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Cosmopolitan Conundrums: Impacts of Trade Fortresses on the Gã Space, 1450–1870

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The social and cultural history of the Gã state (in Ghana) in the past 500 years is best understood within the broader context of Afro-European connections and interactions, and the subsequent development of the Atlantic world.[1] The Gã territory, like the other states on the Gold Coast, was entangled in the nascent web of global commercial and social networks in the 15th century with the European presence in on the West African shores, manifest by the establishment of permanent fortress.

Arguing that defensive works were crucial for anchoring commercial monopolies, this article examines the imprints that the littoral European fortifications and the Atlantic trade made on the physical and social spaces of the Gã kingdom from the late 15th to the 19th century. The fortifications of West Africa, particularly those on the Gold Coast, have been studied through a variety of disciplinary lenses, with historical archaeologists, antiquarians,[2] and historians[3] being active in the field. Most works see the forts and settlements as facilitators of the Atlantic slave trade, and insist that the current popular interest in them has to with their being sites of tourism and memory (i.e., people visit to recall the lives of their

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[1] A note on Gã pronunciation: /ã/ is approximate to the nasalised 'an' in the English word 'gang'. The letters /Ŋ, ŋ/ are pronounced 'ng' as in 'singing'; /Ɔ, ɔ/ 'or' as in orange; and /Ɛ,ɛ/ as in 'err', respectively. The Gã language has undergone several orthographical revisions since the publication of Rev. Johannes Zimmermann's Gã dictionary in 1858 and Gã Bible in 1866. This study has used the most current orthography, which has been in use since the 1970s.

[2] J. C. Anene, 'Review of *Trade Castles and Forts of West Africa* by A. W. Lawrence', *American Anthropologist* 68 (1966): 824–825, however, sees Lawrence's *Trade Castles and Forts of West Africa* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1963) as 'more architectural than archaeological'. See also Kwesi J. Anquandah, *Castles and Forts of Ghana* (Paris: Atalante, 1999); Christopher DeCorse, *The Archaeology of Elmina: African and Europeans on the Gold Coast, 1400 –1900* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 'Early Trade Posts and Forts of West Africa', in Eric Klingelhofer (ed.), *First Forts: Essays on the Archaeology of Proto-colonial Fortifications* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 209–234, 'The Danes on the Gold Coast: Culture Change and the European Presence', *African Archaeological Review* 11 (1993): 149–173; E. Kofi Agorsah, 'Archaeological Perspectives on Colonial Slavery: Placing Africa in African Diaspora Studies in the Caribbean', in Paul J. Lane and Kevin C. Macdonald (eds.), *Slavery in Africa: Archaeology and Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 199–221.

[3] Larry Yarak, 'The "Elmina Note": Myth and Reality in Asante-Dutch Relations', *History in Africa* 13 (1986): 363–382; William St. Clair, *The Grand Slave Emporium: Cape Coast Castle and the British Slave Trade* (London: Profile Books, 2006); Robin Law, *Ouidah: The Social History of a West African Slaving "Port," 1727-1892* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

ancestors, to learn about the origins of the African diaspora, or out of sheer curiosity).[4] A recent work illustrate how the forts were spatially organised internally to suit the transportation of enslaved Africans.[5] Indeed, considering the flurry of fortification projects undertaken by trading companies of various European nations during the peak of the Atlantic slave trade in the 17th and 18th centuries, this association in the literature of the fortresses to enslavement is not unfounded.

Yet, other enduring impacts of the fortresses and the trade on societies, localities, and entire regions in West Africa ought to be unravelled through primary research. Using the developments in the Gã area from the 15th to the late 19th century as a case study, this article explores the effects of the fortifications on the (re-)ordering of the physical and social space of the entire Gold Coast and its neighbouring regions. We identify two interrelated impact areas. The first relates to the consequences of the fort trade for the relationship between the Gã state and external powers (European trading companies and imperial African neighbours).

The focus here is on the power dynamics associated with the siting of European forts and settlements on the Gã coast and the consequences of the fort trade for inter-state competition and the regional balance of power between the forest Akan and the coastal Gã states. The second relates to the consequences of the fort trade and related inter-state competition for the (re-)configuration of social, spatial, and political relationships within the Gã territory. Spatially, we examine how the relative economic and political roles of coast and countryside changed in the period with focus on urbanisation and cosmopolitanism. Socially, we focus on the impact of the fort trade on society, particularly the rise of a class of commercial intermediaries. Politically, we focus on how particular groups drew on their established relationships with the Europeans and the forts to frame identities during periods of political contestation. To examine these two impact areas, we draw on a variety of sources: printed

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[4] Rebecca Shumway's work is in this vein: 'Of particular interest [to visitors from the Western Hemisphere … are Africa's largest collection of forts and castles used during the transatlantic slave trade … [which] offer vivid reminders of the horrific trade that gave birth to the black population of the Americas. Visitors come to Ghana's Castles to experience … where many Americans' ancestors spent their last days'. She says that many of them go 'in search of a connection with their own African ancestors'. See Rebecca Shumway, *The Fante and the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2011), 3.

[5] Edmund Abaka, *House of Slaves and 'Door of No Return': Gold Coast/Ghana Slave Forts, Castles and Dungeons and the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2012).

travel accounts and reports;[6] archival material; oral sources and cultural materials of the Gã people (songs, aphorisms, and *asafo* flags);[7] scholarly research; and other secondary material.[8]

Our study is organised thematically, but it also covers a wide chronological span, looking at the period from the 15th to the 19th century. Thus, though there are a myriad of relevant materials to illustrate our arguments, we have been highly selective when it comes to supporting evidence due to the issues discussed and the extent of the contribution. What follows is divided into three sections. The first outlines the position of the Gã kingdom and the factors that made the territory an important trading zone and, rather paradoxically, rendered it vulnerable within the inter-African nexus of competition. The second looks at the impact of forts on population movements, settlement patterns, and the relationship between the littoral and the interior. And the third analyses the framing of identities and political contestation around the fortifications.

'Once a mighty nation':[9] Frontier of exchange and conflict

[6] John Barbot, *A Collection of Voyages and Travels*, Vol. V: *A Description of the Coasts of North and South Guinea* (London: Awnsham and J. Churchill, 1732), 181; Willem Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea* (1704) (London: F. Cass, 1967); Georg Nørregård, *Closing the Books: Governor Edward Carstensen on Danish Guinea, 1842–50*, trans. Tove Storsveen (Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2010); Selena Axelrod Winsnes (trans.), *Letters on West Africa and the Slave Trade: Paul Erdmann Isert's* Journey to Guinea and the Caribbean Islands in Columbia (1788) (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 1992) (hereinafter cited as Isert, *Letters from Africa*); Selena Axelrod Winsnes (trans.), *Two Views from Christiansborg Castle* (Legon: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2009): Vol. I: *A Brief and Truthful Description of a Journey to and from Guinea* by Johannes Rask (1708–1713) and Vol. II: *A Description of the Guinea Coast and Its Inhabitants* by Hans Christian Monrad (1805–1809); Pieter de Marees, *Description and Historical Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea* (1602), trans. Albert van Dantzig and Adam Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 1987); Ludewig Ferdinand Rømer, *Tilforladelig Efterretning om Kysten Guinea* (1760) (Copenhagen: Frifant Forlag, 1997), *A Reliable Account of the Coast of Guinea* (1760), trans. and ed. Selena Axelrod Winsnes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Erick Tilleman, *A Short and Simple Account of the Country Guinea and Its Nature* (1697), trans. Selena Axelrod Winsnes (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1994); Thomas Astley, *A New General Collection of Voyages and Travel*, Vol. II (London: F. Cass, 1968).

[7] On Gã songs, see Marion Kilson, *Kpele lala: Ga Religious Songs and Symbols* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971); Margaret J. Field, *Social Organization of the Gã People* (Accra: Crown Agents for the Colonies, 1940). On Gã *asafo* flags, see John Kwadwo Osei-Tutu, *The Asafoi (Socio-military Groups) in the History and Politics of Accra (Ghana) from the 17th to the Mid-20th Century* (Trondheim: Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 2000).

[8] Georg Nørregård, *Danish Settlements in West Africa: 1658–1850*, trans. Sigurd Mammen (Boston: Boston University Press, 1966).

[9] Isert, *Letters on West Africa*, 133.

Several authors[10] have described the origins, extent, and status of *Ŋkrãŋpɔŋ* or Great Acra.[11] Briefly described, territorially, the kingdom up to the late seventeenth century covered the entire Accra plains, extending from Tema in the east to *Laŋma* (Cook's Loaf / *Dampa* Hill) in the west.[12] The northern boundary was at the foothills of the Akuapim (Akuapem) Mountains, which are part of the Akuapim-Togo Range. The Atlantic Ocean washed the southern boundary. The linguistic boundary, however, transcended the geographical one, stretching eastwards to Kpone within the *Dãŋme* area. The interior and the littoral had separate significance for Gã economic, social, and cultural life. The political and economic heart of the kingdom lay inland. The *mãŋtsɛ* (literally, 'father of the town') and the political leadership of the unified kingdom was based at Ayawaso, the state capital, which was 'about 11 miles' from the seaside.[13] The economy was agricultural, and large settlements and villages were scattered over the territory, producing food crops for subsistence and sale. The principal market town, Abonse, was close to Ayawaso, from where the king regulated the trade in and out of his territory and exacted taxes and tribute.[14] From its origins as the centrepiece of the local Gã market system, Abonse – from the late 15th, and particularly in the 17th and 18th centuries – gained prominence as a commercial node in the coast-to-interior regional and inter-state trade network deriving from Afro-European commercial relations.[15]

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[10] For a description of the extent and powers of the kingdom, see Irene Odotei (Quaye), *The Ga and their Neighbours, 1600–1742* (Doctoral Thesis: University of Ghana, 1972); Samuel S. Quarcoopome, *The Impact of Urbanisation on the Socio-Political History of the Ga Mashie People of Accra, 1877–1957* (Doctoral Thesis: University of Ghana, 1993); Osei-Tutu, *The Asafoi*, 16.

[11] The Gã-Danish Treaty of 1661 refers to 'Great Acra'; see Ole Justesen (ed.) and James Manley (trans.), *Danish Sources for the History of Ghana, 1657–1754*, Vol. 1: *1657–1735* (Copenhagen: Det Kongelige Danske Videnskabernes Selskab, 2005), 12–13. Other designations for the Gã kingdom appear in the sources. According to Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description,* 66–69, 332, '*Acra* [was] the name of this country, which was formerly a kingdom whose inhabitants were conquered by the *Aquamboeans,* and driven to a place called *Little Popo,* which at present contains the remainder of the great Kingdom of *Acra*'. Astley, *A New General Collection*, called it 'Ackra', as did de Marees, *Description and Historical Account,* 86. For 'Acara', see Tilleman, *A Short and Simple Account*, 25–26. *Ŋkrãnpɔŋ* is the Gã word for 'Great Acra'. See Herman W. von Hesse, *Euro-Africans, Afro-Brazilians and the Evolution of Social Space in Nineteenth-Century Accra* (Master's Thesis: University of Ghana, 2014), 2.

