

Spring 2012

# Transnationalism and Identity: the Concept of Community in Ghanaian Literature and Contemporary Ghanaian Culture

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**TRANSNATIONALISM AND IDENTITY: THE CONCEPT OF COMMUNITY IN  
GHANAIAN LITERATURE AND CONTEMPORARY GHANAIAN CULTURE**

by

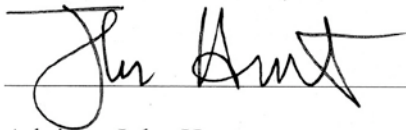
**Devin M. Geary**

A Thesis Submitted to the Honors Council

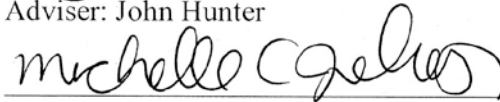
For Honors in Comparative Humanities

April 1, 2012

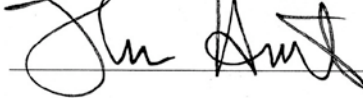
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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I would like to thank my adviser, John Hunter, and my second-reader, Michelle Johnson, who helped me through every step of the process. Professor Hunter, you helped me narrow my claims, understand what my topic really was, and of course, always asked “so what?” Professor Johnson, you helped me tackle the unknown world of anthropology, which introduced me to all kinds of new and interesting ideas I had otherwise not encountered. To the Comparative Humanities program, thank you for encouraging me (and all students) to study abroad and explore the world from different perspectives, because that experience, of course, inspired this thesis. To the University of Ghana, thank you for hosting me for four months. I’ll be back!

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## ABSTRACT

In my thesis, I use anthropology, literature, and *adinkra*, an indigenous art, to study Ghanaian concepts of community from an interactive standpoint. While each of these disciplines has individually been used to study the concept of community, the three have not previously been discussed in relation to one another. I explore the major findings of each field—mainly that in anthropology, transnational informants find communities upheld; in literature, transnational characters find the opposite; and in *adinkra*, there are elements of both continuity and dissolution—to discuss Ghanaian constructs of community in the transnational world. Throughout time, there have always been transnational individuals and concepts, but as globalization continues, transnationalism has become an ever-more vital topic, and combined with the common anthropological discussion of tradition and modernity, its influence on developing countries, like Ghana, is significant. Therefore, in my thesis, I explore how differing conceptions of community present themselves in each discipline, and how those divergences create a new understanding of place and identity.

## INTRODUCTION

In the transnational world, where people and ideas constantly cross national borders both physically and culturally, the idea of community has acquired new and different meanings. Transnationalism has reshaped global conceptions of nationality, as people connect with others beyond their national boundaries. Individuals constantly move locations, changing the physical components of the community: the people who create it. Transnationalism has redefined notions of belonging through these shifting localities and the cultures that accompany them, as ideas and practices intersect in new contexts. In Ghana, the relationship between transnationalism and concepts of community is particularly relevant, as the idea of “Ghana” as a single nation was imposed upon the ethnically diverse region of the Gold Coast by its British colonial rulers. Since independence in 1957, though, this artificially-created nation has been a successful democratic state despite significant ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity. Because of this imposition, community is a complex issue in Ghanaian culture. Through anthropology, literary study, and indigenous art, I will examine how Ghanaians understand and construct different notions of community. I will explore how those constructions of community are represented in the different disciplines to examine the possibility of maintaining Ghanaian community structures in the transnational context. Specifically, I will explore how ideas of abandoned community, dual identity, memory, moral values, and the conflict between tradition and modernity impact the transnational



experience to affect an individual's concept of identity as a Ghanaian in the transnational world.

In Chapter 1, I begin with anthropology to establish a grounding of traditional concepts of community structure among African cultures. Korsi Dogbe and Kwame Gyekye, both Ghanaian philosophers, explain community as a continuous network of the living, the dead, and the not-yet born (Dogbe 786). This definition of community is important when discussing transnational implications, because it establishes the community as a continuum, contingent not on a physical presence but on a spiritual connection; the deceased and the not-yet-born are not physically present, but they are forever considered part of the community. With this understanding, it follows that transnational members—those who still exist in the world but not in the central geographic unit within Ghana—are also forever part of the community. I discuss case studies of both repatriate and expatriate Ghanaians to explore whether or not this continuity exists, and to determine how their conceptions of community differ. Expatriates living in London at the beginning of the twenty-first century, for example, find they maintain connections to their communities in Ghana through intercommunication technologies (ICTs) like cell phones, e-mail, and video cameras: “studies of transnationalism have provided convincing evidence that, far from cutting ties, many immigrants maintain close contact with family and friends that remain in the homeland” (Burrell and Anderson 204). Repatriates, however, imagine their homecoming with an understanding of community that is not actually upheld (Lake 31). Using Daniel Schacter's

psychological model of memory and Joann D'Alisera's anthropological expositions of memory, I propose that desired memories shape a transnational's notion of community, even when that notion is not reflected in reality. The community is an imagined reality that only truly exists when the informant is not physically present. A collective conception of community is not truly possible because differing experiences contribute to that understanding. Since all do not share the same experiences, they also do not all understand the meaning of community in the same way.

In Chapter 2, I explain how Ghanaian literature explores the same issues to determine the ability of transnationals to maintain connection to their communities—and their communities to uphold their purported values—as members come and go between worlds. I draw on works by Ama Ata Aidoo, Ayi Kwei Armah, Francis Selormey, and Amma Darko to demonstrate how characters generally find such maintenance is not possible, nor is their ability to straddle both places. Instead, they are liminal subjects, people who are, in anthropologist Victor Turner's words, "betwixt and between" two realms (Turner 95). The characters belong neither at home nor in their host communities, because their background experiences isolate them from either. In Selormey's *The Narrow Path* (1966), Kofi is isolated because he is forced into a rootless lifestyle due to his father's missionization, which never allows him to grasp a connection to any community or identity, indigenous or Christian. In Armah's *Fragments* (1969), Baako is a "been-to," having received his education in the United States, which causes his Ghanaian

community to treat him differently and change their expectations of and for him. In Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977), Sissie cannot comprehend European practices, nor her fellow transnational migrants' adoption of them, which destabilizes her connection to the transnational community, and to the Ghanaians who idealize it. And in Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* (1991), Mara's father gives her as a wife to Akobi, who in turn forcibly moves her from Ghana to Germany, where she is sold into prostitution, losing all sense of self. In each case, the protagonist is confronted with issues of self-identity in the face of community values, left to ponder his or her status as someone of distinction, treated as an Other. Also in each case, the protagonist mourns what he or she sees as a cultural abandonment of community as issues of transnationalism come into play.

In Chapter 3, I argue that *adinkra*, an indigenous art form, is a bridge between literature and anthropology because its transnational applicability sympathizes with the anthropological informants' experience of dual identity, even as its evolutionary changes mirror the literary characters' contentions that transnationalism contributes to an abandonment of community. A set of pictographic icons used in both ritual practice and casual settings (jewelry pendants, bumper stickers, computer screen backgrounds, etc.) *adinkra* "attempts to depict religious, philosophical and cultural values of the Akans" (Azindow 4). Its evolution from a funerary practice that honors the "cornerstone of Akan polity... the relationship between the dead and the living" (Amoah Labi 48) to a cultural expression in completely nontraditional situations indicates both its significance

and its adaptability: its importance to the cultural identity of Ghanaians is vast enough to transform it into forms applicable in modern contexts. This demonstrates the fusion of tradition and modernity, for “the assumption of a relatively static ‘traditional’ culture which changes radically with the impact of contact with the West, resulting in conflict at the individual and societal levels, is simplistic and unproductive” (Warren 31). Instead, tradition is itself part of modernity, a dynamic process through which *adinkra* encompasses both. As such, it bridges anthropological and literary concerns of transnationalism’s effect on Ghanaian constructs of community and identity.

Through these different disciplines, I hope to explain the realities of a changing community structure in Ghana. Anthropological informants find the community a strong component of their identity formation, whereas the literary characters indict it as inauthentic and unsupportive. *Adinkra*, though, allow constructs of Ghanaian community to be both transnationally significant and historically relevant. This art form creates realities for Ghanaians, both at home and abroad. Those realities vary from person to person, just as the experience of transnationalism does, but as a product of *adinkra*, they are always, at base, Ghanaian. The culture of community may be fragmenting, as the literature suggests, but through a constant reinterpretation of this indigenous form, traditional Ghana adapts itself to fit the modern world. *Adinkra* itself is not a solution to the allegations of an inauthentic community structure that the literary characters complain of, but it is a medium of expression for liminal subjects, a compromise

between what they once were and what they currently are. In the pages that follow, I outline anthropological concepts of community, literary interpretations of community, and an artistic union between the two. Through this analysis, I hope to explain the discrepancy between traditional ideals of community and their practical implication, the difference between how the foundations of community imply members are valued, including those who leave and return, versus those who have actually left and returned really feel, and how community values are truly upheld in the context of returning countrymen. Overall, I plan to compare the meaning of community in traditional and contemporary Ghana to determine the difference between intended and practiced values. Through this comparison, I will expose the intersection of real and ideal constructs of Ghanaian community.

The interdisciplinary approach is crucial to my exploration of Ghanaian constructs of community, as it will discuss the differences found in each discipline and raise new questions because of the differing understandings. The authors have explored feelings of alienation time and again, and yet they produce very different results than the anthropologists who study the same issues. When read in conversation with one another, literature and anthropology expose the complications of community in the transnational context. The interdisciplinary approach therefore exposes the transparencies of a single meaning. The study of *adinkra* is a valuable third discipline because *adinkra* symbols themselves are transparent; they cannot be read in just one way, nor can the story of transnationalism and identity be read in just one way. Through interdisciplinary

conversation, we can better understand the complexity of community in a transnational context.

## CHAPTER ONE

Transnationalism, like postcolonialism, is a globalized force that tests individual and cultural identities. As in colonialism, where influences from the colonizing nation penetrate the colonized territory's original culture, in transnationalism, influences from a transmigrant's host nation infiltrate his or her native culture. Both forces demand a rearrangement of consciousness as people reconsider their conceptions of self according to national, international, and local allegiances. People explore the intricacies of identity along individual and communal lines, with subjects personally and collectively deciding their own notions of self and groups defining their collective identity. Korsi Dogbe's notion that "the African world is . . . ruled by a 'we-law' or a 'we-logic'" suggests that individuals in the continent privilege the needs of the community above their own (Dogbe 789). This "weistic" attitude is fundamental to understandings of their selfhood. Further, Dogbe emphasizes that "to the indigenous African, the community is a living embodiment of the past, present, and the hereafter" (Dogbe 786). Individuals are therefore always part of the community—before, during, and after life.

But while this emphasis on the community is of great importance in many African societies (Menkiti 157), balancing individuality and community duty naturally causes conflict, as people are autonomous, self-asserting agents in spite of their communal ties. Some philosophers, like Ifeanyi A. Menkiti, Gyekye, and Dogbe underscore the importance of community through concepts like weism, (Menkiti 157; Gyekye, *African Cultural Values* 35; Dogbe 797), but other scholars emphasize

the significance of the individual within the communal world. Social anthropologist Victor Turner, for example, proposes that liminality, a state where people are “betwixt and between” two positions, is a common condition for people torn between identities (Turner 95). He uses ritual practice among the Ndembu of Central Africa as an example where subjects are placed in an in-between realm as they transition from individual to social roles, but the condition of liminality extends far beyond the boundaries of ritual practice (Turner 95). This liminality, according to Turner, provides an arena for the ritual initiates to ponder their individuality. Liminality is also a defining characteristic of the transnational, for in the transition from postcolonial to transnational, meanings of selfhood collide, creating a liminal state that blurs constructs of community yet again. As migrants balance connection to home communities with their individual experiences as “aliens,” multiplicity defines their existence.

