based on the size, or number of people in your household. So slaves, once they gained trust were seen as proto members of the clan and managed to breed into the clan.

SO: So this means that its difficult to distinguish between who is descendant of a slave and who is not?

NA: Don't forget, our relationship to this institution is ambiguous, when Reindorph came after the end of abolition, 50% of Africa was of slave origin. The Basel missionaries actually bought slaves to marry their sons. There are a number of grey areas that meant the British had a hard time trying to abolish slavery in Ghana. First, most of the traditional leaders were traders, and secondly, there were layers of servitude in Ghanaian society, made even more ambiguous by the institution of pawning people when they were in debt. If you owed money it was common practice to pawn yourself for a number of years to pay off the debt. Families also gave their names to slaves, further obscuring their origins.

SO: So what can you say of the fact that the presidential palace, "the castle' is in a former slave fort, do you think this was done to simply appropriate a former site of colonial or pre-colonial power?

NA: Well, actually, the presidential palace used to be a madhouse, - an asylum. The slave forts have always been used as courthouses and prisons, the British ordinance of 1870 was falling away from the regulatory justice. The British took over the administration of justice to weaken the ability of the chiefs to make moves. Justice was lucrative, you got a cut of the fines, and slave forts were especially used for political dispute.

SO: So who decided to house the presidential offices in the castle?

NA: Nkrumah had an uncanny knack for appropriating British symbols of power. Christanborg was left to the ministries, and in 1962 the government let Nkrumah appropriate the castle.

SO: Ok, so lets move a bit to the different colonial communities in Accra, I heard a popular urban myth, that the colonials painted the walls of ridge white so as to better enforce the evening curfew, i.e., catch black bodies trying to scale them..

NA: What absolute rubbish, (irritated). Jamestown, Accra became the colonial administrative capital in 1897 and educated Africans were used in the administration. In 1908 there was bubonic plague in Accra.

The British brought the surgeon general of the army, “Stevenson”, to advise on the plague and the mortality of the Europeans. He landed in Accra, looked at Osu and Jamestown and Ushertown, and said ‘the only way to stop the desecration is to destroy all houses. Now remember at this point there were no cemeteries, the deceased were buried within the compounds of a family home.

The White European homes were situated between the African homes in Jamestown, and although they were two storey buildings with big walls, remember at that time public sanitation was in Europe was no good either, so the situation in both communities was bad.

Stevenson decides to deystroy all but the ancestral graves beneath ground, the fishermen there were the first to be moved, then the people from leshibie(? I didn’t get this bit>.)

(unreadable) people were brought as slaves to work at Usher fort. Then the british elevated Wetse Kodjo to the Jamestown Manche, before that he was a trader who acted as a go between for the brits.

It was Stevenson’s idea to move and segregate the Europeans. The Europeans did not have an immunity or tolerance to disease, this also coincided with a new british idea of colonialism, they needed to be masters. At this point they decided upon Ridge and Cantoments.

The Government bought Ridge and forced all government workers and administration to move there. No one initially wanted to move. But Stevenson followed the logic that malaria, literally ‘mal-aria’ was caused by ‘bad air’, and that sunshine and good air where the key to good health. That is why the colonial houses in ridge were elevated on stilts, to allow the flow of air around them.

Blacks were seen as the carriers of disease, and so the idea was to separate blacks and whites at dusk, so that any mosquito that fed on a black would not infect a white.

A cordon Sanitaire was set up from the Rex Cinema through to (unclear writing), down to the asylum, Barnes road, (where the national museum is) to kojo Thompson road. For Jamestown along the sanitaire , Africans were living (next line unclear).

1910-1920- segregation came in. It is important to note through the changes, (housing design etc), the death rates dropped considerably. By 1930 the mortality rate was as good as Europe. Not just in Accra, but also Cape Coast and Sekondi, health was used to justify separation which fed into European Segregation.

European African Relations travelled from an earlier model, where Africans were treated as equals, (including marrying them for health, -as an African wife could help you with local herbs to cure malaria and came with an extended family network to help sustain your existence), to the 1920's and 30's when Africans were plainly *subjects*.

SO: And what of the slave trade, are there any monuments to it ?

NA: There is no state monument in Accra that commemorates the slave trade, and its not just that, All that was fought for against the british remains unmmemorialised, there are no monuments, and remember, hundreds of thousands of Ghanaians fell in the first and second world wars.

This is not a culture of memorialising trauma's to find healing. Here, these are not things we celebrate.

Appendix 23

Discussion with Professor Nat Nunoo-Amarteifio (1943–2021), Architectural historian, University of East Legon, Accra and former Mayor of Accra (1994–1998). Conducted February 2008.

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1910–1920, segregation came in. It is important to note through the changes (housing design etc.), the death rates dropped considerably. By 1930, the mortality rate was as good as Europe. Not just in Accra, but also Cape Coast and Sekondi. Health was used to justify separation, which fed into European segregation.

European/African relations travelled from an earlier model, where Africans were treated as equals (including marrying them for health, as an African wife could help you with local herbs to cure malaria and came with an extended family network to help sustain your existence), to the 1920s and 30s, when Africans were plainly subjects.

SO: And what of the slave trade, are there any monuments to it ?

NA: There is no state monument in Accra that commemorates the slave trade, and it is not just that—all that was fought for against the British remains un-memorialised. There are no monuments – and remember – hundreds of thousands of Ghanaians fell in the First and Second World Wars.

This is not a culture of memorialising traumas to find healing. Here, these are not things we celebrate.