[12] Tilleman, *A Short and Simple Account*, 24.

[13] See Quarcoopome, *The Impact of Urbanisation*, 38.

[14] John Parker, 'The Cultural Politics of Death and Burial in Early Colonial Accra', in David M. Anderson and Richard Rathbone (eds.), *Africa's Urban Past* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000), 205–221.

[15] For the development of trade networks in Ghana, see K. B. Dickson, 'Trade Patterns in Ghana at the Beginning of the Eighteenth Century', *Geographical Review* 56 (1966): 417–431.

The littoral consisted of small 'fishing villages'[16] that produced fish and salt, which were distributed through the regulated market at Abonse. However, the coast was important primarily as the spiritual centre of the Gã state – the abode of a pantheon of divinities known as *wɔjii* (singular, *wɔŋ*) and *jemãwɔjii* (singular, *jemãwɔŋ*) associated with the agricultural, riverine, and military spheres of the Gã state. The principal divinities included *Nãi*, associated with the sea and urban culture, *La Kpã*, the principal oracle, and the lagoon divinities, *Kɔɔle* ('wife' of *La Kpã*), *Klɔte* (the son of *La Kpã* and *Kɔɔle*), *Kpeshi* (rival of *Kɔɔle*), Sakumɔ (at Accra), and *Sakumɔfio* at Tema.[17] It would appear that until the Akwamu invasion of 1677, the unified Gã polity enjoyed relative peace and prosperity, though there were occasional border skirmishes with neighbouring states, particularly the Effutu to the west, the Akwamu and (from 1733) the Akuapim to the north, and the Aŋlo across the Volta River in the east.

The opening of Afro-European trade from the second half of the 15th century greatly enhanced the economic and strategic stature of the Gã kingdom relative to its landlocked Akan neighbours to the north. In addition, internally, the balance of power between the coast and the agricultural interior also changed. Though there may have been commercial interaction on the coast, it was in the 1520s that the Gã and the Portuguese traders formally established trade relations. Believing that the Portuguese motive was purely economic,[18] the Gã leaders permitted the visitors to build a fortified lodge in 1557–1558.[19] For the Portuguese, a military post was a necessary deterrent against English and French competition. Despite brisk commercial engagement on the Gã littoral, São Jorge da Mina remained 'the strategic heart of [inter-European] rivalry'[20] until the Dutch displaced the Portuguese from the western part of Gold Coast between 1637 and 1642.[21] Yet it is noteworthy that, prior to their expulsion by the Dutch, the Gã were reputed to have been the first Africans on the Gold Coast to expel the Portuguese from the eastern fringes.

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[16] Ioné Acquah, *Accra Survey: A Social Survey of the Capital of Ghana, Formerly Called the Gold Coast, Undertaken for the West African Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1953–1956* (London: University of London, 1958), 16–17.

[17] These divinities supposedly stem from *Ataa Naa Nyɔŋmɔ* (Gã, Grandfather-Grandmother God, the Supreme Being). See von Hesse, *Euro-Africans*, 36; Parker, 'The Cultural Politics of Death', 207; and Rømer, *A Reliable Account*, 84.

[18] DeCorse, 'Early Trade Posts and Forts', 209.

[19] See Paul Ozanne, 'Notes on the Early Historic Archaeology of Accra', *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 6 (1962): 51–70, 66 n. 34, 68 n. 38; Barbot, *A Collection of Voyages*, 163; and Astley, *A New General Collection*, 568.

[20] John Blake, *European Beginnings in West Africa, 1454–1578* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1937), 100.

[21] São Jorge da Mina (Elmina) was taken in 1637, and Fort San Antonio was taken in 1642.

Pieter de Marees, a Dutch trader and explorer, reported the circumstances of the expulsion as being a 'result of some violence they did to the blacks', wherein 'the inhabitants came and seized the castle by force, murdering the Portuguese and seizing and razing the fortifications to the ground.'[22] The Gã armies subsequently defeated a punitive expedition dispatched by the Portuguese headquarters, São Jorge da Mina, and foiled another attempt to rebuild the lodge and re-establish control in 1610.[23] This incident was a clear signal that the Gã kingdom decided the terms of engagement in the territory, and that any European power that wanted to engage in trade needed to submit to the authority of the Gã sovereign. The Portuguese failure in the east is also attributable to their approach to asserting their monopoly, which antagonised the African hosts, who apparently were open to free trade with all European visitors to their territory. John Blake describes two types of Portuguese groups engaged in the West African enterprise. There first was made up of traders who were interested in peaceful commerce and the profits accumulated through mutual exchange. The second was a colonising party that did not hesitate to use violence to assert the sovereignty of the Portuguese crown over host communities.[24] Generally, in West Africa, the latter group's approach led to tension and antagonised the African host communities. As Blake put it, 'the Portuguese government was unreal over most of the Guinea Coast. Their claim to conquest, dominion and tribute over all West Africa was not in accordance with the facts. They commanded the respect of negro tribes, who lived near their fortresses of Arguin, Axem, Sarnma, Sao Jorge and Accra, but not of other tribes'.[25]

The Gã, therefore, responded to the hegemonic threat with equal violence and annihilated all traces of the Portuguese presence.[26] By containing Portuguese ambitions, they not only asserted their determination to defend their independence but also showed a determination to carry out mutually beneficial commercial interaction with all European

[22] De Marees, *Description and Historical Account*, 85 n. 28. It would be instructive to compare the Portuguese version of the incident, if it exists. Artus of Dantzic related that the Portuguese built the fort 'against the will of the natives'; see Astley, *A New General Collection*, 568.

[23] De Marees, *Description and Historical Account*, 88–89; Astley, *A New General Collection*, 568–569; Blake, *European Beginnings*, 177.

[24] Blake, *European Beginnings*, 177.

[25] Blake, *European Beginnings*, 140.

[26] Quaye, *The Ga*, 29, and A. A. Amartey, *Omanye Aba* (Accra, 1991), 220–221, suggest that the king who led the enterprise against the Portuguese was probably Ni Ama, whose reign he dates to 1560–1585. However, it is not clear how he could be so certain about these dynastic dates. A problem is that, though Amartey dates Manpong Okai's reign to 1585–1610, there appears to be evidence that this king was murdered in January 1642. See the Furley Collection at the University of Ghana, N3 1639–1635, Ruyehaver to Count Maurite and Council, Brazil, 1 February 1643. See also Quaye, *The Ga*, 35.

nations that were inclined towards free trade. Indeed, irrespective of Portuguese attempts to exclude competition, the Gã state was a site of intense commercial interaction, where English and other interlopers plied there trades. In fact, several European nations yearned to establish fortified settlements and trade relations within the Gã territory, which was attractive to them for several reasons.

The first reason was the advantageous coastal location, as it made the territory accessible to the maritime trade. It was easy to reach by boat from the other forts to the west and by the regional trade roads. Because of its accessibility, the Gã coast superseded nearby coastal trading centres in Agona (Augwina) and Effutu territories, from where 'the trade is now removed to Akra'. Before then, 'Akra-Blacks', it was reported, 'came down this [Agona and Effutu] coast to traffic, when they hear [sic] of ships that have good cargos'. [27] In addition, several trade routes connected the Gã market to the key gold- and slave-producing Akan in the interior. One route went through Akuapim and Krobo territories and eventually went along the Volta River through Kwahu (Kwawu) to Atebubu to Salaga (where the famous slave market was located). Another went northwards through New Dwaben (Koforidua) and Akyem territories, and linked them to the eastern north route at Kwahu. A coastal route went from Accra through Effutu and Fante territories in a northwesterly direction to Asante's territory through Prasu.[28] According to Edward Reynolds, the routes to the coast provided communication for the territories they traversed and for the European settlements on the coast: 'The commercial significance of these routes is underlined by the fact that most of them went through the rich gold mining districts … to the areas with heavy concentration of European forts. European goods as well as indigenous produce penetrated the interior markets along these routes'.[29] Many of the important trade routes started or ended in the Gã area because the leadership saw an opportunity to mediate in and gain economic advantage from the lucrative trade in goods that they themselves did not produce.

The second reason for the Gã territory's attractiveness to Europeans was that gold and slaves, much sought after by the Europeans, were plentiful in the Gã markets, where they were

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[27] Astley, *A New General Collection*, 614–615.

[28] Ghana Public Records and Archives Administration Department (PRAAD) SC6/26, 'Despatch from Governor Sir W. Brandford Griffith, forwarding a Memorial from Merchants, Agents, and Traders of the Gold Coast Colony, with Observations and the Secretary of State's Reply', London, November 1893: 8. For a description of Gold Coast trade routes, see Edward Reynolds, *Trade and Economic Change on the Gold Coast, 1807–1874* (London: Longman, 1974), 27.

[29] Reynolds, *Trade and Economic Change*, 27. For the trade in gold, see Ivor Wilks, *Forests of Gold: Essays on the Akan and the Kingdom* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1993), 2–32.

traded for European merchandise.[30] The Dutch merchant Willem Bosman noted that in the Gã area 'alone sometimes more gold is received than on the whole coast besides', though the flow of the commodity could have sometimes been reduced due to the Akyem-Akwamu rivalry for supremacy.[31] There is no evidence that Gã territory possessed any gold mines, but botanist Paul Erdmann Isert observed people panning for the metal on the coast, noting that 'this system produces only a little gold at Akra' and is carried out mostly by women, who, after a whole day panning, can 'collect at the most gold worth one *Reichsthaler*'.[32] The gold that was traded in Gã markets came from the gold mines of northern neighbours of the Gã state, notably Akyem, Kwawu (Quahoe), and Asante. In fact, Akyem was the source of most of the gold, 'which is very fine', that came to 'Akkara, and thence to the western forts on the coast'.[33] According to Isert, 'in the golden age the Europeans of Akra could trade with the Akims to the value of more than a thousand *thaler* in one week'.[34]

Bosman satisfies the curiosity of the enquiring mind that may be wondering why there were no overt clashes between the 'three companies' trading in the Gã area:

> It might be reasonably conjectured that the three several companies trading here, might be apt to clash with one another that it might be fatal to the whole commerce. But experience proves the contrary; for here is such great plenty of gold and slaves, that no one is in danger of wanting its share; and each is stocked with commodities, which the other hath not, which very often tends to the promotion of trade.[35] … The gold is brought to us from … Quahoe, which abounds with that metal … and its inhabitants go through Aquamboe to *Acra*, where they drive the greatest part of their trade.[36]

[30] Tilleman, *A Short and Simple Account*, 19: 'The wares traded … from *Assene* to *Tessie* [Teshi] are: bedsheets packed in chests, cotton cloth …, blue *Baftas, Zitsen,* and other colorful East Indian cottons; likewise gunpowder, guns, all manner of glass beads, iron, brass pans, pewter plates, flintstone, tankards, padlocks, knives, fish hooks, bells, old reblocked hats, blood coral, tallow, and corn brandy [and] other beverages'.