Using anthropological studies, I will first outline community ideals and then explore their implications to establish that the transnational life is one of multiplicity; just as Turner describes ritual initiates as people who are “betwixt and between,” so too are transnationals (Turner 95). In between their places of origin and their host countries, they neither wholeheartedly abandon one nor adopt the other. This multiplicity, though, is not found across all scholarly disciplines, and particularly not in literary study, which I will discuss in a later chapter. Through the following anthropological studies of transnationalism, I will argue that the community values Ghanaian cultural scripts advocate exist only when participants



are not present. Their physical absence from the community allows them to idealize of it as they hope it is, rather than how it actually is. In the migrants studied, for example, expatriates in London find traditional community values upheld, as do repatriates who have not yet returned to Ghana. But when members of either group actually do return, they no longer find community values to be upheld. I will argue that memory is a key influence on how these conceptions of community are seemingly intact, even when they may not be in reality. In the case of expatriates, nostalgia and longing for the familiarity of home nurture a sense of continued community, whereas for the resettled repatriates, unfulfilled expectations contribute to feelings that the community has failed to maintain its claims. As a result, repatriates experience a sense of alienation and disappointment—parallel to the sentiments expressed in other disciplines, including literary study—that expatriates do not feel.

### **COMMUNITY IDEALS**

Before leaving, emigrants are likely to have a communitarian outlook, as values that emphasize the community above the individual widely dominate African thought systems (Hallen 46; Gbadegesin 64). There is, of course, a wide range of community structures throughout the continent, but emphasis on the collective is a primary concern for most African states and peoples (Gbadegesin 67). Dogbe and Gyekye both explore the importance of community in Africa from an indigenous West African perspective. Though their definitions do vary slightly, both agree that

interdependence, cooperation, and reciprocity are central to African notions of community (Gyekye, *Person and Community in African Thought* 118; Dogbe 789). It is significant that both of these philosophers are African broadly and Ghanaian specifically, because their work is thus the product of experience in Africa by Africans. When the community values Gyekye and Dogbe propose are not upheld, it follows that Africans are betraying indigenous values, not values constructed by outsiders. It is also significant, though, that the stamp of colonialism determines much of Africa's current political landscape, with artificially-imposed borders defining national boundaries, regardless of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic overlap. Consequently, these impositions fuse the line between "indigenous" and "foreign"—each encompasses the other. The views Gyekye and Dogbe present are significant, and particularly so for Ghana, as they are both Ghanaian, but they cannot represent all African societies or viewpoints, nor do they determine ultimate authority. Instead, they represent a collection of beliefs specific to certain contexts.

According to Gyekye, "a community is a group of persons linked by interpersonal bonds—which are not necessarily biological—who share common values, interests, and goals" (Gyekye, *African Cultural Values* 35). These bonds are the defining characteristics of what constitutes membership. Dogbe further emphasizes "it is an entity that may be said to be of far greater importance than the individual or perhaps the sum total of all such individuals" (Dogbe 786). The well-being of the group is therefore privileged over the well-being of the singular person, as opposed to the West today, where "modern society starts from exclusion and

then offers inclusion in various ways” (D. Baecker quoted in Halfmann 516). Gyekye concurs with Dogbe, noting, “each member acknowledges the existence of common values, obligations, and understandings and feels a loyalty and commitment to the community that is expressed through the desire and willingness to advance its interests (Gyekye, *African Cultural Values* 36). Together, Dogbe and Gyekye agree that the community is the central point of importance, driven by a collection of individuals who understand their senses of self through connection to the whole. Interdependence, cooperation, and reciprocity are integral to these understandings.

Interdependence, the understanding of mutual support from one person to the next, is vital to these communitarian lifestyles. As Gyekye explains, “communitarianism immediately sees the human person as an inherently (intrinsically) communal being, embedded in a context of social relationships and interdependence, never as an atomic individual” (Gyekye, *Person and Community in African Thought* 104). While Gyekye himself proposes an Africa based on what he calls “restricted communitarianism,” which permits the dual existence of a communal being and an autonomous, self-determining self, in both systems, people naturally rely on one another, concerned for the group as much as for themselves. Dogbe also recognizes that “there is a holistic interdependence . . . The people, the ancestors, the gods, the spirits, the earth, flora and fauna, and the entire cosmos itself are ontologically intertwined” (Dogbe 790). Dogbe wrote this in 1980, but he outlines traditional values to suggest that they are applicable beyond their original context, expanding their relevance into the modern world. This is precisely the case

for *adinkra*, which will be discussed in Chapter 3. In Dogbe's terms, community members, who extend from the living to the dead, are redundant without the community itself; the system is broken and it cannot operate. This is evidenced in the Akan maxim that says "one tree does not make or constitute a forest (*duo baako nnye kwae*)... The analogical meaning... is that one individual person does not constitute a community" (Gyekye, *Person and Community in African Thought* 105). Alone, a person is significant for his or her contribution to the collective, but it is the collective itself that is most important. Individuals are valuable, but their influence on the whole is most important.

Naturally, cooperation is an essential component of interdependence. Dogbe explains it as a given: "A special concept of co-operation is, therefore, evolved and taught to the individual... [it is] necessary for peace and balance" (Dogbe 787). Interaction with others is a critical influence on identity-formation. Cooperation, according to these philosophers, is, for Africans, crucial to notions of self: "It is the necessary relationships which complete the being of the individual person" (Gyekye, "Person and Community in African Thought" 104). While he does not deny that the individual is also a "self-assertive being with a capacity for evaluation and choice," Gyekye confirms that cooperation among group members is a founding ideal of community life; it allows for the definition of both the community and the individual, because the individual is recognized as a part of the larger whole (Gyekye, *Person and Community in African Thought* 113). *Adinkra* symbols (see Chapter 3) also convey the importance of cooperation:

Powerful symbols exist in African society to teach everybody about the significance of the concept of cooperation for the community. For example, in indigenous Ghanaian culture, there is a symbol of the two crocodiles whose two heads point toward different directions, but feed on a common stomach... [It teaches] that even though there might be individual differences, initiative and purpose, these must be influenced greatly by a community concern and a common goal” (Dogbe 788).

Cooperation is continuously practiced as a foundational custom of community life.

Reciprocity then follows as interrelated between cooperation and interdependence. According to Gyekye and Dogbe, Africa is often a place of give and take. Indigenous cultural frameworks reflect this notion, as “social reciprocity is a value expressed in the Akan maxim: ‘The tortoise says: ‘The hand goes and a hand comes’” (Gyekye, *African Cultural Values* 64). When one person is lacking, another will come to his or her aid, and the community expects the practice to be returned when the situation is reversed. The social structure of society—how power is arranged and status is assigned—is also reflective of the value of reciprocity, because “an individual’s social status is measured in terms of his sense of responsibility, in turn, through his responsiveness and sensitivity to the needs and demands of the group” (Gyekye, *Person and Community in African Thought* 111). If an individual does not contribute to the goals of the group, he will not be respected among his peers. It is the individual’s duty to maintain a dynamic relationship between self and community, because this relationship proves his or her contributions to the collective, which in turn define his or her position in the group. Dogbe summarizes this with the idea that “members are so related that the freedom,

uniqueness, or power of each serves the freedom, uniqueness or growth of all the other members within the whole community” (Dogbe 785-786). According to both Gyekye and Dogbe, individuals are expected to behave with a conscious awareness for the well-being of others.

It is important to note that the significance of interdependence, cooperation, and reciprocity should not be taken to undermine the value of the individual. While the human being has “the natural attribute of being communal,” the self “can from time to time take a distanced view of its communal values and practices and reassess or revise them” (Gyekye, *Person and Community in African Thought* 113). Despite the “weistic” attitude of many African societies, individuality remains important, as people naturally make evaluations from their own perspective; it is impossible to be evaluative without having some sense of autonomy. As they make these evaluations, however, the well-being of the collective is often the driving force: “the indigenous African is unable to abide by the Cartesian dictum *cogito, ergo sum*. Reality to him is authenticated and validated by a weistic-logic whose dictum is ‘I am because we are, since we are, I am’” (Dogbe 790). Existence is therefore dependent on the cohesion of the collective, and identity-formation is also very much influenced by this collective, but each person does possess an internal notion of selfhood. Inclusion in the whole is a defining feature of indigenous communities, which is why transnational continuity of such inclusion is a major concern for transmigrants, but individuality should not be disregarded.

## **MAINTENANCE OF COMMUNITY IDEALS**

But just because Gyekye and Dogbe outline these values of interdependence, cooperation, and reciprocity as essential to the framework of African communities does not mean Africans always find them upheld, or that they carry them with them when they physically change location. Sometimes people individually disregard them when they are in new situations, and other times communities disregard them when contexts or social systems change, including when new people return to or join the community. The difference between expatriatism and repatriatism provides an excellent contrast: expatriates leave a community and hope to carry that identity with them, whereas repatriates rejoin a community and hope to incorporate its identity into their own. I argue that expatriates feel they are able to maintain their connections because the community is no longer a physical presence, but rather a memory that they can construct to satisfy their current context, whereas repatriates do not feel they are able to make connections because the community has ceased to be an imagined vision and has now become a physical existence that cannot feasibly uphold all imagined ideals. Drawing from these experiences, it follows that the community structure as it is perceived is not replicated in reality.

Anthropologist Obiagele Lake, an African-American born in New York, explores the latter in her studies of diaspora African repatriates in Ghana. Her informants, the repatriates, are primarily born outside of Ghana but have traveled back to join the community where their ancestors and relatives assure they are

always welcome. Lake begins by acknowledging that “while there are many differences among indigenous and diaspora Africans, the cultural and political dismembering of African communities on either side of the Atlantic by Europeans constitutes a bond that transgresses geographic and temporal boundaries” (Lake 22). This statement implies that experience is more binding than social or political categories; despite the difference between a Ghanaian-American and an indigenous Ghanaian, the two nonetheless share a common tie in their relationship with the European Other. In theory, then, vis-à-vis Dogbe and Gyekye’s emphasis on reciprocity, the expectation of acceptance in a Ghanaian community, be it American or indigenous, is reasonable for African-Americans and indigenous Africans alike. This theoretical acceptance, however, is not found to be true: “many repatriates in Ghana felt that social intercourse between indigenous and diaspora Africans needed to be augmented” (Lake 31). The standards of community as outlined by Gyekye and Dogbe are not necessarily upheld; one who goes and returns is not always welcomed with ease, nor are his or her descendants. The descendants are precisely the “hereafter” that is essential to the community as an extension beyond the here and now, but still they do not feel included or welcomed. The Ghanaian communities of their homeland have put forth fraudulent values of acceptance, which are supposed to extend inclusion from the deceased ancestors to their living descendants, but do not.

According to Lake, one contributing factor to the sense of alienation often stems from indigenous Ghanaians referring to repatriates as “*obrunis*,” a term which



literally means “foreigner,” but which is used culturally as a term of endearment to welcome white visitors (Dolphyne 17). The repatriates, “as one informant said, ‘would like to feel that [they] have come home,’” but instead, they are marked for their difference (Lake 33). The label is a reminder that they are not originally part of the system, and an indication that they will not become part of it, either. They have come from abroad, and that distinction forever separates them from the indigenous community. With this distinction, they find themselves alone and isolated. In Ghanaian literature, Armah’s, Aidoo’s, and Selormey’s characters all echo these same feelings (see page 45).