[31] Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description*, 69 (Letter V), 78 (Letter VI), 326.

[32] Isert, Letters on West Africa, 143.

[33] Astley, *A New General Collection*, 627.

[34] Isert, Letters on West Africa, 143.

[35] Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description*, 66–69.

[36] Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description*, 326.

Finally, a third reason behind the European desire to establish fortifications in Gã territory was the pragmatic attitude that the Gã adopted towards European trade. We have seen how they curtailed the monopolistic policy of the Portuguese from the mid-16th to the first decade of the 17th century. Their dealings with English, French, and other interloping European trade companies in the period suggest that they were aware that they could best promote their economic interests by maximising profits through free trade with all Europeans. In pursuance of this policy, they did not allow any European company to erect forts in their territory until the mid-17th century.

European fortresses and African sovereignty on the Gã littoral, 1550–1677

In the establishment stage of Gã-European commercial interaction, the Gã king and people were clearly the sovereign power. They chose which Europeans to trade with, and they decided, by treaty, which nations could establish forts and settlements in their territory.[37] On 18 August 1661, the King of 'Great Acra', Okãi Kwei or Okãi Koi (reigned ca. 1644–1677), signed the following 'treaty' with the 'King of Denmark and the Danish Africa Company':

> I, Kanckoy [Okãi Kwei], King of Great *Acra,* do hereby proclaim with this document … have been drawn up and signed by my own hand, for myself and all my successors, caboceers, and whosoever may head the government of Great Acra and serve as its leaders, whether on land or along the coast, that from this date on I do make settlement and once more for the present and in perpetuity, have sold Ozzou's [Osu] lands and coasts for a sum of 50 benda in kind to the noble Mr. Jost Cramer, Governor at Friedrichsborg in Guinea, in the name and on behalf of HRM of Denmark and his Noble Chartered Danish Africa Company, with which I am also sufficiently satisfied, subject to the following conditions: that the said Governor Cramer shall build for his King and his Noble Chartered Danish Africa Company a fortress and stone house at Ozzou … I further undertake to grant him all possible assistance, and there bonebons [?] also to help and protect the said

[37] For the history of how the European traders gained permission to establish posts and, later, forts, see Olfert Dapper, *Naukeurige beschrijvinge der Afrikaensche eylanden* (Amsterdam: Jacob van Meurs, 1676), 83; Barbot, *A Collection of Voyages*, 431; Tilleman, *A Short and Simple Account*, 95; and Lawrence, *Trade Castles and Forts*, 49, 199. See also Astley, *A New General Collection,* 567–569, for an account of the escapades of the Portuguese and the French on the coast of the 'Akkras'. The effort by African rulers to profit from inter-European commercial rivalry is also noted in George E. Brooks, *Eurafricans in Western Africa: Commerce, Social Status, Gender, and Religious Observances from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003), 82–84.

> Danish Company in Ozzou and in all other lands and coasts belonging to me by birth against all hostile attacks and nuisances, whether committed by the inhabitants and natives or other white nations, whosoever they might be. Thus, do I hereby transfer and surrender once again, free and without encumbrance, to the said Cramer for his principals, the right to use and employ as their property, at their will and pleasure, the whole area and rights in Ozzou in all perpetuity. And as further affirmation I have eaten the fetish[38] called Aquandoe to this effect in the presence of Ahen, son of the late King Hennequa of Fetu, who has been sent here to this end from Futu [= Fetu], and Jaan Claesen of Friedrichsborg, and in proof of this have signed three documents with my own hand and impressed them with my ring 'K' below. Given in Great Accra, the 18th of August, anno 1661, Kanckoy.[39]

With several nations officially entering the Gold Coast trade in the 17th century, the Gã attitude towards fortification building seems to have changed. They understood that allowing some competing European nations to build permanent fortifications could create stability and predictability in the flow of trade and profits. Otherwise, they risked losing their competitive advantage to neighbouring competing coastal states, which were also yearning for trade. Under different circumstances in the 16th century, they expelled the Portuguese, but the leadership now permitted the Dutch, English, and Danish trading companies, respectively, to build fortresses on their territory between 1649 and 1673. The Dutch, who moved their headquarters to São Jorge da Mina after expelling the Portuguese in 1637, built Fort Crevecoeur as an outpost in 1649–1650.[40] In fact, the Dutch established relations with the Gã much earlier, in 1611, when they gained permission, by means of a contract with the king of Accra on 30 August, to erect a fort. However, they failed in their attempt in 1649 to gain a monopoly over the trade in the Gã territory.[41] The English, who had their headquarters at Cape Coast, established Fort James as an outpost in 1673. The location and function of this fort within the English system

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[38] Isert, Letters on West Africa, 129. To 'eat fetish' means to 'swear' an oath 'in the presence of all the people' to ratify a treaty (of armistice, alliance, etc.). 'Eating fetish', then, is like signing a document in the presence of witnesses ('all the people') to bind one to a contractual obligation.

[39] Justesen, *Danish Sources*, 12–13. Some 50 'benda of gold was equivalent to 3,200 florins' (Nørregård, *Danish Settlements*, 43).

[40] In the late 17th century, the Dutch attempted to erect another fort at 'the Village Ponni [Kpone], at the end of the Gold Coast', and even though they brought a 'ship with building materials' they abandoned the project 'for fear the old King [of Akwamu] would too much impose on' them (Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description,* 66).

[41] Nørregård, *Danish Settlements,* 42.

of fortresses is described in the 'Accompt of the Limits & Trade for ye African Company' as a 'factory … for gold to be sent thence to Cabo-Corso'.[42] Forts Crevecoeur and James were located within a cannon shot of each other to the west of the Danish settlements. The Danes erected one castle and two other fortified places on the Gã littoral: Christiansborg Castle, their Gold Coast headquarters, was located at Osu in 1657/1661–1662.[43] They also built lodges in other Gã towns: Labadi (Lobodei) and Teshi (Thessing, Tassi, or Teschi in the records) in 1700 and Nungwa[44] (Little Ningo)[45] and Tema in 1734.[46] From there, they focused their operations leeward up to the Volta River.

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Figure 9.1: Kortnummer 337 29: Kort over de danske besiddelser i Guinea Tegnet i 1802, redigeret efter nyere opmålinger fra 1828, 1837 og 1838, tegnet af P. Thonning. [Reproduced by courtesy of H. M. the Queen's Reference Library, Copenhagen.]

Bosman described the positions, structures, and defences, and assesses their relative strengths. The three forts were in close proximity to one another, with the Dutch fort sandwiched between the Danish and the English ones. As physical structures, they were 'reckoned amongst the best forts on the coast'. As defensive structures, they were vulnerable: though they could hold their own against African attackers, they were less formidable against the guns of rival Europeans from land or sea. Bosman notes that the English and Dutch forts in Accra were 'within Cannon-shot' range of each other. The English Fort James 'is a well-built square fort, with four batteries'. The walls were high and thick, with the side facing the Dutch Fort Crevecoeur

[42] The UK National Archives, CO 268/1, ff. 8–10, 'The King Grants the Right to Trade in Africa, 1672' and CO 268/1, ff. 5–6: 'The Royal African Company Trades for Commodities along the West African Coast'. The digitalized version can be seen at the following web address: http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/.

[43] Christiansborg Castle has a complex history. The site on which it was erected appears to have been one of the most sought after on the entire Gold Coast. At one time or another in the 16th and 17th centuries, different nations were credited for having made an attempt to monopolise the site: the Portuguese (1578), the Swedes (1652), the Dutch (1661), and the English (under a mortgage agreement with Danes in 1685–1689, and through a direct purchase in 1850); and Akwamu, an African state (1693–1694, through capture). See Nørregård, *Danish Settlements*, 10; Lawrence, *Trade Castles and Forts*, 199; PRAAD, Adm. 5 April 310; Ghana, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, *Historic Christiansborg: A Brief Account of the History and Construction of the Christiansborg Castle, Accra, Ghana* (Accra, 1961), 3–4; Gold Coast Survey Department, *Atlas of the Gold Coast* (Accra, 1949), 20.

[44] Fort Augustenborg and Fort Friedensborg, respectively.

[45] European sources always referred to Nungua as 'Little Ningo'. The Gã or Dangme never did that. Probably, the Europeans confused Ningo (a Daŋme town) with Nungua or Nungwa, and sometimes labelled it 'Little Ningo'.

[46] Isert, *Letters on West Africa*, 151; Great Britain War Office, *Military Report of the Gold Coast, Ashanti and the Northern Territories* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1912), 68–69.

reinforced to withstand the guns of the latter. Its defences were otherwise meagre; it was 'meanly garrisoned' and equipped with 'twenty five pieces', the majority of which were 'small and slight'.[47] The Danish officer Erick Tilleman corroborates the meagre defences of Fort James, which was 'equipped with twenty-eight large and small cannons, a chief merchant, an assistant, a barber, a sergeant, a constable, a drummer, and twenty common soldiers, as well as the Christians' servants and some slaves. The *Negeri* here is called *Sioco* [Sokko/Soco/Tshoco],[48] which cannot muster more than sixty men with guns'.[49]

The Dutch Fort Crevecoeur 'is the largest of all three', but had thinner walls that could not withstand sustained pounding from the English fort. However, Crevecoeur did have better defences than its counterparts. It was equipped with 'twenty-eight cannons, a chief and an assistant merchant, two *assistants,* a barber, a sergeant, a corporal, three *Adelsburser,* a drummer, and twenty-four common soldiers, as well as their slaves and *Natureller* as servants'. It lay in the fishing village called '*Aprag* [*Apraŋ* / Little Accra], which can muster a good five hundred men with guns'. In 1692, a warehouse and accommodations for the merchant all built with Dutch material were added.[50] Nevertheless, the English and Dutch forts were 'about equal in strength',[51] and the latter was 'half a mile from Christiansburg'.[52]

The third fort, Christiansborg Castle, writes Bosman, 'is a square building, strengthened with four batteries, and to the best of my memory twenty guns. It appears very beautiful, and looks as if it were but one continued battery; as it is really in effect; for the roof being entirely flat, the cannon may conveniently be planted on all parts of it'. The 'village of Ursow (Osu) [which] could muster 300 men with guns for war' was underneath Christiansborg.[53] Bosman says it was 'exactly a cannon-shot' from the Dutch and the English forts and was the strongest of the three, being 'too strong for the united force' both forts combined. Yet, none of the three forts was strong against the forces of nature, which could wreak as much havoc on the forts

[47] Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description*, 67.

[48] Winsnes is probably wrong to suggest that 'Soko' is the same as 'Tshoco' or 'Tsɔkɔ'. She is clearly confusing Soko with Chorkor (Tsɔkɔ/Tshoco), a fishing village located to the west of 'Soko'. Soko is the original name of Ŋleshi / James Town before the erection of Fort James. In fact, currently there is a position of 'Queenmother of Soko' in James Town.

[49] Tilleman, *A Short and Simple Account*, 25. Erick Tilleman served as a lieutenant at Christiansborg Castle and later served as the Factor of the Danish possessions. He lived on the Gold Coast for a total of nine years from 1692 to 1698.

[50] Tilleman, *A Short and Simple Account*, 25.

[51] Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description*, 66.

[52] Isert, *Letters on West Africa*, 149–150.

[53] Tilleman, *A Short and Simple Account,* 26.

walls as cannons could. The tropical weather elements perpetually wore down the buildings by attrition, but, sometimes, thunder and earthquakes did more immediate damage. In the 1690s, 'the English fort at *Acra* was [so] thoroughly handled by the thunder, that its walls were left shattered with holes'.[54]

In terms of size, style, and defensive capabilities, the three fortresses stood in sharp contrast to the vernacular architecture of clay and thatch huts of the Gã landscape in which they were located. The intimidating outlook of the forts never translated into European political subjugation of the Gã state. In terms of location and power, 'though the English, Danes and we have forts here, yet our authority is very small, and confined within our own walls: So that the forts only serve to defend ourselves; for if we should make any attempts on the Negroes, they would certainly end in our Destruction',[55] as the Portuguese experienced in the 1550s.[56] Nørregård noted: 'True, the Africans had no means of conquering a fort of European construction; but they controlled the garrison's communications with the surrounding country, could cut off the Europeans' landward supplies, and thus could prevent their trade with the inhabitants of the country'.[57] There were occasions when powerful interior African potentates, seeking to gain either direct control of the trade or to assert their authority, occupied forts, albeit over short periods of time. During Akwamu rule over the Gã state (1677–1730), Asameni, a general of the Akwamu army, captured Christiansborg Castle, 'the strongest of the three' forts in the Gã state.[58]

Fort trade, intermediaries, and imperialists: The Gã and their Akan neighbours, 1677–1826

Generally, a cordial relationship existed between the host communities and the fort residents on the Gold Coast. In fact, the states and communities that hosted the forts and European

[54] Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description,* 66–69, 113–114.

[55] Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description*, 69.

[56] According to Blake, *European Beginnings*, 100–101, the Castilian chronicler Andrés Bernáldez (*Historia de los Reyes Católicos*, ch.vi) in 1513 and the English privateer Martin Frobisher [see Blake, note 2, p. 101] in the 1560s reported similar weaknesses vis-à-vis Portuguese defences on the Gold Coast in the 15th and 16th centuries. Portuguese power was limited to the walls of São Jorge da Mina. Particularly, Andrés Bernáldez noted that the Portuguese had no control over the Gold Coast 'save only for their trade in a fortress, which they have recently erected'. The Portuguese propensity to make enemies of their hosts and allies appeared to be legendary. Also see Tilleman's account of why and how the Fetu, former allies of the Portuguese, helped the Dutch to root out their commercial foes from São Jorge da Mina (Tilleman, *A Short and Simple Account*, 21–23).

[57] Nørregård, *Danish Settlements*, 5.

[58] Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description*, 66–69. The circumstances of this event have been described in sources and analysed in several scholarly works. See John Kwadwo Osei-Tutu and Victoria Ellen Smith (Ed.), *Shadows of Empire: New Perspectives on European Fortifications* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 148-150.

settlements were rarely a danger to the Europeans. An observant visitor to any of the remnants of the European forts in the Gã state and the Gold Coast in general will notice that the majority of the portholes and invariably large guns trained seawards. Only few and smaller gun holes pointed on the towns. One could also observe that the cannon balls for the landside guns were smaller, compared to those for the seaward guns. Clearly, the bigger threats to the European settlements were rival European navies and interlopers. In the Gã area, the forts and the Gã rulers observed mutual decorous relationship, and the latter by the terms of the Treaty of 1661 committed to defending the Danish forts and establishments against attacks from both African and European enemies. There were instances too when Gã women and children took refuge within the compounds of the forts when the men were out fighting enemies.[59]

As noted above, the pre-19th-century Gã economy was agricultural and the majority of Gã men and women were engaged in the production and/or sale of local items such as cloth, fish, salt, beads, pottery, grains, and fruits, in addition to various animal by-products. There was also small-scale gold and iron smiting.[60] However, trade with Europeans became the greatest source of income and wealth for the leadership. The Gã territory lacked the natural commodities and the slaves that Europeans required, but the Gã exploited their host position to the benefit of their entrepreneurs by restricting the access of non-Gã traders to the forts. It appears that a similar restrictive policy prevailed all along the Gold Coast. Blake noted that though the Europeans knew that the 'merchants, who sold the gold, brought it to the coast from the interior [they] sometimes found it difficult to persuade the coast tribes to give them through passage down to the shore'.[61] According to Nørregård, 'the Accra did not allow the traders coming from the interior to enter into direct trade with the foreign ships, thus they were assured of a substantial profit, often 100 percent or more'.[62] In addition, Gã leaders granted tax relief to local and neighbouring farmers and fishermen as a deliberate policy designed to lure trade away from competing coastal markets and bring it to Accra.[63]

Generally, the restrictions compelled non-Gã traders to confine their trading to the inland market at Abonse and use the services of Gã agents in the trade from the coastal forts to

[59] Justesen, *Danish Sources*; Nørregård, *Danish Settlements*, 80.
[60] Tilleman, *A Short and Simple Account*, 26; de Marees, *Description and Historical Account*, 262, 266–267.
[61] Blake, *European Beginnings*, 11.
[62] Nørregård, *Danish Settlements*, 44–45.
[63] De Marees, *Description and Historical Account*, 86–87; Barbot, *A Collection of Voyages*, 184; Astley, *A New General Collection*, 620.

Abonse. Clearly, this restrictive trade policy towards neighbouring kingdoms or states stood in stark contrast to the free trade policy towards the competing Europeans nations.

A major economic and social effect of the Gã monopolistic policy was the development of a class of wealthy and influential trading elite (*jarayelilɔi, niiatsɛmɛi/wealthy men)*, who came to build their commercial residences near the forts.[64] They were linguistically versatile, having learnt the languages of both the Europeans and the inland traders. In addition, their knowledge of the weights used in the trade made them skilled *negotiators* or intermediaries between traders from different cultural worlds.[65] The intermediaries or brokers were mainly males from influential families, and included chiefs (known as 'cabuceers').[66] Jean Barbot, a French merchant who made two voyages to the Guinea Coast in 1678–1679 and 1681–1682, summed up the economic condition of the Gã people at that time as follows: 'The King and Chief Blacks were, in my time, very rich in slaves and gold, through the vast trade the natives drove with the Europeans on the coast, and the neighbouring nations up country. These people in their flourishing peaceful times possess more wealth than most of those before spoken of put together'.[67] The ruling class also profited from granting building rights to the Europeans, for which they received monthly rents. For instance, each of the forts paid 32 rdl. Guinean currency (Gc)[68] in *custom* to the Gã king, and 'a certain amount' to each cabuseer or highest-ranking official of the state each month.[69] The payment of monthly or yearly tribute was confirmation of recognition of the sovereignty of the Gã king and the Gã territory.[70] Though few influential males and families dominated internal economic space, European observers recounted that

[64] See Von Hesse, *Euro-Africans*.

[65] Tilleman, *A Short and Simple Account*, 29–30, suggested that those who did the trade, *negotien* ('middlemen'), often cheated the local traders on whose behalf they were negotiating because of the latter's disabilities in the European languages and in the measures used. See also Ray A. Kea, *Settlement, Trade, and Polities in the Seventeenth-Century Gold Coast* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 171–172; and Quaye, *The Ga*, 75–76.

[66] De Marees, *Description and Historical Account*, 262, 266–267; Isert, *Letters on West Africa*, 134, 142–143; Barbot cited in Acquah, *Accra Survey*, 16–17; Dickson, 'Trade Patterns', 68.

[67] Barbot, quoted in Astley, *A New General Collection*, 435–436. See also Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description*, 70; and Astley, *A New General Collection*, 619.

[68] Danish currency during the Atlantic trade.

[69] Tilleman, *A Short and Simple Account*, 28.

[70] For Asante claims to sovereignty over Elmina and its other coastal provinces by possession of a tribute agreement, see Yarak, 'The "Elmina Note"', 363–382.

many more people were involved and benefitted from the economic prosperity created by the trade.[71]

The general prosperity enjoyed by the Gã peoples from the 16th to mid-17th centuries appears to have enhanced and, consequently, extended the kingdom's political influence in neighbouring territories, including Akwamu in the north, Breku (Obutu) in the west, and the Daŋme towns up to the banks of the Volta River.[72] There was also a visible development in Gã leadership culture towards secularism, involving a change from a priest-led polity to a secular leadership. This change clearly came in response to the secular needs of a society that had become increasingly commercially oriented and urbanised because of European trade.[73] In addition to being business-minded, Gã political leaders seemed to have become more bellicose than they had ever been, as can be illustrated by the reprisals they took against the Portuguese in 1576.

'So ended the mighty kingdom of the Accra':[74] Gã and its neighbours, 1677–1826

Generally, 1677–1826 was a turbulent period in the development of Gã state society; it was characterised by the successive rule of three imperial Akan states: Akwamu, Akyem, and Asante. However, as will be explained presently, the defining events of the period occurred from 1677 to 1680, when the kingdom succumbed to the coastward expansion drive of Akwamu. The three Akan states were the main suppliers of the gold and slaves that sustained the Atlantic trade and had therefore grown particularly wealthy and powerful in the 17th century. Akwamu rule lasted from 1677 to 1730, and it was supplanted by Akyem rule from 1730 to 1742 and then Asante rule from 1742 to 1826. Several printed sources and scholarly

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[71] Isert, *Letters on West Africa*, 134, 142–143; Barbot cited in Acquah, *Accra Survey*, 16–17; Dickson, 'Trade Patterns', 68.

[72] Tilleman, *A Short and Simple Account*, 28; and Nørregård, *Danish Settlements*, 45.

[73] The transition process differed from town to town. In Labadi, for instance, secular authority was delegated to a subordinate of the priest-leader. In other places, the priest assumed the secular position and relinquished the priesthood to a family member or to any suitable person from the town. Still in other places, secular leadership appeared to have been 'seized' by military leaders. See Quaye, *The Ga*, 38–41. Gã towns appear to have developed urban characteristics long before the destruction of the kingdom. See Tilleman, *A Short and Simple Account*, 30; Ozanne, 'Notes', 66ff.; Claire Robertson, *Sharing the Same Bowl: A Socioeconomic History of Women and Class in Accra, Ghana* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 1. Reindorf, *History of the Gold Coast and Asante* (1895) (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 2007), 113–114, 117; and Margaret J. Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Gã People* (London: Oxford University Press), 4, hold that the process began in the late 17th century. See also Rømer, *A Reliable Account*, 49; and Quaye, *The Ga*, 260–261.