Disappointment with these abandoned claims of community values necessitates an understanding of the culture’s alleged aims. What does society say people should strive towards? What is the ideal? According to Dogbe, “collective action, group involvement, and social-self-development of the individual are condoned markedly within the culture” (Dogbe 790). Isolating newcomers and returners upon their arrival in or return to the community does not uphold these values, nor does it present the image of a culture that actively pursues social reciprocity, as it claims to do. Again Akan maxims illustrate the theoretical basis for community values. One such saying teaches simply “a human being needs help” (Gyekye, *African Cultural Values* 24). It is therefore a cultural responsibility of every individual to ensure the community cares for every other person. When repatriates do not find integration possible, there is a tangible disparity between what is taught and what is practiced. Those seeking to join or re-join the community

do not actually experience the cultural foundation of a social society centered on “other-regarding concerns, or concerns about the good of others,” as they expect (Gyekye, *African Cultural Values* 71). Instead, they are disappointed at the lack of acceptance and connection between groups, including that between repatriate and indigenous groups.

Expatriate transnationals, as a point of comparison to these repatriate transnationals, do not report the same feelings of disappointment. UCLA anthropologists Jenna Burrell and Ken Anderson study expatriates to examine the same issues regarding maintenance of community ideals. They study the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) among expatriate Ghanaians living in London to determine the extent to which migrants remain connected to Ghana. Unlike Lake, whose repatriate informants are disappointed that community is not maintained, Burrell and Anderson find expatriates are content with their connection to home. According to their results, Ghanaians “explore the world yet resist cultural immersion; they remain loyal to (if sometimes critical of) their homeland, defending it against stereotyped representations of Africa” (Burrell and Anderson 207). This finding suggests that Ghanaians maintain pride in their home culture even as they consider themselves lucky for their access to travel. As Burrell states, “in the popular imagination in Ghanaian society, ‘abroad’ is the source of innovation, opportunity and material success. Contacts and information from abroad are highly prized in Ghana and convey status to the recipient of these resources” (Burrell and Anderson 205). According to these findings, Ghanaians know

they have achieved recognition and status at home and therefore carry their pride with them, maintaining the Ghanaian identity in the face of new opportunity.

Whereas Lake's findings suggest communities abandon their theoretical framework when newcomers travel or return to Africa, Burrell and Anderson's study finds Ghanaians carry those frameworks with them when they themselves leave. As individuals, people retain connection to the collective, but as a collective, people do not necessarily retain ties to individuals who have physically disconnected.

This finding is significant for the weistic attitude Dogbe proposes because it strays from his notion of an all-encompassing worldview. According to his definition, Africans think according to the interests of others. But this anthropological evidence suggests otherwise; if individuals retain connection to the whole but the whole does not retain connection to the individual, it is the individuals of the group who care for it, rather than the group caring for the individuals. There is therefore a self-interested component of weistic logic, which is precisely the opposite of what one may expect. The community is not founded on a reverence for its members, but instead on the benefits that those members gain through their belonging; belonging is crucial because it provides social support, not because there is some underlying force that values each membership. If such a force did exist, the collective would maintain ties to those who have disconnected, but instead, it is only the individuals who retain connection, as they recognize the advantage membership brings.

## DUAL IDENTITY: THE POSSIBILITY OF MULTIPLICITY

The contrasting experiences of expatriates and repatriates questions the possibility of a dual identity as both a Ghanaian and a Westerner. As Kwame Anthony Appiah notes, “loyalties and local allegiances determine more than what we want; they determine who we are” (Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism* xvii). When these loyalties and allegiances shift, a person’s sense of self likely shifts with them. But what is to be made of these altered modes of self? In Burrell and Anderson’s study, most of the informants are still living abroad. Changes in their identities may not reflect those formed originally in their homeland, but they are now fitting to their present circumstances; their identities have been negotiated to fit their current cultural framework. Does this imply an abandonment of community? Have informants compromised their own moral values, and their culture’s, by readjusting notions of self? Or have they simply embraced “the nature of being African . . . the gift of syncretism [that] gives the ability to live in multiple worlds” (Busia 60)? Being African, Abena P.A. Busia says, is founded on this ability to encompass multiple identities. But this claim is too simplistic. There is a component of multiplicity in all expatriate cultures, not just African ones, and moreover, the identity of “African” is indefinable. Too many differences exist throughout the continent to encompass all as one, and the idea of “Africa” is itself a Western construct—it came into existence as a result of imperial goals of acquisition. To

claim “the gift of syncretism” as inherently “African” overlooks the distinction of individual people and cultures.

Further, not all Africans find “this gift of syncretism” to be real. Once again, literary characters like Armah’s Baako, is a good example (see page 73). According to Steven Vertovec, an anthropologist who studies transnationalism specifically, “it is not assumed that all migrants today engage in sustained social, economic and political engagement across borders” (Vertovec 13). As Baako demonstrates, multiplicity of meaning is not necessarily possible for all migrants. Increased communication techniques, like the ICTs Burrell and Anderson cite, may increase the capability of staying connected across territorial boundaries, but they do not guarantee the maintenance of cultural inclusion on both or either side of the world.

Instead, Vertovec finds,

one of the hallmarks of diaspora as a social form is the ‘triadic relationship’ between: (a) globally dispersed yet collectively self-identified ethnic groups; (b) the territorial states and contexts where such groups reside; and (c) the homeland states and contexts whence they or their forebears came (Vertovec 4).

Individuals are thus confronted with the complications of forming identities based on association with non-traditional groups, for example fellow transnational populations or co-workers, instead of ethnic groups or villages. Whereas for Gyekye, “the moral values of African societies are founded essentially on the African people’s experiences of living together—that is, on existential conditions, on their perception of how best to live a harmonious and common social life” (Gyekye, *African Cultural*

*Values* 70), transnational migrants are forced to reconsider moral values based on experience of precisely the opposite, of *not* living together. Social lives in the diaspora are not necessarily “harmonious and common,” as they are assumed to be at home. Different notions of community present the challenge of whether these transnationals should be held to the same moral standards as their companions at home. If definitions change in one arena, do they change in all?

Bernard Dadié of Côte d’Ivoire suggests transnationals certainly should be held to the same standards. Morality, he proposes, is boundless, applicable across time and space. In *The City Where No One Dies*, he develops a new literary genre to discuss the concerns of a West African traveler headed from Paris to Rome. Considered a “chronique,” Dadié’s fiction “adapts traditional African values to the modern world and fuses the two in a new reality” (Mayes 8). Janis Mayes, the first person to translate *The City Where No One Dies* from French to English, firmly declares that is not a novel, but rather a “form unique to African literature” that allows him to express concern for a loss of morality in two western cities” (Mayes 9). In Paris, his character laments that “two opposing vices, greed and luxury, shape the city, two plagues which have brought down all the great empires” (Dadié 38), and in Rome, he wonders “has money become a holy spirit? The invigorating spirit, young vigorous blood running through the veins of the Roman people?” (Dadié 67). The traveler finds his values challenged in both situations. His disappointment causes him to question of the compatibility of West African values in a world he sees to be driven by an individual quest for material gain. Dadié indicts the moral failure

of the western world, but this indictment provides little hope for the maintenance of his traditional values in it. Having traveled and returned himself, he is disappointed that the ideals in these foreign places cannot seem to accommodate his own.

It is also significant that these transnational migrants are imbedded in a system entirely different than their indigenous ones. Refusing to adopt cultural practices different from their own is at odds with the very goals of transnationalism, to connect people in a world defined entirely by difference. Migration undeniably presents challenges to those who pursue it, most notably “the two major problems which emerge with the evolution of the modern concept of inclusion: the risk of exclusion from any form of membership in social systems and the risk of exclusion from a nationally defined community of citizens” (Halfmann 522-523). If transnational migrants do not take on new roles as Africans in the West, they may compromise their hopes for a successful and fulfilling life. Those at home may condemn their actions as a loss of self and an abandonment of culture, but they themselves may simply be working towards integration in a system where obvious differences like skin color, language, dress, and economic status already work to their detriment. Perhaps abandonment of community ideals is not always equivalent to a wish to disassociate from the community at home, but rather an attempt to make multiplicity of meaning actually possible.

For example, in Burrell and Anderson’s study, the researchers found that expatriate “Ghanaians expressed a personalized form of imagination. Rather than imagining either individual or group identity, they were busy imagining and

developing a ‘vision’ of where they would like to be in five, 10 or 15 years” (Burrell and Anderson 217). This individualization seems to contradict Gyekye’s basis that “value is that which promotes social welfare and so enhances the well-being of every individual member of the society,” but rather than positioning it against traditional notions, perhaps Burrell and Anderson’s findings suggest changing notions of responsibility (Gyekye, *African Cultural Values* 70)s. While the informants in Burrell and Anderson’s study are clearly concerned for their communities, and hence continue to communicate with them via ICTs, future plans are relevant not for an entire community that exists elsewhere in the world, but for the informant him/herself. This is likely alarming and dangerous for Gyekye, as he posits that “when the character of individuals degenerates, the character, capacity, and quality of life of the whole nation are affected: such degeneration leads eventually to the decline and fall of the nation” (Gyekye, *African Cultural Values* 67). The whole nation is therefore affected by expatriates who leave and begin to view the world individually; changing notions—of self, community, or identity—start with one person, but inevitably affect the culture at large. Further, it is possible that these transnationals may have considered the world through such individualism, but the transnational context is the first opportunity they have to freely act on it. Once again, it is difficult to draw boundaries between “indigenous” and “imposed,” as indigenous peoples adopt “imposed” ideals, and vice versa. In Chapter 3, I will examine how these changing notions affect tradition, and how, in fact, tradition, like identity, is always changing (see page 105).



These kinds of revised worldviews are fundamental to postcolonialism in general. As Richard Werbner states, “in its multiple shifting realities, the postcolonial encompasses contradictory complexity and times out of time” (Werbner 4). Contradiction, Werbner explains, is an intrinsic element of postcolonialism. Subjects are faced with dilemmas of identity that are not always soluble without some kind of ambiguity or conflict, because postcolonialism itself is a paradox, “at once a presence and an absence, the now in tension with the not-now” (Werbner 4). Combining transnational and postcolonial issues of identity complicates the situation even further: subjects are torn from their own place of birth, but in most cases, that place is itself torn by issues of ethnic tension, arbitrarily-imposed borders, and language conflicts. Ghana’s own creation, its borders delineated by colonial forces (see introduction), is itself an intersection of meaning, as ethnic groups were selected for belonging arbitrarily. There is a multiplicity of meanings for the country itself, so conflicting personal identity is thus a natural progression from the political and social environment; multiplicity of selves exists on the macro level for Ghana as a nation, and on the micro level for individuals native to any of the various groups considered to be “Ghanaian.”

The politics of the postcolonial play a major role in this multiplicity. As Achille Mbembe explains, “the postcolony is made up not of one coherent ‘public space,’ nor is it determined by any single organizing principle. It is rather a plurality of ‘spheres’ and arenas, each having its own separate logic yet nonetheless liable to be entangled with other logics when operating in certain specific contexts” (quoted

in Werbner 1). There is no one identity, for there are too many intersections of culture—languages, customs, beliefs, to name a few—to define a coherent sense of the Ghanaian (or Senegalese, or Nigerian, or Côte d’Ivoireian). In the very fact that a place is the legacy of a colonial force—be it Ghana or any other territory—there are contradictions of identity at work against one another. When this uncertainty exists for the nation as a unit, which is supposedly unified under the emancipation from colonial domination, it is bound to exist for the people individually.