[74] Nørregård, *Danish Settlements*, 45.

works have adequately described the origins of the imperial motives of the Akan states.[75] The relevant questions here are as follows: Why the coast? How did the Gã littoral in particular become an object of the hegemonic gaze of the competing Akan powers from the 17th century to early 19th century? Why were the European forts not a deterrent against Akan invading forces? What immediate impact did the wars have on Gã state and society?

Control over the trade in commodities and firearms was an important motive for expansion of the Akan states. However, the rise of Akwamu, Akyem, and Asante successively as great powers in the Gold Coast region and, in the case of Asante, within parts of West Africa and the related struggles among them for supremacy were fundamentally imperial projects.[76] The goal was territorial expansion and, ultimately, economic growth: control over the trade in firearms and slaves. The impact, however, of these imperial subjugations on the Gã socio-political and cultural spheres are debatable.[77] Importantly, the imperial competitions thrived on the spirit of rivalry, which was maintained through alliance systems.[78] They were driven by the need for direct access to imported European weapons. Those Akan states were the main suppliers of the slaves, gold, and other commodities that sustained the Atlantic trade. The wealth accumulated over decades provided a strong economic base that helped to sustain the military imperatives of the imperial projects. Indeed, Akwamu developed from a relatively small inland state in 1640 into a 'coastal and imperial power' whose territorial extent encompassed the Gã-Dãŋme area by 1679 and Aŋlo, Popo, and Whydah by 1710 before crimping back to a small state along the Volta River.[79] The territorial extent of 'imperial Akyem' stretched to the western banks of the Volta River and included Gã-Dãŋme from 1730

[75] For Akwamu, see Ivor Wilks, 'The Rise of the Akwamu Empire, 1650–1710', *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 3 (1957): 25–62 and *Akwamu, 1640–1750: A Study of the Rise and Fall of a West African Empire* (Trondheim: Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 2001). For Akyem, see Wilks, *Akwamu, 1640–1750*, 91–103; Robert Addo-Fening, *Akyem Abuakwa, 1700–1943: From Ofori Panin to Sir Ofori Atta* (Trondheim: Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 1997); Robert Addo-Fening et al., *Akyem Abuakwa and the Politics of the Inter-war Period in Ghana* (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 1975); Kofi Affrifah, *The Akyem Factor in Ghana's History, 1700–1875* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 2000). For Asante, see Festus A. Aboagye, *Indigenous African Warfare: Its Concept and Art in the Gold Coast, Asante and the Northern Territories up to Early 1900* (Accra: Sedco, 2010); Larry Yarak, *Asante and the Dutch, 1744–1873* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); Thomas E. Bowdich, *Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee, with a Statistical Account of that Kingdom, and Geographical Notices of Other Parts of the Interior of Africa* (London: James Murray, 1819), 228–251; and A: B. Ellis, *The Tshi-speaking Peoples of the Gold Coast of West Africa* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1887).

[76] Kwame Arhin, 'The Structure of Greater Asante, 1700–1824', *Journal of African History* 8 (1967): 65–85.

[77] See Osei-Tutu, *The Asafoi*; and Quaye, *The Ga*, for the nature of Akan control.

[78] Aboagye, *Indigenous African Warfare*, 35, 103, 319, 388, 427, 451.

[79] Wilks, *Akwamu*, *1640–1750*, 1–35. See Maps 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 (pp. xv, xvii, and xix).

to 1742.[80] Territorially, the Greater Asante in the early 19th century was the most extensive of the three, encompassing almost the entire territorial space of present-day Ghana and extending to parts of Togo in the east and Côte d'Ivoire in the west. It became the dominant coastal power by the 1810s,[81] and it was the hegemon over the Gã state from 1742 to 1826.[82]

The quest for European firearms, which they needed to prosecute their wars of expansion, drove them to direct their hegemonic gaze towards the seaboard. The mediatory role of the Gã kingdom in the trade and its propensity to block the trade roads in order to enforce their monopoly was a major obstacle to the economic, military, and political imperatives of the Akan states.[83] Thus, the conquest of the Gã and other coastal states, while part of the larger expansion projects of the three Akan powers, were also a result of Akan imperial rivalry fuelled by an intense desire to gain control over firearms that assured greater firepower for their armies. Relatively, then, though the coastal states hosted the trade forts, they did not possess the economic resources to acquire the tools and raise large armies to wage a sustained war against the invaders from the north. In all likelihood, they were more inclined towards 'defensive warfare' than towards aggressive expansion.[84]

Significantly, the presence of the three forts on the Accra littoral did not guarantee protection against the invading Akan forces. As noted above, the forts' defences were weak and the Europeans in them were vulnerable to attack and wisely avoided provoking conflict with the competing African potentates. Moreover, even the combined force of the sparsely garrisoned forts could not have provided adequate defences against the invaders if they felt inclined to do so. Above all, it made no economic sense for the Europeans to antagonise the powers that were the real source of their trade goods, especially so when the forts and the European trade enclaves they anchored were not targets of conquest. Similarly, it made no sense – politically, militarily, and economically – for the invading powers to defeat their own imperial motives by attacking the providers of the imported tools that they needed to realise

[80] See Affrifah, *The Akyem Factor*, 52–70. See Map 3 (p. 65) and Map 4 (p. 65).

[81] Asante emerged as a power after the unification of several small states in 1670. It became the dominant Akan power following the defeat of Denkyira in 1701. See Ivor Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Centur*y (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Tom C. McCaskie, *State and Society in Pre-colonial Asante* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and Great Britain War Office, *Military Report*, 68–69.

[82] For the territorial extent of the Asante Empire in the 19th century, see Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century*, 62; and Thomas J. Lewin, *Asante before the British: The Prempeh Years, 1875–1900* (Lawrence: The Regent Press of Kansas, 1978), 13.

[83] Great Britain War Office, *Military Report*, 47; Acquah, *Accra Survey*, 16–17.

[84] Reindorf, *History of the Gold Coast*, 122, 148, 150.

their expansionist ambitions. In any case, the terms of the 1661 treaty did not enjoin the Danes (or other Europeans) to intervene militarily in inter-state conflicts and wars on the Gold Coast.[85] Rather, Gã Maŋtsɛ Okãi Kwei in the treaty undertook to protect European interests against attack. In recounting the Asante invasion of 1826, Gã historian Carl Reindorf indicated that, some *mãŋtsɛmɛi* understood that 'Osei Yaw [Asantehene] never meant to fight the Danes or the English, but the Akras, and we are the Akras'.[86] Thus, the European establishments conveniently recognised the sovereign rights of the Akwamu, the Akyem, and eventually the Asante, and transferred tribute and rent payments to them.[87] Paradoxically, European economic interests based in the forts combined conveniently with the imperial ambitions of the Akan states to seal the political and economic fate of the Gã kingdom. As Nørregård put it: 'So ended the mighty kingdom of the Accra, which, because of the trade, between the European and the Africans, to the interior, had reached such a high level of prosperity'.[88]

Cosmopolitan conundrums: Migration and urbanisation

The suggestion so far is that the siting on the littoral of three rival European commercial emporia and the parallel imperial struggle among three Akan states fundamentally influenced the organisation of state and society in the Gã area. The Akwamu conquest in 1680 dealt an immediate disrupting blow to the centralised socio-political and spatial order. This singular event tilted the balance of power between the Gã interior and the coast in favour of the three *ŋshɔnãã mãjii* (coastal towns), particularly 'Little Akkara' [*Kinka*], 'Soko' [*Ŋleshi*], and 'Orsaky' [Osu], and affected the settlement patterns, as much of the territory was laid 'waste and [became] uninhabited'.[89] This development is illustrated by highlighting changes in migration trends and population composition, and settlement patterns, as well as trends towards urbanisation.

The invasions from 1677 created a wave of refugees and led to the dispersal of the ruling class. Ashãŋmɔ (Ashangmo), who succeeded Okãi Kwei as king, could not stem the invasions and subsequently fled with a large following eastwards to Anɛxɔ (Aneho/Little

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[85] Justesen, *Danish Sources*, 12–13.

[86] Reindorf, *History of the Gold Coast*, 203.

[87] The Dutch were particularly committed to Asante through diplomatic and commercial relations established in the early 18th century. See Yarak, *Asante and the Dutch*.

[88] Nørregård, *Danish Settlements*, 45.

[89] Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description*, 244, 332.

Popo), from where the Gã claim to have originally migrated to the Accra plains.[90] A second group of internal refugees settled in the coastal villages, where they endeavoured to replicate pre-invasion political structures under the 'sovereignty of the Akwamu',[91] and later that of Akyem and Asante. Following these developments, the littoral fishing settlements, which were already spiritual centres and sites of the European fort trade, gained additional prestige as the political and economic centres of (a weakened) Gã state from 1680.

This change can be reconstructed by examining population and settlement patterns in the Gã state from the late 17th to the late 19th centuries. Before the official British colonial census of the Gold Coast in 1891, demographic and population data on the Gã state generally, and Accra and Osu in particular, was generally speculative and unreliable.[92] Most early impressions of demography, urbanism, and population, and settlement patterns could be gleaned from a number of European travel accounts from the late 17th to the 19th centuries. However, many of these early European impressions were superficial, sketchy, and sometimes obviously exaggerated. Thus, we ought to compare the data from contemporary travel accounts, and use the process of triangulation – reading the data from these sources against oral sources, ethnographic data, and archaeological evidence from the Accra plains – to corroborate their accuracy. These sources show that, when Ayawaso was the political and economic hub, the major population centres were located inland. Urban development was slow and based almost exclusively on the natural development of the indigenous population. Two Danish sources in the 17th and 18th centuries, respectively, report that '[Great] Acara' was up to 'two miles further inland where the mountains begin' and that it was 'full of towns and people everywhere'.[93] This claim was much later corroborated in Margaret J. Field's ethnographic study of Gã social institutions that was published in 1940, which, based on oral evidence, reported that 14 major inland population centres existed in the Gã kingdom.[94]

Studies of urban growth on the littoral in the post-Ayawaso period identify two phases of urbanisation: the first phase from 1677 to about 1877 and the second ('modern') phase from 1877 onwards. The second phase was under British rule and began with the transfer of the

[90] Significantly, Anɛxɔ in Popo eventually came under Akwamu control around 1702 to 1710. See Wilks, *Akwamu, 1640-1750*, Map 6 and Map 7 (p. xvii). See also Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description*, 332.

[91] Nørregård, *Danish Settlements*, 45.

[92] See E.V.T Engmann, *Population of Ghana, 1850–1960* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1986), 48, 148.

[93] Tilleman, *A Short and Simple Account*, 28–30. See also Rømer, *A Reliable Account*, 115 (Rømer was a Danish trader and official at Christiansborg from 1739 to 1750). See also Barbot, *A Collection of Voyages*, 181.

[94] Field, *Social Organization*, 86 (Diagram VI).

colonial capital from Cape Coast to Accra.[95] However, this periodisation seems not to consider urbanisation as a historical process. We contend that, historically, the Gã littoral had experienced a continuous process of urbanisation since the 1670s, even though in terms of physical changes and migration the process accelerated markedly under British colonial rule (1877–1957) due to the concentration of government functions in Accra and Osu and due to the fact that the local governments and local planning mechanisms regulated the process.

Nevertheless, our concern here is to trace the development from 1680 to the mid-19th century, looking at the dynamic interaction between population growth and migration, physical changes, and features of cosmopolitanism.

The physical expansion of Accra and its 'satellite Christiansborg'[96] is described in the travel accounts from the 16th century to the early 20th century. From their origins as 'small homogeneous fishing village[s]',[97] these towns grew into a contiguous and heterogeneous modern city by the end of the 19th century. Barbot, in the late 17th century, described Little Akkara [*Kinkã*], Soko [*Ŋleshi*], and Orsaky [Osu] as 'reckoned among the best on the coast'.[98] In the European sources, these places were referred to as James Town, Dutch Accra / Ussher Town, and Christiansborg / Danish Accra to denote the respective geographical spheres of European influence by virtue of the established fortified commercial entrepôts.

According to Barbot, 'Soko consists of about a hundred scattering houses, it having been enlarged in 1692 by the accession of many families who retired hither from Little Akkra, when it was destroyed by the Blacks of Aquambo; so that the year following, it became one of the finest, and largest, on the Gold Coast'.[99] Henry Stanley in 1873–1874 noted that Accra 'was straggled for nearly a mile on the edge of a terrace overlooking the beach' and that the dwellings consisted of 'pretentious, whitewashed', and 'airy European houses' sandwiched by 'the clay-brown huts … of the town of native[s]. Some three miles to the east … is the village of Christianburg [sic], a picturesque mass of whitewashed buildings, consisting of a ruined

[95] Quarcoopome, *The Impact of Urbanisation*, 52–87. For a general description of the settlement patterns and urban networks on the Gold Coast generally, see Kea, *Settlement, Trade, and Polities*, 9–94; Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, *The History of African Cities South of the Sahara: From the Origins to Colonization*, trans. Mara Baker (Princeton: Marcus Wiener Publishers, 2005), 153–154; and Bill Freund, *The African City: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 51, 72–73.

[96] Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa* (1897) (eBooks@Adelaide: The University of Adelaide Library, 2012, https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/k/kingsley/mary/west/), 22–23.

[97] Acquah, *Accra Survey*, 16–17.

[98] Barbot, *A Collection of Voyages*, 181.

[99] Barbot, *A Collection of Voyages*, 181.

castle, a ruined Martello tower, and another large establishment of the enterprising Basle Mission'.[100] He goes on to say that 'the huts of the natives have been established anywhere, without regard to order or to any symmetrical arrangement'. From the top of the three-story house of Mr. Croker, the agent of the mercantile house of F. and A. Swanzy Brothers, one could view of the physical extent of the towns. According to one description of the view from this vantage point,

> the outlook from the windows of the second story takes in, perhaps, a hundred of these thatched roofs … From the third story, however, the eyes are delighted with views of sea, shipping in the roadstead, the area of the ill-planned town, the houses of the European residents, and a vast stretch of plain country, covered with cactus, and gums, and thorns, and grass, and a winding lagoon of grey-green water.[101]

From Mary Kingsley's perspective, Accra in 1893 'is one of the five West Coast towns that look well from the sea' with 'oriental type' beauty. 'Fort St. James on the left and Christiansborg Castle on the right' give 'a certain air of balance and strength to the town'. Without them, Accra 'would be but a poor and flimsy [place], for the rest of it is a mass of rubbishy mud and palm-leaf huts, and corrugated iron dwellings for the Europeans'.[102] The first part of the road to 'Christiansborg from Accra runs parallel to the sea, [and] forms the main street of Accra'. After the 'native houses or huts' come the Hausa lines, a few European houses, and the cathedral, and, when nearly into Christiansborg, a cemetery on either side of the road.[103] A British medical officer in 1903 sketches the built-up area of the area during the early phase of British colonial rule in 1903: 'There existed the small densely populated districts of Ussher Town, James Town and Christiansborg, and the government offices and residences at Victoriaborg'.[104]

The expansion reflected the increasing population of these towns. However, until the 1890s population and demographic estimates on Accra-Osu and the Gold Coast in general from

[100] Henry Stanley, *Coomassie and Magdala: The Story of Two British Campaigns in Africa* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1874), 76–77; Acquah, *Accra Survey*, 27.
[101] Stanley, *Coomassie and Magdala*, 79.
[102] Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, 22–23.
[103] Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, 24.
[104] Cited in Acquah, *Accra Survey*, 28.

European sources were sketchy and exaggerated. For instance, Ludewig Ferdinand Rømer (resident at Christiansborg from 1739 to 1750) claimed that 'about millions of people once [lived] on the Accra coast'.[105] In 1836, Wulff Joseph Wulff, a Danish-Jewish official resident on the Gold Coast, speculated that 'many hundred perhaps thousands of people live in the town' of Osu.[106] However, though archaeological evidence[107] supports the idea of a relatively well populated Accra and Osu, the specific claims of the European sources remain unsubstantiated. The colonial censuses from 1891 give a more reliable picture. The first official census in 1891 put the population of Accra (Kinkã, Ŋleshi, and Osu) at 19,999 and that of the entire Gã-speaking region at 91,612.[108] In 1897, the British colonial official George MacDonald reported that Accra and Christiansborg had 20,000 inhabitants, and that the 'whole Ga [*sic*] country' had 'some 100,000' people.[109] MacDonald's estimate shows that the Gã interior was repopulated due to the relative peace that prevailed in the 19th century following the decisive overthrow of Asante rule by combined African and British forces in 1826.

The increase in the population in the littoral towns was due to the general inflow of refugees and other migrants. The first wave of Gã internal refugees, including the fleeing political elite, settled in the coastal towns,[110] where they encountered an already established and influential migrant community which the English had brought from Lagos (Benin region, now Nigeria) as a workforce during the erection of Fort James.[111] The Akwamu, and later Akyem and Asante, conquests opened up the fort trade in Accra and Osu for participation by their own traders. Even though Akwamu destroyed Little Akkra, which was the middlemost of the maritime Gã villages in 1692,[112] Akan rule generally appeared to be socially benign. In

[105] Ludewig Ferdinand Rømer, *A Reliable Account of the Coast of Guinea* (1760). Translated and edited by Selena Axelrod Winsnes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 115.

[106] Selena Axelrod Winsnes, *Wulff Joseph Wulff: A Danish Jew in West Africa*, African Series 6 (Trondheim: Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 2004), 64-65.

[107] Ozanne, 'Notes', 66.

[108] Acquah, *Accra Survey*, 30–31; Great Britain War Office, *Report: Colony of the Gold Coast and Ashanti* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1904), 20. Governor Griffith reported that 'the total population of the Gold Coast in 1891 was 1.5 million'. See PRAAD SC6/26, 'Dispatch from Governor Sir W. Brandford Griffith, Forwarding a Memorial from Merchants, Agents, and Traders of the Gold Coast Colony, with Observations and the Secretary of State's Reply', London, November 1893: 82.

[109] George MacDonald, *The Gold Coast Past and Present: A Short Description of the Country and its People* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1898), 206. MacDonald was the Director of Education of the Gold Coast, Inspector of Schools, a member of the Board of Education, and Manager of Government Schools. See also Nørregård, *Danish Settlements*, 44.

[110] Quarcoopome, *The Impact of Urbanisation*, 5.

[111] PRAAD, Adm. 11 January 1673, Maxwell Commission of Inquiry (MCI), Notes, 10 October 1907: 25.

[112] Barbot, *A Collection of Voyages*, 181.

fact, there was no attempt to suppress the Gã commercial intermediaries that dominated the coastal trade prior to 1680. Rather, the new overlords encouraged their own class of traders and merchants to set up their businesses and compete for dominance over the trade. The stature of Accra and Osu was further enhanced by the establishment of commercial and diplomatic quarters by Akwamu and Asante during their respective periods of control. Akwamu established *Otublohum* (Otu's Quarters) near Fort Crevecoeur, and Asante established *Ashante Blohum* (Asante Quarters)[113] near Christiansborg Castle, where their viceroys and descendants resided. In addition, these towns, which already had a substantial number of European residents and their descendants (with African mothers), received migrants from other parts of the Gold Coast and the West African region, as well as diaspora African returnees, particularly from Brazil, who relocated to Accra to establish their own quarters, *Tabon*,[114] among the Gã *akutsei* (sing., *akutso*) or quarters. By the late 19th century, Accra had developed a spatial layout that distinguished three maritime towns or the 'old core' Gã settlements from the European section known as 'Victoriaborg' and the predominantly Hausa Muslim *Sabon Zongo* (New Zongo or new strangers' settlement).[115]

This population flow and mix made Accra and Osu some of the most ethnically and racially heterogeneous and cosmopolitan settlements in West Africa. A reliable perspective on the ethnic and racial composition of Accra and Osu can be gained from the 1891 census, which disaggregated the population according to race and ethnic origins. The census lists only racial categories: there were 19,417 Blacks, 68 Whites, and 514 Euro-Africans, and in 1901 there were 17,796 Blacks and 96 Whites. However, the census data of 1948, while showing a marked

[113] According to Gã ethno-history, *Asante Blohum* was established as the *akutso* of the *Mãŋkralo*, who was the trade broker with the Danes and therefore the second-highest office in all the towns from Osu to Tema. Many Asante traders settled there, and some of them intermarried with established indigenous families there. An example of a family of Asante origin is Masoshwɛ We (anglicised as 'Masoperh'). The original Osu Doku settlers in Osu separated into two *akutsei*, Kinkãwe and Amãntrã. The royal quarter or Amãntrã was renamed Kinkãwe (Household of Kinkã / Dutch Accra). The royal house relocated to the vicinity of the Shrine of *Dadebu* (close to the modern Accra Sports Stadium), which had been occupied by the Dutch and their Kinkã allies in the conflict between Osu and Kinkã in 1729–1730. See Justesen, *Danish Sources*, 404, for the document '16 May 1730, Gov. Wærøe et al., Christiansborg, to the Directors of the West India and Guinea Company, Copenhagen'. See also Henry Nii-Adziri Wellington, *Stones Tell Stories at Osu: Memories of a Host Community of the Danish Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade* (Accra: Sub-Saharan African Publishers, 2011); Field, *Religion and Medicine*, 197.