But herein lies the discrepancy: anthropologists, informants, and authors do not all agree whether multiplicity is always, sometimes, or never possible. Busia suggests it is; Dadié implies it is not; and at different points, Vertovec presents conflicting claims, on the one hand noting migrants do not always maintain cross-border relationships and on the other claiming the border is not socially divisive (Vertovec 13, 72). Adaptation may be the underlying force that determines which experience a transmigrant has. It is obviously an important characteristic of the transnational lifestyle, for adaptation introduces a kind of cultural training that determines how one will integrate, assimilate, or isolate. It is perhaps the most significant skill that enables the individual to obtain the potential for multiplicity of meaning, as this is the basis of transnational anthropology, the ability to break down the dichotomy of home versus away. Through multiple identities, then, migrants in the diaspora are able to manage traditions of past times and places in their new settings and contexts. Answering the question “what is the mechanism of managing multiplicity?”, Vertovec uses Ann Swidler’s metaphor of culture as a toolkit to find

“people engage in their everyday activities by ‘selecting certain cultural elements (both such tacit culture as attitudes and styles and, sometimes, such explicit cultural materials as rituals and beliefs) and investing them with particular meanings in concrete life circumstances” (Vertovec 72). These traditional cultural materials continue to manifest themselves in modern contexts, their significance carried transnationally though their original physicality may be different. Space, for the transnational, is not necessarily the most determining factor of identity.

Anthropologist Deborah Pellow summarizes this with the observation “that the social and spatial are not separate; rather they are two integral dimensions” (Pellow 60). The social structures of the traditional can continue to exist in different spatial zones of the modern.

Adaptation, as previously noted, is a major factor in the transnational experience of multiplicity. While some may not find multiplicity possible, data suggests many transmigrants do develop skills specific to the aim of leading a dual identity. In a 2002 study, anthropologists Peter H. Koehn and James N. Rosenau “sought to elaborate just what kind of skills or competences are acquired through transnational experiences that enable individuals to ‘participate effectively in activities that cut across two or more national boundaries” (quoted in Vertovec 70). The “ability to manage multiple identities” and the development of a “sense of transnational efficacy” are two skills they found migrants acquire (Vertovec 70). Multiplicity of meaning, according to their findings, is not a problem for most transnational migrants. Further, “by retaining close contacts with the sending

society—what Appadurai (1996:22) refers to as initiating ‘new conversations between those who move and those who stay’—these migrants and transmigrants are able to maintain their original analytic, emotional, creative, and behavioral skills” and “embrace a new culture without sacrificing their historical identity” (Koehn et al. 117). In anthropology, multiplicity is not only a realistic and attainable possibility for transnationals, it is the very way of life.

One way the possibility of multiplicity manifests itself is in the negotiation of beliefs about origin. Many transnationals find that in their new locales, with new influences, particularly the development of relationships with persons from outside the migrant’s native culture, new tales—religious or secular—become an important part of the migrant’s identity. Instead of abandoning old notions, however, they incorporate ideas from both cultures into regular practice, thereby maintaining attachment to the original while simultaneously marking the importance of the new one. For Busia, this means she can honor the lessons taught by Ghanaian myths of origin without necessarily believing the stories within them to be reflective of the true origin of the world, the Akan people, or the relationship between the two: “it is not so much that their myths of origin have become crucial to me in terms of my own creative impulses as that the social ceremonies of birth, death and celebration through which these myths are marked give meaning to my life” (Busia 60). Even though she does not hold the myths to a standard of religious truth, she recognizes “the power of those originary mythologies to express through their images the worldview they lay claim to” and as a result, “those myths of origin have indeed still

informed [her] idea of family, community, and peoples” (Busia 59). The traditional method of understanding the myths is not applicable to Busia’s contemporary American situation, but the influence of those myths on her understanding of the world remains significant.

The same can be said of rites and rituals. For Busia, the Akan world “is the universe that gives shape to the lives of the people among whom [she] was born and who certainly—wherever in the world [she is] and whatever it is [she thinks she is] doing—claim [her]” (Busia 60). Whether or not she regularly practices their rituals is irrelevant, because she still feels connected to and part of the community. Despite her physical separation, “their seasons and symbolic demands hold almost as much sway as the Christian calendar or the academic year. [She] acknowledge[s] their festivals, whether or not [she] practices them [herself] ritually” (Busia 60).

Distanced from the group, Busia still feels reverence for its traditions. She is not a physical part of it, and does not live the same lifestyle as those who are in Ghana, but she still feels she is part of the community, a sense of belonging extended across national boundaries. Busia is only one example, but her experience is telling of the possibility of multi-locality. She remembers her past, and that memory nurtures a continuous connection to it.

### **MEMORY’S INFLUENCE ON IDEAS OF COMMUNITY**

But transnationals may not be as connected as they think, as perceptions of connection between diaspora and continental Africans may be distorted. In Burrell

and Anderson's 2008 study, for example, informants may not acknowledge or realize the potentially illusory condition of life in the diaspora, especially in terms of the strength of their connections with those at home in Ghana. The work of Michael Jackson, an anthropologist of phenomenology, supports such illusion, as he finds that the tendency to see the world through a distorted lens is equally likely for both Africans and westerners: "Africans and Europeans alike experience a tension between the way the world appears in its givenness or facticity and the way one wants it to be" (Jackson 27). This is the essence of the discrepancy between the ideal and the real: human beings, regardless of their geographic origin, are wont to view their world according to their own interests, with the result that images of culture are unintentionally misrepresentative of the culture's actual practices. In Burrell and Anderson's findings, Ghanaians living abroad could perceive themselves to be representing the cultural identity of Ghana—and Ghana to be maintaining its connection to them—when in reality, their loyalty and allegiance to that identity is questionable. Internal perception of self is distinct from external observation by others, and it is perhaps this divergence that is most telling of Ghanaian representation in a transnational context. Whereas individuals, as Burrell and Anderson find, may consider themselves happily representative of Ghanaian ideals, their peers may challenge their authenticity more critically.

Another possible explanation for contested experiences of expatriates maintaining Ghanaian community ideals rests in the limitations of the human mind. As social psychologist Daniel Kahneman proposes, there are two distinct selves,

separated into categories of the “knowing self” and the “remembering self” (Kahneman). As a consequence, “we do not attend to the same things when we think about life than when we actually live” (Kahneman). Memory is distinct from experience; it cannot reproduce the lived experience as it truly happened with absolute certainty.<sup>1</sup> Social pressures are proven to be significant influences on memory recall, which could suggest that the expatriates in Burrell and Anderson’s study could be reporting their feelings of content based on an idealized version of communities that they remember inaccurately because of altered memory, or because subconsciously, they want to remember it differently (Edelson 108). As anthropologist Joann D’Alisera notes, a memory of an event “is something more than a (re)constructed history of the past. It is in fact a (re)collected set of images in which that which has disappeared (re)appears in new and intriguing forms” (D’Alisera 40). Though the expatriate informants’ inaccurate representations may be unintentional, and they may truly feel connected to their homes through ICTs, memory bias should certainly be considered—nostalgia for an experience of the past, which is theoretically conveyed and continued through these ICTs, is often influential on a person’s perception of the experience.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, for some scholars, nostalgia includes “in addition to the lived past, a preference for the un-lived or imagined past”; communication through ICTs could be an attempt to fuse nostalgic yearnings with actual experience (Milligan 384). The ICTs may be effective in

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<sup>1</sup> Sir Frederic Bartlett, *Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1932).

<sup>2</sup> Jason Arndt, “False Recollection: Empirical Findings and their Theoretical Implications.” *The Psychology of Learning and Motivation* Volume 56. (Waltham, MA: Academic Press, 2012): 119.

convincing expatriates they are still connected, but Burrell and Anderson's study does not survey all informants' sentiments of inclusiveness upon return, which is often different than expected, as Lake observes.

Memory failure at large can be used to the transnational experience. Daniel Schacter, for example, describes memory failure through the idea of seven sins: transience, absent-mindedness, blocking, misattribution, suggestibility, bias, and persistence (Schacter 4). Of particular relevance to transnationals are misattribution and bias, which are concerned with the source of memory and contextual influences on it. Schacter explains that "it is difficult to separate recall of 'the way we were' from current appraisals of 'the way we are'" (Schacter 141). In the case of transnationalism, this could easily come to determine a person's recognition of connection to the community: the expatriate informant may firmly believe the connection exists, but, as Schacter explains, it may be because the memory is incapable of distinguishing between what was and what is. If the individual was connected while at home in Ghana, he or she may be applying that memory to his or her condition in London, even if it is not reflective of the true experience. When such misconception is construed as truth, though, the result is an imagined narrative of the transnational connection to community that is not an accurate representation of the lived experience.

Instead, there is a discrepancy between what is real, what is told, and what is believed. Anthropologist Edward Bruner notes that "the distinction is between life as lived (reality), life as experienced (experience), and life as told (expression)"



(Turner and Bruner 6). What a person thinks is distinct from what actually is, and what a person experiences is inevitably different than how he or she describes it, because experience cannot be replicated to reproduce an exact duplicate. Further, “our memories of the past are often rescripted to fit with our present views and needs. The sin of bias refers to distorting influences of our present knowledge, beliefs, and feelings on new experiences or our later memories of them” (Schacter 138). For expatriates, then, there may very well be an unintentional rescripting of community to fit the present situation. In order to operate in their new contexts, it is highly likely that expatriates may unknowingly encounter memory bias that skews their perceptions of their connection to the home environment.

Vertovec explores the effect of these potentially distorted recollections and perceptions of home countries in transnational migrant populations. He finds that through “the awareness of multilocality, the ‘fractured memories’ of diaspora consciousness produce a multiplicity of histories, ‘communities’ and selves” (Vertovec 7). Differing perceptions of “what used to be,” visions of the transnationals’ home before they indeed became transnationals, creates a different narrative of community. This, too, is a legacy of colonial impact, with postcolonial subjects trying to establish independence and develop communities distinct from the colonial imposition. As Werbner notes, “the postcolonial imagination as a highly specific and locally created force reconfigures personal knowledge in everyday life... that reconfiguration shapes the subjective, moral and religious realities” (Werbner 3). In both the postcolonial and transnational context, when those recollections are

reproduced and presented as realities, the result is a multiplicity of meaning. The transnational living abroad finds a different definition of community than the transnational who has lived abroad and has since returned, and an even different definition from the one who has never left.

D'Alisera studies collective memory as an identity-formative process in the particular context of West African migrants. She specifically studies Sierra Leonean Muslims in America, but her findings, and their experiences, are relevant to notions of transnational community at large. She bases her work on the idea that "home and ultimately the loss of home become an important base upon which identities are developed and maintained" (D'Alisera 39). She questions how changing notions of "home" and "community" influence changing notions of self. She finds

images of homeland are a way of localizing memory within the space of displacement. Those spaces ultimately become imaginative (re)constructions in which the illusion of rediscovering the past in the present becomes the central paradigm for defining group and individual identity (D'Alisera 40).

Remembering past definitions of community, meaning those that existed for the Sierra Leonean informants before they moved to the United States, allows the migrants to build a sense of identity in their new transnational context. Memories of home bridge the experience of present displacement with comfortable images from the past, creating a sense of familiarity in an unfamiliar setting. As D'Alisera notes, however, those images are only "imaginative (re)constructions," which potentially mislead informants to self-definition based on an imagined, not true reality, given

the changed context of life in the United States. This could easily be the case for the participants in Burrell and Anderson's study, as well; they believe they are connected to Ghana through ICTs, but their physical connection has not been tested, because they have not physically returned.

The past, then, is highly influential in determining how a person incorporates the experience of displacement to maintain or create an identity. But D'Alisera stresses that "the presentation of the past has little to do with historical 'truths,' but much to do with the way in which displaced identities are negotiated and made 'real'" (D'Alisera 41). Instead, D'Alisera argues, groups provide frameworks for individuals to keep and store memories, thus influencing the way those memories are recollected and represented as "true" or "real." "Presentation" is a key word here— as any oral historian will attest, the actual reality of the past does not always parallel a community's representation of it. It may be idealized to portray a changed image of the culture, or made to justify present identities by emphasizing aspects of history that were not necessarily most prominent during their own historical present. In terms of community, migrants may alter remembrances of traditional views to accommodate life in its present transnational context. For this reason, the theoretical ideal of community may be an impossible reality, and could in turn cause an effect of disappointed, disillusioned, and frustrated returners when new identities do not align with previously established ideals.

## RE-TELLING THE TRANSNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

But misperception and misrepresentation do not discriminate; they guide experience in both places. Just as misperception may cause migrants to experience an imagined connection to the home community when they are abroad, misguided perceptions of the world abroad often frame the re-telling of their transnational experiences when they return home. Memories of life abroad can be misremembered and misconstrued just as readily as memories of home can be while informants actually are abroad. Burrell and Anderson find that

the benefits of having lived abroad and returned built upon these imaginings of the land where 'money grows on trees' reduced the incentive for Ghanaians to describe their struggles in London in too much detail once they returned to Ghana, and so these misperceptions continue (Burrell and Anderson 208).

The allure of life abroad is that it supposedly provides opportunity for endless success, and this is the story people at home want to hear. When people have gone and returned, they are likely to emphasize the positives, brushing over the negatives, because they do not want to appear as if they have failed in a land of opportunity. It is an inherent paradox of the transnational experience: travelers are expected to find certain experiences, and if they do not, it is assumed that they have failed, rather than that the envisioned experience is not achievable. As with the vision of "home" that does not measure up, challenges to the idealized version of "abroad" are not accepted very readily. The fantasy is maintained at the expense of

the individual's true experience. As a result, misguided conceptions continue the image of life abroad as the ultimate demarcation of success.

Mousse Sene Absa's 2001 film *Ainsi Meurent les Anges (And So Angels Die)* elucidates this point. Detailing the story of Mory, a Senegalese man who returns from France without the success story of Western prosperity that his village had imagined, the film illustrates how failed conceptions of transnational possibilities can taint relationships between transnationals and their communities at home. Stephanie Newell explains that "in one vivid, violent scene, we are shown how Mory's father has sold his soul to neocolonial values to such an extent that he violently cuts his feet in order to force them into a pair of European shoes" (Newell 42). Besides this one pair of shoes, Mory returns with little for his village, yet the people prize the ideal of the West so much that his father is willing to physically cut his feet so that the shoes will fit, so that he will own a piece of the fantasized West for all to see. They do not see the challenges Mory faced while abroad, but rather the fact that he was able to go at all, able to achieve that status. His true experience is not what counts; it is the imagined reality that bears weight.

What these examples teach us is not what constitutes community, but rather what frames it in transnational contexts. Whether the migrant is abroad or has returned, the community is always imagined. I do not deny that there are structural components to the community that undoubtedly materialize its existence, for there certainly are—political establishments, ritual practices, and economic systems, to name a few—but I do suggest that once a person removes him/herself from the

original context, a standard of community agreed upon by both the migrant and the original group ceases to be possible. As Bruner explains, “it is impossible to know completely someone else’s experience” (Turner and Bruner 7). This is important because the experience of going and coming back is different from the experience of staying, and both experiences frame conceptions for those who undergo them.

When the two groups conceive of community, then, they naturally have different ideas. Each group may be sympathetic to or interested in the other’s experience, but there is an undeniable fission that cannot always be overlooked. In Gyekye’s and Dogbe’s terms, the two groups have different ideas about reciprocity. Their ideas of community have diverged, and cannot necessarily rejoin, because those experiences will always shape ideas about interdependence, reciprocity, and cooperation.

Read in comparison to one another, the experiences of the expatriates and those of the repatriates share a common tale. The expatriates are excited with their ability to maintain connection with the home community: “we found generally that ICTs at Ghanaian social events indeed were used to promote a sense of belonging and enhanced cultural identity through synchronization with the homeland and with other co-nationals in the diaspora” (Burrell and Anderson 211), while the repatriates express disappointment in what they find as “an atmosphere of alienation” (Lake 33). The emotional components of both studies are very different—generally optimistic for expatriates and disappointed for repatriates—but in both cases, an image of completed community only exists when the person is not a physical part of the community. The repatriates are excited to return to their

ancestral home, anticipating the community that will welcome them as they complete their journey of re-connecting with history, but they are disillusioned when the connection is not made. Likewise, the expatriates are proud of their continued relationship to home, but upon return, they do not find continuity of inclusion. Gladys, an informant in Burrell and Anderson's study, expresses her disappointment when she returned to Ghana for her mother's funeral after 32 years in London:

she expressed having never felt more disconnected from her family than when she was physically with them for the first time after a long absence, saw firsthand how everyone's lives had carried on in her absence, and how she was no longer part of that (Burrell and Anderson 211).

Theoretically, she could maintain connection through ICT use, but in reality, it was not possible, just as integration was impossible for the repatriates in Lake's study.

Each of these anthropologists has found very different evidence regarding acceptance in and maintenance of Ghanaian communities. Their contradictions are inconclusive, as there is no one image of the transnational experience. The same ideals that foster Gyekye's and Dogbe's representation of community values are not always possible, nor are those that Burrell and Anderson or Lake find. In different locales and in different contexts, community has different connotations, even when the people experiencing it do not change. Further, because experience is re-told rather than shared, there is an unavoidable disconnect between those who go and those who stay, and consequently, realities of transnationalism are distorted. Both sides present different expectations, so they interpret the constitution and

maintenance of community differently. The expatriates content in London perceive community to be maintained because that is the narrative they want to find true, both for themselves and for those at home who will judge their experience as failure if it does not reflect expected outcomes. The repatriates returning to Ghana do not find community maintained because their expectations of immersion exceed the capabilities of a real environment, so they are not met, and disappointment ensues. But just as there can be no one Ghana, there is also no one “transnationalism”; it is simply non-existent.



## CHAPTER TWO

At independence in 1957, Ghana became the first sub-Saharan African nation to free itself from colonial rule. In the years that followed, as the country established itself in the international community, leaders experimented with different governmental policies and constitutions. The years 1966 to 1979 marked the period of greatest political transition, beginning with the 1966 overthrow of Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first president and leader of the fight for independence. This was the first of three coups, though it was not until the end of the period, in 1979, that military violence ensued.<sup>3</sup> In addition to the issues of cultural self-definition that accompany the birth of a postcolonial nation, this period of transition naturally drove literary production, as authors sought to explicate how Ghanaians formed their identities, and exhibit sentiments not captured in other, more empirical disciplines, like anthropology. Read in conjunction with the anthropological concerns addressed in Chapter 1, literature provides an alternative perspective on the maintenance of community in the transnational context, as it exhibits the concerns that people found most pressing, those they wished to discuss in an expressive medium that can freely criticize cultural behaviors in a way that scientific discourse cannot. Literature therefore acts as a kind of pulse of the

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<sup>3</sup> LaVerle Berry, ed. *Ghana: a country study*. (Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1994): xv.

people—an important record of cultural concerns that are not discussed in other disciplines.

Among significant literary works from this period are Francis Selormey's *The Narrow Path* (1966), Ayi Kwei Armah's *Fragments* (1969), and Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977). Each author explores the impact of independence on Ghanaian conceptions of community and identity-formation from a slightly different perspective. Collectively, they can be read as an exploration of the relationship between the ideal and the real in terms of inclusion in a communitarian society. Specifically, the novels explore the implications of abandoned community, insincerity, loss of self, conflict between tradition and modernity, and the complications of a dual identity. Given the period's political uncertainty, these issues were especially poignant. Here, I suggest that these issues are the major reasons why the community structure does not support people in the ways it claims.

### **ABANDONED COMMUNITY**

In each of these novels, the characters struggle with their relationship to a community that does not uphold the image it originally claims. As communities stray from the values they initially proclaim, the characters are forced to consider the strength of the collective versus that of the individual, uncertain what the changes imply. In *Our Sister Killjoy*, Aidoo depicts one woman's experience of Ghanaian community in a transnational context. Her protagonist, Sissie, travels as a foreign exchange student from Ghana to Germany. She meets Marija, a lonely

German housewife who tries to seduce her, and visits London, Ghana's "colonial capital." The work is divided into four sections: Sissie's preparation for departure, her experience in Germany and with Marija, her time in London, and her thoughts on a lover's choice to remain abroad rather than return to Ghana, written as a love letter. Throughout the book, which is a mixture of prose and poetry, Sissie reveals her contempt for the many Ghanaians she observes losing their sense of African identity and community as they migrate. She laments her treatment as an "exotic" visitor in the West, as well as for her fellow countrymen who have chosen to live abroad, forgetting their origins and abandoning their traditions in favor of Western ideals. At one point, she angrily asks her lover "What did I rather do but daily and loudly criticize you and your friends for wanting to stay forever in alien places" (Aidoo 117). She believes they have lost their Ghanaian identity, opting instead to live in a world that is not their own, where they abandon their past to prove that they can survive in the world of the Other, the world of the Colonizer.

In *Fragments*, Baako Onipa finds this same kind of abandoned community. Before his departure, Baako is assured his sense of belonging to his community is well-founded. Those who bid him farewell wish him the best and insist he will be welcomed upon his return. He is told "You who are going now, / do not let your mind become persuaded/ that you walk alone. / There are no humans born alone. / You are a piece of us, / of those gone before/ and who will come again" (Armah 5). He leaves with a feeling that he will always be a part of Ghana and that Ghana will always be a part of him; the influence of his home is inescapable, and for that, he is

grateful. The community establishes its values in the proverb “a human being alone/ is a thing more sad than any lost animal/ and nothing destroys the soul/ like its aloneness” (Armah 6). This teaching, to Baako, implies a sense of completeness found in the community. His village recognizes the importance of community support, reassuring Baako that he will always be a part, never be alone. As his family discusses his departure, Naana, the trusted grandmother respected for her age and knowledge, assures “everyone who goes returns. He will come. He will be changed, but we shall welcome him as the same. That is the circle” (Armah 4). Departing with this assurance, Baako is confident he will forever remain a part of his Ghanaian community, regardless of location.

But Baako does not find these promises upheld. Just as the anthropological studies suggest visions of communities both at home and abroad are fantasies, so too is Baako’s understanding that he will always be welcome (see pages 37-38 above). Cecil Abrahams notes “it is in great trepidation that Baako returns to his homeland, a country which has been corrupted and which now measures a man in outward possessions rather than integrity” (Abrahams 357). He does not find the same welcome he was assured, nor does he feel comfortable in what was once his most natural environment. Instead, “all his talk was of a loneliness from which he was finding it impossible to break, of the society he had come back to and the many ways in which it made him feel his aloneness” (Armah 145). At his departure, his community guaranteed inclusion was eternal. He was not to feel alone, at home or abroad, because he was a part of the whole. But now, “he finds himself alienated

from his society by its open and cynical corruption, and from his family by their inability to understand that his ambitions are not primarily material ones” (Lobb 253). The isolation is unexpected, which only reinforces his alienation, because he has returned to a world different than the one he remembers. He is therefore distanced both because of his isolation and because of his lack of knowledge; like Sissie, he is distressed that his community is not what he once thought. Baako himself has certainly changed, too, but he is disturbed by the stark shift he notices in his community’s value system simply because they now have access to the world of the been-to.