[114] The Tabon community members in Otublohum *akutso* (within Kinkã) used their 'strategic identification' with Brazil to reinforce their ethnic assertiveness. SCT 2/6/5, PRAAD, Accra, SCT 2/6/5, Jemima Nassu and others v the Basel Mission and another, 10 July 1915. See Kwame Essien, '*A abertura da casa Brasil*: A History of the *Tabom* people, Part I', in Kwesi Prah (ed.), *Back to Africa*, Vol. 1: *Afro-Brazilian Returnees and their Communities* (Cape Town: Center for Advanced Studies of African Society, 2009), 174–186; Alcione M. Amos and Ebenezer Ayesu, ''I am Brazilian': History of the Tabon, Afro-Braziliansin Accra', *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, New Series, No. 6 (2002), 35-58.

[115] *Zongo* is Hausa for 'strangers' quarters'. See Deborah Pellow, 'New Spaces in Accra: Transnational Houses', *City and Society* 25 (2003): 59–96.

increase in population through migration, also reveals that people of African origin had come to Accra and Osu from all parts of Ghana: in fact, the data showed that the migrants in Accra represented 62 of the 64 ethnic groups in Ghana. Other African groups came from other parts of West Africa,[116] and non-African migrants mainly consisted of Europeans,[117] Arabs, Asians,[118] and Americans.[119]

This ethnic and racial composition of Accra and Osu is certainly the result of the centuries of migratory flows outlined above. Parallel to these developments were occupational changes: whereas indigenous occupations in agriculture and fishing declined in importance, commerce (markets and retail trade) gained ascendancy.[120] A characteristic of this occupational change was the commercialisation of private residences. Mary Kingsley, the British ethnographic and scientific writer, wrote that almost every one of the native houses or huts at the time of her visit was a 'shop', and that these shops 'were of the store nature, each after his kind, and seem homogeneously stocked with tin pans, loud-patterned basins, iron pots, a few rolls of cloth and bottles of American rum'.[121] George MacDonald, Director of Education of the Gold Coast in the late 19th century, reported that there were 'good carpenters and masons … while many are employed in petty trading. Education is making rapid strides, and there is no lack of native clerks for mercantile and official work'.[122]

'Ablekuma aba kuma wɔ': Forts and identity politics

It is remarkable that, despite the massive inflow of African and non-African migrants, there were no reports of any serious anti-foreigner sentiments and inter-ethnic conflicts in the Gã area during this period.[123] One reason for this could be that in the immediate aftermath of the fall of Ayawaso, which led to rule by successive Akan imperial states (1680–1826), there was no centralised Gã authority or state to regulate immigration in the same way as the Ayawaso

[116] Francophone West Africa, Liberia, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone.
[117] British, Swiss, French, Germans, Italians, Greeks, Dutch, Austrians, Bulgarians, Danes, Swedes, and Turks.
[118] Lebanese, Syrians, and Indians.
[119] Acquah, *Accra Survey*, 30–45; Field, *Social Organization*, 81, 208, 209.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, 22–23.
[122] MacDonald, *The Gold Coast Past and Present*, 206. MacDonald was also Inspector of Schools, a member of the Board of Education, and Manager of Government Schools.
[123] To be sure, there have nevertheless been increasing tensions about land rights and ownership because, with increased immigration and the consequent demand for building spaces and plots, land became a contested economic resource from the second half of the 20th century. Generally, the land tensions have had little or no ethnic undertones.

had done. Indeed, the respective Akan rulers pursued a policy that opened up the Gã area to their own people for trade and settlement during this period. Nevertheless, since colonisation was not the principal motive for the successive Akan powers, their rule appeared to be generally benign towards the remnant Gã political elite. However, disunity among the latter posed difficulties for attempts to replicate the Ayawaso-type centralised state. As a result, the Gã state that finally threw off Akan rule in 1826 assumed a semi-confederate nature, as it was plagued by disagreements about hierarchy. Under the circumstances, there was no coordinated policy on immigration, even if the political leadership did see a need for one.

However, there is also the philosophy of '*Ablekuma aba kuma wɔ*' to consider as a plausible explanation for the positive attitude towards immigrants and strangers. Literally translated, it means, 'May strangers settle among us and help us to develop the nation',[124] which underscores the cosmopolitan character of the Gã world view. Considered in the context of the restrictive policies during the Ayawaso period, this invitational ethos was apparently not meant to translate into an open immigration policy. It was probably directed towards influential non-Gã persons that could provide services – military, economic or spiritual – that furthered the interest of the state and its people. Through the provision of such services, foreigners or strangers (*gbɔi*, singular *gbɔ*) could be incorporated into clan lineages and become Gã 'citizens' by virtue of civic duty, as opposed to becoming '*Gã Krɔŋŋ*' ('pure Gã'). The prospects for 'strangers' acquiring Gã identity are emphasised in another aphorism, '*Ga sɛ gbɛ dzi gbɛ*', which stresses the primacy of Gã culture and traditions. In other words, to be accepted as a Gã person a 'stranger' must be fully immersed in the 'Gã way' through social and cultural integration. Marriage into an influential family was perhaps the most effective path to integration.[125] Whereas '*Gã Krɔŋŋ*' identity was a definition of identity based on primordial criteria, the acquisition of Gã identity through civic duty and marriage underscored a constructionist view of identity, which could be activated for political purposes.

[124] See Field, *Religion and Medicine* , 2. A pseudonymous newspaper columnist explains the aphorism as: 'May an *Affluent* or Well-disposed Stranger Abide or Lodge with Us', See Letter by Gãnyobi, 'The Motto of the *Gã-mei*', *The Gold Coast Independent*, 8 December 1928, 1560.

[125] Margaret Field reports an example of incorporation using the story of Adzeite Aʃari to illustrate this possibility. The consensus narrative is that Aʃari, a 'foreigner' and probably a refugee from Akwamu, came to live with Adzeite, who combined the office of *wulɔmɔ* ('priest') of the deity *Tʃade* and Head of Lineage (*We*). Aʃari fell in love with and married Adzeite's daughter, and by the Gã tradition became recognised as Adzeite's 'son' and thenceforth was known as Adzeite-Aʃari ('Adzeite's Aʃari') according to the local tradition of naming children. On the death of old Adzeite, Aʃari became *Tʃade wɔlɔmɔ* and simultaneously filled the newly created post of *maŋtsɛ* to take the new stool to war.

Thus, in the context of post-Ayawaso political contestation in the cosmopolitan environment, the activation of identity based on external criteria, particularly historical relationships with the European forts, migration, and services to the state, became instrumental. Contending claims about hierarchy and autonomy during the Maxwell Commission of Inquiry in 1907 illustrates this point. The terms of reference of the Commission included the determination of the 'relative positions of James Town (or English Accra) and Ussher Town (or Dutch Accra), and whether such position has [sic] undergone any change since the acquisition [in 1872] by the English of the Dutch possessions'.[126]

> *Mantse* Kojo Ababio: My stool is not under the Ga Mantse. I was brought by English traders from Lagos way. That is why the quarter is called Lagos [Town]. Alata is the Fante word for Lagos.[127] The Ga word is 'Angwemi'. Those Gas that came with Okakwae I [my predecessors] did not accompany … When the English traders came they brought two, one was Kwajo Buropo who went to Cape Coast. Weche Kojo came to Accra. That is about three hundred years ago. When Kinka was under the Dutch government, we did not serve the Dutch government. Weche Kojo made the stool.[128]
>
> Moi: I am a Ga; did you come from Lagos and make me Mankralo here?
> Kojo Ababio: Yes, I made you Mankralo.
> Moi: Can you who say you are a stranger make me a Mankralo?[129]

This diatribe during the 1907 Commission of Inquiry, and indeed the discourse of the subsequent official inquiries,[130] brings out conceptual issues like migration, identity making, and power relations, which can be theoretically interrogated by the application of notions of

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[126] PRAAD, Adm. 11 January 1673, MCI, Notes, 10 October 1907: 1.
[127] James Town is also referred to locally as Ŋleshi (local rendition of English) or 'Lagos Town'. James Town is made up of the Alata or Ŋleshi Alata, Akanmaji, Asere, and Sempe *akutsei*. Through English patronage, the Ŋleshi Alata *akutso* began to claim '*mãŋtsɛ*-ship' over the indigenous Akanmaji, Asere, and Sempe.
[128] PRAAD, Adm. 11 January 1673: 25.
[129] PRAAD, Adm. 11 January 1673: 28. See also Akosua Adoma Perbi, *A History of Indigenous Slavery in Ghana: From the 15th to the 19th Century* (Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2004), 138–139.
[130] In fact, the question of hierarchy became so intractable that successive governments (colonial and post-colonial) have found it imperative to intervene through commissions of inquiry. One of the most comprehensive inquiries was the 'Ga Traditional Council Committee of Inquiry' of 1975–1976. See PRAAD, Adm. 5/3/221, 1 October 1975- 4 February 1976.

transnationalism,[131] imagined communities,[132] and the invention of tradition.[133] However, we limit ourselves here to the empirical issues relating to the efficacy of identity as a political tool.

To put the theme of the political utility of identity making into perspective, we need to briefly outline the historical basis for the respective claims in the diatribe. Bosman in the 17th century noted: 'Each fort hath its adjacent *village,* distinguished by its particular name, though the general one is *Acra*; the name of this country, which was formerly a kingdom whose inhabitants were conquered by the *Aquamboeans*'.[134] Later in 1839, an American missionary, J. L. Wilson, scouting for a suitable location to build mission stations identified 'Accra' as 'the proper starting point', since 'Danish and Dutch Accra are near to English Accra, and there is a missionary from Basle near the former'.[135] These European nomenclatures are references to coastal villages where European trading firms gained permission to erect forts. For the Europeans, these conceptual demarcations buttressed respective claims of informal sovereignty and monopoly over the trade within the theoretically mutually exclusive spheres. Clearly, the respective fortified settlements became organising points for alliance making locally, and for forging relations with other African potentates regionally. African allies were required to trade with 'their' Europeans only.[136]

Largely, African communities adjacent to the forts appropriated and internalised these designations, and in times of political and military uncertainty they deployed their alliance with the forts as a deliberate political strategy. Where there was opportunity, some communities used the European forts and settlements as identity markers to buttress their claims to more influence or autonomy within emerging power configurations. The post-Ayawaso scenario on the Gã littoral, where the various towns identified as Ŋleshi (English), Kinkã (Dutch), and

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[131] Randolph S. Bourne, 'Tran-national America', *Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 118 (1916), 86–97. David Held, Anthony McGrew, David Goldblatt, and Jonathan Perraton, *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics, and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999); Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

[132] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 2006).

[133] Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); particularly, Eric Hobsbawm, 'Introduction: Inventing Traditions' (1-14) and Terence Ranger, 'The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa' (211-262).

[134] Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description*, 69 (Letter V).

[135] Letter from Mr. J. L. Wilson, Dated Cape Palmas, 25 April 1839, 'St. Andrews, Cape Lahoo, and Accra Regarded as Missionary Stations'. *The Missionary Herald – Containing Proceedings at Large of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions*, Vol. 35 (1839): 465–466.