Again in *The Narrow Path: An African Childhood*, the protagonist is disappointed by the illusory nature of community—he does not find it fulfills the claims it makes. The author explores the relationship between the Ghanaian individual and community, as well as Christianity’s effect on traditional community structures. In the novel, the protagonist, Kofi is the son of Nani, a strict headmaster who moves his family from village to village as he accepts different positions at several Catholic schools along the coast. The work documents the conflicts of a rural boy’s life in Ghana during the 1930s and 1940s: life as the well-to-do headmaster’s child, an African boy choosing an identity in the colonial world, and the tension between tradition and modernity. As the coherence of a strong family begins to deteriorate, Kofi is forced to come to terms with his identity alone. Among his many concerns are the fear of the unknown, the loneliness of solitude, the African dilemma of Western versus indigenous, the reality of a dissolving community, and

the desire for development in the context of rural Ghana. As he confronts these issues, Kofi undergoes his own maturation. In this way, *The Narrow Path* can be considered a *bildungsroman*. Like Sissie and Baako, he witnesses the collapse of a community structure, but unlike Sissie and Baako, he has not been abroad; his community dissolves because of internal issues, not external factors, and does so thirty years before the crisis of the independence struggle. Kofi's example suggests that the abandonment of community is not a problem unique to well-traveled, upperclass and "cosmopolitan" Ghanaians; it is manifested in the indigenous, as well. The problem is not unique to a newly-independent nation, but one imbedded in the culture long before decolonization. The problem's widespread resonance suggests the cultural framework of community is less developed than it may seem or want to be, for these characters' experience all challenge the system's authenticity, and all come from different geographic, economic, and historical backgrounds. The pervasiveness of the experience suggests the framework of community is aspirational rather than real.

With each move, Kofi and his family become more disrupted. Geographically, of course they are displaced. But each time, the family itself also loses cohesiveness. Nani has adopted the Christian school system's punitive approach of corporal punishment, so Kofi and his siblings suffer physical beatings often. At different points, and against his mother's wishes, the children are sent to live with various relatives. This involuntary fostering fragments the family structure even further, because it creates tension between the parents and their children, as well as the

extended family. Such tension causes Kofi to question the strength of his familial community. Despite the fact that Kofi is surrounded by many others, he admits, "I felt alone and friendless in the middle of so many people" (Selormey 175). On the surface, there appears to be a community that gives him access to a great number of potential friends and allies, but he cannot break the boundary of superficial relationships.

When he recognizes his own plight, Kofi simultaneously recognizes his own maturation: "Kofi's painful experiences, a number of them resulting from his father's severe beatings, are given to be sensed as rites of growth" (Galle 31-32). Acknowledging and confronting the painful realities of his familial life, which stir internal conflict within the young boy, he grows into himself. Through this growth, he admits the loss of his family. The most vivid example occurs when he defies his parents for the first time. Reprimanding his son publicly in front of his Class 3 schoolmates, Nani beats Kofi with twenty-five strokes (Selormey 80). This moment signifies a pivotal point in the strained relationship between Kofi and his father, and after the beating, Kofi realizes "that day saw the end of my childhood. From then on I knew that I must stand on my own feet" (Selormey 81). Even within his own family, Kofi is alone, just as Baako is alone even within his own motherland.

In *The Narrow Path*, division and alienation are unquestionable; it is undeniably a story of a broken family. There is little harmony in Kofi's life, and "the writer in all honesty makes a social statement on the plight of children from broken homes" (Achufusi 181). Kofi's community is steadily declining into a disjointed

mess. When Nani moves the family back into his father's house, Kofi's mother refuses to live there, because "she knew she could not live a day with [her] uncle's wives without quarrelling" (Selormey 164). She instead proposes that the family move in with her mother, but Nani refuses. He capitalizes on "the one weapon he had to force [his wife] to obey him," demanding that the children live with him at his father's compound, where their aunts will care for them (Selormey 165). This decision ruptures the family structure even further, for it furthers the rift between father and son by creating one between mother and father.

Fostering is a common practice in many African societies, but because Kofi's mother is forced to partake against her will, it disrupts the cohesiveness of the family, for it stirs anxiety and jealousy between Nani, his wife, and his sisters. In turn, this inflicts the same complications on Kofi and the children. Kofi's mother cries, "those wicked women are stealing my children from me. And your father agrees to it. They will give them sweets and make them forget me" (Selormey 172). She grieves at the state of her family, which has become so broken that even her children refuse to visit. According to McDowell, "there is here the feeling of a whole civilization having been slowly dissolved" (McDowell 221). The fragmentation, the characters fear, is irreparable, reflective certainly of Baako's namesake, fragments. Continuous displacement has torn any sense of community, and as a result, family unity is nearly impossible. The parents "both blamed themselves, as well as each other, for the near-tragedy that had come to us," Kofi notes, but it is too late for reconciliation (Selormey 178). The relationships are broken, the community gone,



and the individuals alone. Like Baako, Kofi grieves for the wreckage, but he also knows the hope of resolution is useless. The novel ends on a final regret: "I never achieved that father-and-son relationship with him that I so dearly wanted" (Selormey 178). Kofi has been channeled into a narrow path, just as his father intended, but it is one of solitude and sorrow.

*The Narrow Path* could easily be considered a story of just one family's destruction, the plight of a family forced into a Christian lifestyle regardless of each individual's personal beliefs. But it extends beyond one single situation of a Ghanaian family into an example of the significance of community and its changing definitions. For Homi K. Bhabha,

the people are neither the beginning nor the end of the national narrative; they represent the cutting edge between the totalizing powers of the 'social' as homogenous, consensual community, and the forces that signify the more specific address to contentious, unequal interests and identities within the population (Bhabha).

Neither Kofi, Baako, nor Sissie are the sole inscribers of their country's value system, but their dilemmas demonstrate Bhabha's point precisely: they underscore the discrepancy between a community that operates collectively yet fails to account for those who are excluded, those who are noted for their difference.

Kofi first grapples with the challenge of perpetual displacement, never fully integrating into a single community. He struggles to maintain his ethnic status in Ho, a community entirely different than his own, and cannot adapt to the customs he finds. His family then dissolves, leaving him devoid of both a regional or village

affiliation and a family support system. Instead, he stands alone, in a country that is supposedly built on the foundation of togetherness. He grieves, questioning the reality of a world based on community ideals, because for him, such a world does not exist. In his Christianized reality, it cannot exist. His father's position as a Christian leader has fragmented Kofi's world, as his father's religious ambitions cause the family continued disruption as they are constantly relocating and reestablishing their identity in new places. Missionization is the underpinning cause of such fragmentation, because it is the reason Kofi cannot establish an identity or connect to any defined community. Without his permission (i.e. by virtue of his birth to the headmaster), he has lost access to the community to which all Ghanaians are theoretically entitled. He has been forgotten, thrust with Sissie and Baako into a group of overlooked individuals excluded from their cultural right to inclusion in the whole.

Through different experiences, Sissie, Baako and Kofi all find their homes dissolved of the sense of community that each has been promised. Their findings suggest a discrepancy exists between culture's alleged value system and the practical application of this system. Like the imagined community of the expatriate and repatriate informants in the previous chapter, for each of these characters, the promised ideal is not the lived reality. While no country, group, or society can be expected to realistically uphold all proposed goals, it is significant that these characters struggle with the same problem within different communities that do not seem to recognize their own dissolution. The fact that each of these authors

develops realistic characters who deal with a common problem suggests that behind visions of happiness in popular culture, there is an undertone of skepticism towards the country's cultural ideals, and their implementation. In their works, Aidoo, Armah and Selormey shed light on communitarian shortcomings as a result of rapid change in social setting—transnationalism, in Aidoo's and Armah's work, and migration due to missionization in Selormey's—in very different historical and political moments.

### **TRANSNATIONALISM AND INSINCERITY**

After observing their countrymen's tendency to abandon their communities, the characters note that those same countrymen often develop habits that are insincere to what the characters consider authentically Ghanaian. This insincerity, I propose, is a contributing factor to the authors' contentions that Ghana's cultural framework of community is in fact dissolving. As Kofi, Sissie, and Baako encounter a developing culture of superficiality, they question the relationship between Ghana and the world, and between old familiar customs and emerging globalized ones. Sissie's first encounters in Europe show her incomprehension of difference; she cannot grasp the lifestyle she has entered. Her shock is unsurprising, as confusion is an expected outcome of travel, but to Sissie, the world she has entered is not merely different, it is truly beyond understanding. In London, she finds that "the more people she talked to, the less she understood" (Aidoo 85), and in Germany, she cannot understand even the way people eat: "but to actually chill food in order to eat

it was totally beyond her understanding. In the end, she decided it had something to do with white skins, corn-silk hair and very cold weather” (Aidoo 68). As is always the case with culture shock, Sissie is baffled by the practices she finds. But more importantly, she is baffled by her countrymen who adopt them, for she thinks they are insincere. Distraught, she admits “loneliness pursued me there in the unwholesome medications on the food that I had to eat out of tins, boxes, and plastic bags, just a state of which got my blood protesting loudly through the rashes and hives it threw on my body” (Aidoo 119). She cannot understand the world she has entered, and she cannot overlook the insincerity she finds there.

In line with Sissie’s contention that those who remain abroad are merely pretending to feel fulfilled, posing as they mimic the ideals of the West, Baako is disheartened by the fakeness he observes in the Western world. He finds people will do anything to fulfill an image of Western happiness: “He had seen this first thing: an invitation into a pretended world, happily given, happily taken, so completely accepted that there had hardly been any of the pretenders to whom it could have seemed unreal” (Armah 88). Just as we saw in the anthropological studies (see page 26 above), to many, the acting becomes so habitual that the line between illusion and reality is blurred. Baako feels defeated by the fact that his peers choose so regularly to pretend their lives are optimal, when in reality, they are only upholding an image for the West. Koku Amuzu notes, “throughout the novel it is this awareness of defeat, futility and loneliness which defines all the characters who seem to have an interest in and love for humanity” (Amuzu 82).

Sissie's later responses to her interactions with Ghanaian intellectuals reinforce the same sentiment, as she questions their loyalty to their nation. Addressing her lover, she writes, "[the big-time professors at home] say that after all, literature, art, culture, all information, is universal. So we must hurry to lose our identity quickly in order to join the great family of man." But she concludes this explanation with the question "My Dear, isn't that truly crazy?" (Aidoo 120-121). Her challenge to the professors' claims of universalism stems from her pride in her own culture's uniqueness and her determination to preserve the Ghanaian identity. Unable to comprehend European lifestyle, she is appalled that fellow Ghanaians would pretend to enjoy strange customs that are so clearly not their own. This is certainly a character flaw on Sissie's part, for a person should be able to enjoy another culture while still remaining rooted in her own, but Aidoo's decision to write Sissie in this way is an indication that there are barriers between transnationals and their host countries that are not always reconcilable. This, of course, is the condition of the transnational, but Sissie's exaggerated repulsion from European customs serves to contrast what she sees as the pathetic act of her fellow transnationals assuming Western roles that are insincere to their origins.

The loneliness of the Western world causes Sissie and Baako both to question why Ghanaians abroad continue to treasure their lives in such foreign lands. The allure of imagined economic prosperity is certainly one answer, but Sissie concludes that "these cold countries are no places for anyone to be by themselves. Man, chicken, or goat. There is a kind of loneliness overseas which is truly bad"

(Aidoo 119). In Germany and England, she cannot find the same kind of community she remembers from home. Instead, she finds a land of pretenders, those who “eventually went back home as ‘been-tos’, the ghosts of the humans that they used to be, [and] spoke of the wonders of being overseas, pretending their tongues craved for tasteless foods which they would have vomited to eat where they were prepared best” (Aidoo 89-90). Baako expresses the same concerns, admitting, “I myself am lost here, a stranger unable to find a home in a town of strangers so huge it has finished sending me helpless the long way back to all the ignorance of childhood” (Armah 275). Together, Sissie and Baako question the motives of their fellow been-tos, and suggest that instead of the glorified lives they claim to have, the travelers simply proclaim illusory happiness. The truth of transnationalism, their stories suggest, is both difficult to uncover—disguised in the tales of travelers giddy with excitement that they are part of the “lucky few” (Armah 145)—and detrimental to the preservation of self—many, they claim, are merely mimickers of happiness, their loneliness veiled behind a mask of glory. Anthropologically, this is mirrored in informants’ reluctance to admit to the difficulties they encounter (see page 37).

Sissie herself is a been-to, but she maintains her Akan identity, her connection to her home, and her Ghanaian self. Dr. Abena P.A. Busia, born in Accra in 1953, addresses this question as a Ghanaian expatriate. Though she disagrees with Sissie’s contention that life abroad is a selfish excuse to abandon one’s true identity, she, too, acknowledges the tendency to forget. In her article “Fashioning a

Self in the Contemporary World,” she wonders “at what point does the acquisition of new knowledge or a new Faith make you, individually or collectively, forget, and what do you hear to make you remember again, and how?” (Busia 57). Her role as a leader in the expatriate community of African women perhaps defies Sissie’s claims that Ghanaians largely abandon their identities in favor of Western ideals, but her observation is still testament to the challenge Sissie explains. In both literature and reality, Sissie and Busia contend, memory is tragically unhelpful to the conservation of self; it fails time and again as people forget, willfully or not, what shaped them. Even when Ghanaians abroad do maintain their Ghanaian identities, as Busia does, there are aspects of culture that cannot be preserved. Does relocation always imply a loss of authenticity? Not necessarily, but it does sacrifice access to connection with the whole, further emphasizing the illusory nature of such holism, and it does change cultural realities. Sissie contests this change, but here she fails to acknowledge that humans are indeed always changing.

Decades later, Amma Darko confirms that transnational movement does not always allow people to maintain their former identities, and that past inclusion does not necessarily translate to future continuity. Naturally, transnational migration changes a person, but theoretically, he/she should be able to maintain some cognizance of his/her original self. In her 1991 novel *Beyond the Horizon*, Darko demonstrates how challenging it is to maintain this sense, providing a more recent example of the pains of migration and alienation. Even after political and historical changes, sentiments of torn identity persist in the globalized world. Her protagonist

Mara observes deception that exactly parallels Baako's and Sissie's. She recognizes the falsity of her life, the stringent path that has been carved for her by her father and her husband. She lives a reality that is not her own, and "even when she has thrown off Akobi's yoke, she remains in place living a lie and trying to fulfill the expectations of the family she has left behind" (Odamtten 101). Darko shapes this conflict in the structure of her narrative, opening the novel with an older Mara reflecting on her experiences as she views herself in the mirror. There, she realizes "I am staring painfully at an image. My image? No!—what is left of what once used to be my image" (Darko 1). She is not representative of her own selfhood, but rather a person she has become without choice, through the actions of others—her father, her husband, the men she sleeps with in Germany. Introduced into the literary canon decades after Baako and Sissie, her existence and experience indicate that the same issues of identity feigned to falsely comply with Western ideals persist in the globalized world.

Even those who never leave Ghana, like Kofi, must define a conception of self in the face of colliding worlds. His worries are different than Sissie's or Baako's—his life will still be Ghanaian, still in his homeland, but it will not be indigenous, not to him. He will have to confront the same dilemma of feigned identity, and assimilation—which would require a kind of abandonment of self—could prove an easier transition, especially for an adolescent boy still forming his conception of "I." Whereas Sissie and Baako are external Others, recognized for their differences outside of their native context, Kofi is an internal Other, recognized for his



difference within his own country. Again, this parallels Ghana's struggle for identity as a country, because the population is so variable; Kofi cannot retain his national identity as he travels all across, because that national identity itself is contested (see page 11 above). Like Sissie and Baako, he will have to face his differences: he is an Ewe, but not the same kind of Ewe as those in Ho. Like Baako, he will have to come to terms with the reality of materialism—what it means to be a part of a privileged sector of society. Unlike Sissie and Baako, though, Kofi does not face a transnational dilemma, but rather one of ethnic and class status. Even within one ethnic group, in a country with roughly 100 total, individuals like Kofi question their identity as “Ghanaian.” Both at home and abroad, issues of identity can never fully be settled. The reality of abandoned community is thus a multi-faceted problem, relevant not just to the educated Ghanaians who have traveled the world, but also to families in the villages, families like Kofi's. *The Narrow Path* also demonstrates that issues of identity-formation and politics of community inclusion and exclusion do not discriminate along class or ethnic lines. No matter a person's social position, he/she must come to terms with these issues.

As a headmaster's child, Kofi experiences certain privileges that others do not: “he is well provided for and loved by his parents. He is the only child who wears shoes in a town where even adults go barefooted” (Achufusi 180), and his “cousins all label him as conceited because of his book learning” (McDowell 220). He leads a privileged life because of his father's position in society, which initially provides him excessive comforts, like the shoes. But as his family moves from place to place, the

material comforts he enjoys are counteracted by the strangeness of each new location. When Nani announces the family's upcoming move to Ho, Kofi fears

Ho was an inland town, eighty-six miles away. None of us, except my father, had ever travelled so far. We were to leave our family and friends, to leave the sea and the shore, the lagoon and the coconut trees, and the fresh fish that formed the most valuable part of our diet. We felt lost and bewildered. People said that the customs of the Ho people were different from our own, and that we would have difficulty in understanding and being understood, for although we all spoke Ewe, we spoke a different dialect (Selormey 51-52).

He is to leave the community and environment he knows for an unfamiliar place.

Despite material comforts, Kofi cannot help but fear the unknown. He is to transition from his life at an elevated status to one where he cannot even guess what he should expect. The community is entirely new, the language is different, and the environment is not his own. He cannot help but worry.

Kofi's feelings of exclusion are not far from Sissie's. They are internal, Ghanaian, whereas Sissie's are external, European, but both are facing the unknown. Given her incomprehension of Europe, Sissie is unable to reconcile difference. She is not proud she finds it so difficult, and in fact "for the rest of her life, she was to regret this moment when she was made to notice differences in human colouring" (Aidoo 13). For the first time in Sissie's life, race is a more determining factor of social realities than ethnicity. But the conflict becomes an unavoidable part of her experience as a Ghanaian in Europe. The differences are natural, she acknowledges, but she is unhappy when she realizes "we are the victims of our History and our Present. They place too many obstacles in the Way of Love. And we cannot enjoy

even our Differences in peace” (Aidoo 29). Sissie is uncomfortable, a condition she fully expected when she began her journey, but she is disturbed by what seems to be the impossibility of overcoming such discomfort. Tabish Khair sympathizes with this dilemma, noting that in general, “what the Other signifies is the ineradicability of difference” (Khair 158). Sissie is ashamed that she cannot help but notice differences in humanity, but Khair suggests this obstacle is integral to identity-formation: identity is defined based on perception, a confrontation with the Self that “makes the Self aware of both the proximity and centrality of the Other and its alterity” (Khair 159). This is true for both internal changes, i.e. conception of self, and externally marked identities, i.e. Sissie’s demarcation as black. Difference, then, is central to the construction of self.

But sense of place is also significant to the development of this conception of self. Paula Morgan notes that in *Our Sister Killjoy*, “Aidoo writes out of a settled inner sense of place and belonging which shapes her alien and alienating perspective of strange European lands” (Morgan 192). Aidoo’s own confidence in her sense of place therefore pervades Sissie’s character, and the inability to reconcile difference becomes a feeling of personal defeat for Sissie. She is personally upset by the fact that she is forced to notice differences in race—and also that she is forced to come to terms with her own racialized identity— but also that other Africans will fall to the trap of colonial rule, wishing to prove their skills in the white world rather than at home, in Africa, where they are needed more. Gay Wilentz writes Sissie is “the killjoy who refuses to allow them to live in their delusions and forces them to

acknowledge the duties they have ignored towards their native land and families” (Wilentz 89). Sissie thus tasks herself with the duty of preserving her country’s culture; she will not let it be ignored, replaced, or integrated, nor will she allow the reality of the transnational to continuously be portrayed simply as happiness, because this is an illusion.

In the globalized world of *Beyond the Horizon*, falsity has become Mara’s reality. At the novel’s end, she is confronted quite literally with a choice of identity. Kaye, an African woman and former prostitute in Germany, suggests she needs a new name, saying “Mara is no more... she isn’t the same any more. You are no more you, Mara. You’ve changed” (Darko 127). While she initially contests, replying “No, Kaye... I’m still me, I have just understood the world a bit better” (Darko 127), she later admits “there is no turning back for me now... I have problems recollecting what I was like before I turned into what I am now” (Darko 139). She has lost touch with her world before the West, the community of her birth and the one to which she always should have belonged. Now, displaced geographically and emotionally, she is alone. She speaks to Ghana only through Mama Kiosk, the woman who first helped her realize Akobi’s actions were not normal for a husband/wife relationship. She sends money, TV sets, and episodes of *Tom and Jerry* back to her village, but besides these material contributions, she is gone, “hailed by the ideological forces that subject her and the other characters to this alienated existence” (Odamtten 107). Disappointed, but honest, she admits, “material things are all I can offer them. As for myself, there’s nothing dignified and decent left of me to give them” (Darko

140). She has been stripped of every quality that defines her. Defined only by descriptors that have been assigned to her by others, she is empty. She has been trapped by these restraints, and now she cannot escape. Her life is entirely false, which she openly admits, because she lives a narrative constructed by ideals that are not her own.

The superficialities exposed in these works underscore how both individuals and groups abandon concepts of community even further, because they imply that those who adopt such posed realities are aware of the desire to drop Ghanaian concepts of community in favor of these illusions, whether this decision is conscious or not. In both situations—the act of abandoning community and the development of false identities—social pressure causes an implicit or explicit desire for the individual or the collective to alter a defining characteristic of Ghana. For the individual, it is the choice to desert the Ghanaian identity, and for the collective, it is the choice to abandon group values that cohesively create the community. Anthropologists do not always find the same results; Sherry Ortner, for example, finds that even after thirty years of geographic fragmentation, her graduating high school class maintains “a strong sense of the endurance of community... albeit in fascinatingly altered forms” (Ortner 63). The persistence of this idea across Ghanaian literature, though, suggests that in Ghana, forces of social doubt are working against one another to hinder the sustainability of community values across transnational lines. Instead, individuals find that concepts of community do not always translate or maintain themselves in new locales.