[136] John Hippisley, *Essays. I. On the Populousness of Africa. II. On the Trade at the Forts on the Gold Coast. III. On the Necessity of Erecting a Fort at Cape Appolonia. Illustrated with a New Map of Africa, from Cape Blanco to the Kingdom of Angola* (London: T. Lownds, 1764), 39–42.

Dãnbii (Danish), respectively, illustrates this dynamic very well. In addition, the traditional cosmopolitan ethos – that accorded 'citizenship' to 'strangers' (by virtue of civic and military service) – complicated the situation. The unsettled political climate and apparent power vacuum after 1680 opened up the possibility for towns and quarters to claim autonomy by citing relationships forged with the three forts 'about three hundred years ago'.[137] Indeed, claims and counterclaims that characterised the efforts by the remnants of the displaced Gã political elite to re-establish centralised structures on the coast confirmed the efficacy of the politics of identity making and, even, evince blatant cases of inventing traditions and using identity practices, old alliances, and traditions of incorporating migrants into society to gain political capital.[138]

The controversies during this period bore down to efforts by power brokers and communities to exploit the apparent power vacuum and chaotic political climate of the post-Ayawaso period to establish their own autonomy, albeit within a confederate arrangement. As a result, in the 19th century there was general political tension within the state, as well as violent outbreaks between the quarters within towns. The tension festered to such an extent that sometimes personal conflicts between individuals living in different European spheres could degenerate into civil war between the quarters or towns from the individuals came. In such cases, officials at the European forts intervened through persuasion of threat of force. The last Danish governor, Edward Carstensen, describes one such civil war between Ŋleshi (James Town / British Accra) and Kinkã (Dutch Accra) from 6 to 17 September 1847:

> On the 6th in the morning, quarrel and fighting arise between an English and a Dutch Negro. From that a general battle quickly developed. … During the fight some English Negroes set fire to a house in Dutch Accra (This town is separated from English Accra only by a small, open square), and the fire spread quickly because of the wind. A great many houses with grass roofing burnt down. The

[137] PRAAD, Adm. 11 January 1673: 25.

[138] For the modes of and the circumstances surrounding the invention of traditions, see Terence Ranger, 'The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa', in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 211–262; Roger S. Gocking, 'Indirect Rule in the Gold Coast: Competition for Office and the Invention of Tradition', *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines* 28 (1994), 421–446.

> fighters ('the town's (armed) young militia') were separated from each other, but now the Dutch equipped themselves to repulse the attack.[139]

Whereas diffuse European control during the middle of the 19th century made violence an active method of settling the question of hierarchies, under British colonial rule from late 19th century the Commission of Inquiry became the normal mechanism for solving such political disputes. As evidence, the exchange between Mãŋtse Kojo Ababio and Moi during the 1907 Inquiry (shown above) highlights key elements underlying the process. Important among these are the implications of the 'Ablekuma aba kuma wɔ' philosophy in a contested political terrain and the complications added by dynamic modes of identity making. The struggle of Alata for recognition as a power node in the Gã polity illustrates this theme. Perennial issues that dogged the hierarchy question concerned the status and powers of the Alata (Ŋleshi) Mãŋtsɛ, on the one hand, and the question of *primus inter pares* between the Alata Mãŋtsɛ and the Gã Mãŋtsɛ, on the other. An examination of the circumstances leading to the founding of the Alata *akutso* in the 17th century will clarify the controversy.

The Alata *akutso* was founded by remnants of slaves and indentured labourers that the British Africa Company hired or brought from Lagos and elsewhere on the Slave Coast for the construction of the James Fort in 1673–1674.[140] The leader of the immigrants was Wetsɛ Kojo, who became powerful and influential in Gã affairs because of his British patronage and his role in Gã military expeditions. Accordingly, he was able to create and occupy the position of Mãŋtsɛ of the Alata *akutso*. Due to his access to and official dealings with the British, he became the intermediary between the British and the other towns and quarters, thus informally assuming the titular position as James Town (Ŋleshi) Mãŋtsɛ.[141] Thus, Wetsɛ Kojo, the 'stranger' from 'Lagos way', attained acceptability and influence by using the possibilities offered by Gã tradition and his connections with the British establishment to establish an enduring dynasty, which his successors strove to maintain. Significantly, though the other towns and quarters appeared to recognise this informal arrangement, they were quick to counter

[139] See Nørregård, *Closing the Books*, 261–262, for the document 'Edw. Carstensen, Chief Fort Christiansborg, 22 September 1847'.
[140] Quarcoopome, *The Impact of Urbanisation*, 53.
[141] Reindorf, *History of the Gold Coast*, 40.

Alata claims of pre-eminence and assumed kingmaker role in Ŋleshi. This explains Moi's[142] spirited reference to origins: 'I am a Ga … Can you … a stranger make me Mankralo?'[143]

As Governor Carstensen noted, 'the young militia' (*asafo*) were the active fighting forces in the 1847 civil war.[144] Indeed, throughout the Gold Coast the *asafo* were the mainstays of military and political struggles among and within states. Apart from being involved in formal conflicts, they enacted their belligerent postures during parades as well as through art forms like *asafo* appliqué flags that were replete with symbolism.[145] During the hierarchy disputes in the 19th and 20th centuries in Accra, *asafo* flags became active ingredients for identity expression and for making political claims. Key symbolic elements in the appliqué flags of the Alata and Sempe *asafo* illustrate how contested discourses about identity, power, and influence in James Town in particular and Accra in general was expressed in *asafo* art.

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Figure 9.2 No. 2 Company (Alata) Flag. © John Kwadwo Osei-Tutu.

For our purposes in this article,[146] the relevant theme in the Alata 'No. 2 Company' flag are (i) warfare and military service – depicted by Alata *asafo* armed with European weapons (Congreve rocket and rifles) marching eastwards to war to the beat of war drums;[147] (ii) alliance and British patronage – depicted by the Gothic-style inscription 'God save the King' and the Union Jack to emphasise Alata's historical influence in the British sphere of Accra; and (iii)

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[142] During the 1907 Inquiry, Moi was the spokesperson for the members of the Sempe *akutso*, who are reputed to have been the original inhabitants of Soko before the British brought the Alata migrants.

[143] PRAAD, Adm. 11 January 1673: 28.

[144] Nørregård, *Closing the Books*, 261.

[145] For a similar situation of art and the politics of identity, see Kathleen M. Adams, 'More than an Ethnic Marker: Toraja Art as Identity Negotiator', *American Ethnologist* 25 (1998): 327–351. On belligerent and identity marking *asafo* art in Ghana, see Doran H. Ross, '"Come and Try": Towards a History of Fante Military Shrines', *African Arts* 40 (2007): 12–35; Kwame A. Labi, 'Fante Asafo Flags of Abandze and Kormantse', *African Arts* 35 (2002): 8–37; George Nelson Preston, 'Perseus and Medusa in Africa: Military Art in Fanteland, 1834–1972', *African Arts* 8 (1975): 36–39, 68–71, 91–92.

[146] Space limitations do not allow for a thorough analysis of the entire symbolic scope of the maps.

[147] The eastwards direction being travelled by the warring party probably refers to the Gã-Dãŋme military expeditions against the Aŋlo-Akwamu-Asante alliance in the Volta and Eastern Districts of the Gold Coast which were fought between 1868 and 1874. The lack of British support in the war became one of the reasons for the formation of the Accra Native Confederation.

triumphalism – depicted by the adoption of Julius Caesar's famous triumphal phrase[148] 'Veni Vidi Vici' ('I Came, I Saw, I Conquered') to express Alata's sense of triumph in the Gã social scheme. Seen as a narrative sequence, the flag tells a story of how a combination of factors like military service, wealth (accumulated through commerce), ad alliance with the British had combined with the traditional cosmopolitan ethos to make the 'outsider' Alata quarter a powerful force.

INSERT

Figure 9.3: Sempe Company Flag, James Town, Accra. Photo by John Kwadwo Osei-Tutu.

The key element in the 'Sempe Company' flag is the focus on the themes of authenticity and primordialism. These themes include (i) the primacy of traditional Gã authority – depicted by the inscription 'God Save the Manche' and images of two *mãŋtsɛmei* (presumably of the Sempe and Akãnmãji quarters of James Town) riding a palanquin; (ii) a crescent moon and a five-pointed star, evoking Gã cosmology, spirituality, and the lunar calendar;[149] and (iii) affinity to the British – depicted by the Union Jack and (presumably) a Masonic Compass.[150] The narrative of the Sempe flag is that unlike the Alata, who are 'strangers', the Sempe and Akãnmãji quarters are composed of autochthonous inhabitants whose claims to power are based on traditions and primordial rights as Gã Krɔŋŋ. Read in the context of the general volatile political situation in the Gã state from 1680, the *asafo* flags from James Town reveal the different layers of identity making and political contestation that were legitimised through pre-colonial European patronage and Gã traditions.

Conclusion

The notion of a 'cosmopolitan conundrum' is an apt description of the complex processes that characterised Gã socio-spatial development from the 15th century. There are multiple reasons for this complexity. However, the related seminal events were the establishment of trading forts

[148] The reference is to Julius Caesar's description of his swift victory at the Battle of Zela around 46 BC in his letter to the Senate.
[149] The spiritual symbolism of the crescent of the moon and the star plausibly legitimises the Akãnmãji *akutso*'s contestation of the assumed political authority of the Alata *akutso*.
[150] Freemasonry was established in Accra (and Cape Coast) in the 19th century.

by three competing European states on the Gã littoral in the 17th century and the successive occupations of the territory by three Akan imperialist powers from the second half of the 17th century to the early decades of the 19th century. The presence of the forts particularly affected the social and physical growth of Accra and Osu, which gradually became the economic, political, and cultural epicentres of the Gã state from the 1670s, and of the Gold Coast and Ghana from the 1870s. In many ways, Accra and Osu were both fort towns and port towns,[151] in the sense that both their commercial and social lives revolved around the Danish, Dutch, and English fortified establishments.

The impact of the forts was manifest in many ways. Globally, the fort trade on the littoral drew Accra into the Atlantic economic and cultural system.[152] Spatially, the erection of the forts and the commencement of the associated trading activities attracted populations from different places to Accra, leading to the gradual but sustained urbanisation and expansion of the built-up area. The ethno-cultural mix produced hybrid populations and a cosmopolitanism that resonated with the Gã people's own cosmopolitan outlook. However, the cosmopolitanism contained fault lines that had potential for fuelling conflictual claims and counterclaims, some leading to violent dissent. In the colonial period, particularly, the fault lines were exposed in the form of identity politics in which feuding groups recalled historical alliances with and affiliations to European fort establishments to make political, historical, and economic claims.

[151] Malyn Newitt uses the term 'fortress cities' to describe substantially fortified places. See Maps 1–5 in *A History of Portuguese Overseas Expansion, 1400–1668* (London: Routledge, 2009).

[152] Deborah Pellow, 'Cultural Differences and Urban Spatial Forms: Elements of Boundedness in an Accra Community', *American Anthropologist* 103 (2001): 59–75, 72.

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