## MORAL VALUES AND LOSS OF SELF

Related to the loss of community across national lines is the idea that for individual migrants, loss of moral grounding often leads to a loss of self. As I noted in the previous chapter, individual evolution is the driving force of national evolution (see page 26 above), so when the characters indict individuals with a loss of self, it is therefore a natural extension that national frameworks dissolve. As the characters encounter their new worlds, they are forced to consider what moral constructs shape their representations of self and how they come to exist as distinct persons in their worlds of changing community values. In *Fragments*, described as a “dissident novel” by Oyekan Owomoyela, Baako experiences disillusionment similar to Sissie’s when he returns from his studies in the United States and finds his Ghanaian community members do not fulfill the image or uphold the values they claimed before he left (Owomoyela 106). Upon his return, Baako is unsettled by the glorification he receives for his been-to status. He receives special treatment and services simply because he has traveled overseas, seen other places: “Come, my been-to; come, my brother. Walk on the best. Wipe your feet on it. Yes it’s *kente*, and it’s yours to tread on. Big man, come!” (Armah 85). This treatment is shallow, Baako contends, because his community is welcoming him not because they have missed him and wish to receive him back into their circle, but because they think he now has new resources and connections that may benefit them. Baako’s transformation is ultimately transformative for his community, too. Presented with a changed

Baako, one they think has unlimited resources, his friends and family have become a group driven by materialistic desires, hoping Baako will be the heroic returner from the West:

‘We have the old heroes who turned defeat into victory for the whole community. But these days the community has disappeared from the story. Instead, there is the family, and the hero comes and turns its poverty into sudden wealth. And the external enemy isn’t the one at whose expense the hero gets his victory; he’s supposed to get rich, mainly at the expense of the community’ (Armah 147).

Baako feels he has become merely a medium to fulfill those desires; everyone he knows, it seems, expects that in return for the privilege of his trip, he will take care of them financially and materially, as exemplified in the discussion of *And So Angels Die* in the previous chapter (see page 38 above). Through Baako, Armah warns Ghana against over-glorification of the West, which he finds has established a materialistic culture that threatens to destroy the Ghanaian community structure. He, along with Selormey and Aidoo, questions the authenticity of the structure.

Baako is not alone in his frustration with his people’s willingness to abandon personal values. In *Our Sister Killjoy*, Sissie finds that with such a strong connection to Europe, or really anywhere that is not home, the individual inevitably experiences a loss of self. Wilentz notes that her trip to England “compels her to issue a direct attack on her countrymen who have considered it politically expedient to remain in exile” (Wilentz 86). She criticizes their lack of loyalty, upset that they have abandoned everything that shaped them merely to mimic the ways of the whites: “if our black-eyed squint mentally reprimands the colonizers because of their history

of domination, she looks equally askance at the African self-exiles who have bought the colonial line” (Wilentz 85). She expresses her frustration poetically, claiming “Beautiful Black Bodies/ Changed into elephant-grey corpses, / Littered all over the Western world” (Aidoo 62). Losing their “Blackness,” Sissie claims, they fight to become what the West has deemed desirable, but in doing so, they become empty; they become corpses. Wilentz recognizes this as Sissie’s “commitment to rebuild her former colonized home and confront those who have forgotten their duty to their native land” (Wilentz 80). Like Armah, Aidoo uses Sissie to issue a warning against fallen African values. The Ghanaian, she assures, will not be forgotten.

Throughout the work, Sissie preserves her sense of self by maintaining her identity as “our sister,” a Ghanaian title symbolic of the idea that everyone is family to everyone else; all are welcome to belong. Wilentz notes that

many of the theories concerning these self-exiles... entertain the notion that the exile chooses to escape limitations at home... the exile, particularly the exiled writer, sees himself—and I use this term advisedly—as freed from the constraints at home and open to a world of cultural expression and diversity (Wilentz 80-81).

But this alleged freedom is precisely what Sissie objects to. She does not find that people experience liberation in their lives abroad, but rather that they become enslaved to the environment they have joined:

the story is as old as empires. Oppressed multitudes from the provinces rush to the imperial seat because that is where they know all salvation comes from. But as other imperial subjects in other times and other places have discovered, for the slave, there is nothing at the centre but worse slavery (Aidoo 87-88).



Sissie finds a culture of solitude and loneliness, where solidified conceptions of both self and community are continuously lost to the allure of the West. Colonialism made subjects who revered the West, but when they actually see the West for themselves, they are disillusioned. When they return, the people in their communities who have not traveled maintain these same reverences, and do not connect with their struggles. The migrants, like Sissie, thus struggle in both locations—abroad and at home—because abroad, they do not find the success they imagined, and at home, their communities do not believe those imaginations are fictitious. Like the informants who cannot convey the true vision of transnationalism to their Western-idealizing communities (see page 37 above), the literary migrants are liminal, lost, alone.

Baako finds his community has lost the moral grounding he remembers when he says he would rather be an artist than a materialistic politician. The members of the community cannot understand why he would choose the creative path rather than the one to power. Power and status are common desires for many Africans, and as such, the community criticizes Baako for not taking advantage of his increased opportunity as a result of his been-to status. They do not recognize his conviction to stay true to himself, but instead question his less-than-glamorous ambitions. Edward Lobb writes that "*Fragments* can be seen as an African *Kunsterroman*—a novel about the artist's education, situation, and responsibilities—and the opposed images of the novel (isolation/contact, fragmentation/order, blindness/sight) as aspects of the artist's unified whole"

(Lobb 259). Like Sissie, Baako returns home to find a community rid of the values he once knew, captivated instead by the new possibilities they imagine Baako will bring as a Westernized African. Like Sissie, he is disappointed in what he perceives as an empty community, but also like Sissie, he refuses to retreat into such a shallow existence. Together, *Our Sister Killjoy* and *Fragments* indict Ghana with a loss of moral grounding that threatens the foundation of the culture. Especially considering the relative youth of Ghana's independence at the time of publication, Aidoo and Armah warn of the dangers of idealizing Western capitalist society. Recalling recent emancipation from European colonizers, they expose the country to its shattered ideals, questioning how a place that is theoretically driven by a value system of reciprocity can produce so many individuals who care so little for everyone else. The cause, they both suggest, is idealization of the West, the privileging of Western "success" over its indigenous equivalent.

From Sissie's perspective, the Western attitude toward the Other is entirely unwelcoming. At times, it is even inhuman: she writes, "I have been to a cold strange land where dogs and cats eat better than many, many children; Where men would sit at the table and eat with animals, and yet would rather die than shake the hands of other men" (Aidoo 99). She is utterly uncomfortable, which elicits a vicarious discomfort in the reader. According to Morgan, *Our Sister Killjoy*

makes the Westerner uncomfortable in a manner that the 'exotic' portrayals of the African tribal world do not... Much of this discomfort is rooted in the fact that the native/other has dared to transform 'itself' into an autonomous perceiving eye and to appropriate the

travel narrative for a satiric expose of cultural and ethnic differences (Morgan 191).

Aidoo exposes an African hostility towards the West, driven largely by an African hostility towards African expatriatism. In contrast, Morgan notes, other authors portray Africa simply as an exotic and unknown place, which reduces the level of discomfort for the Western reader, because the African world and the people within it essentially become incomparable and incomprehensible to the West; the “savages” of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* come to mind. While Conrad’s portrayal is racist in its own way, it is different from Aidoo’s approach. In *Our Sister Killjoy*, Aidoo is directly critical of the Western perception of the Other. Bringing the Western and indigenous worlds together, she demands that Africa broadly and Ghana specifically receive equal attention on the international stage.

The hybrid form of *Our Sister Killjoy* is testament to Aidoo’s demands for attention. Morgan notes, “the narrative, like the traveler/protagonist is restless—constantly shifting in time and space; within symbolic structures and frames of meaning. This woman refuses to be fixed in spatial, temporal and epistemological terms” (Morgan 192). Sissie refuses to let her been-to status define her, or to become one of the pretenders who speaks longingly of the luxuries of England and Germany. Aidoo structures her work to reflect this defiance by weaving stylistically to form what Wilentz calls a “prose-poem-novel” (Wilentz 80) that reflects Sissie’s restlessness towards her fellow Ghanaians’ lack of loyalty. With her unique style, “Aidoo pushes relentlessly beyond the individual illumination towards social

imperatives and solutions” (Morgan 194). Through her work, she exposes a single character’s discontent with the dislocation of community while simultaneously demanding that social attention be paid to what she considers a much broader problem of abandoned community.

In *Fragments*, Juana also highlights the lack of concern for social change. As a visitor to Ghana, she arrives with hope for reform, planning to utilize her psychiatric skills to help the Ghanaian people. Like Baako, however, she is quickly disillusioned by the apparent lack of motivation to initiate change. She notices it amongst native Ghanaians and expatriates alike, neither group choosing to interact with the other in a way that will bridge their separation. She observes other expatriates in Ghana choosing their own isolation, opting not to become a part of the indigenous community, but to remain in their own alienated world of their transnational selves, separate from indigenous Ghanaians: “with more looking and understanding she saw it was not really blindness, but a decision quite consciously made not to see, or to see but never to let any real understanding intrude” (Armah 36). There is no attempt to integrate or understand, merely to live in a closed community of like-minded people.

But it is not just the expatriates Juana criticizes, because she observes apathy amongst indigenous Ghanaians as well. Most Ghanaians, she finds, are not looking for change. Rather, they live in their own reality, content with the basic understanding that things work as they do for a reason, unmotivated to build on or enhance the country’s well-being. Disheartened, Juana realizes “the doctors here

know things are a mess. But they accept it. Like some hopeless reality they can't even think of changing, except to make the usual special arrangements for Senior Officers, friends, what have you" (Armah 191). Defeated, she then says, "they told me I was wasting my time talking of a changed approach" (Armah 192). She is dismayed by the apathetic nature of those around her. Juana is specifically distraught because "throughout her existence in the country the refrain of defeat runs obsessively through her ruminations, and she sees the hopelessness it generates on every face and in everything" (Owomoyela 108). Amuzu generalizes this feeling of discontent to describe "virtually all the humane characters," who make the reader "conscious of their social and psychological detachment from the people and the things happening around them" (Amuzu 82). Juana, Like Sissie, cannot connect to her new community in Ghana. She is distanced and isolated, distraught by what she perceives as an environment uninspired to change, and one that has forgotten its own structural principles of cooperation, interdependence, and reciprocity .

Baako also demands that Ghana recognize its own disintegration, which is represented by the physical manifestation of his shattered self in his mental breakdown. He finds an outlet in Juana, who shares common experience with Baako. She is an outsider in Ghana, just as he was in the United States, and as he now feels in Ghana. She provides understanding because she experiences the same discontent and isolation. He takes solace in Juana as a friend and a lover, but even with this relationship, he cannot escape the reality he has discovered, because ultimately "it is

Juana, who has painfully learned that Africa, imbued with the principles that corrupted the West, cannot provide the person of integrity and reform with the necessary environment in which he or she can be of help to the mass of Africa” (Abrahams 357). This is disillusioning to both Baako and Juana, because both have realized their ideal—for Baako, a community that upholds the teachings it advocates, and for Juana, the opportunity to heal troubled minds—cannot be realized at home (for Baako) or in the diaspora (for Juana). These findings parallel the imagined communities of the expatriate and repatriate informants discussed in the anthropological studies (see page 39 above).

Baako demonstrates his frustration with a lack of grounding most overtly when he is confronted about his wardrobe. Furious at fellow Ghanaians who question why he is maintaining his African style, he retaliates “Why else would I wear tuxes and suits in this warm country except to play monkey to the white man?” (Armah 141). He values his Ghanaian identity more than his status as a been-to, and cannot grapple with the fact that his fellow countrymen do not. Owomoyela recognizes this as Selormey’s intent

to present Baako as a man whose impeccable moral integrity prevents him from joining in the maniacal decadence pervading all phases of public and private life in Ghana, a man driven to insanity by the vengefulness of forces that refuse to let him exist as an island of virtue in an ocean of vice (Owomoyela 109).

Like Sissie, Baako recognizes that he is living in a world of illusion, where people will act a part to achieve any frivolous goal. In both *Our Sister Killjoy* and *Fragments*, the protagonists are appalled by Ghanaians’ failure to uphold their African

identities, opting instead to fit the image of the ideal as presented by the West. But, as Darko shows, even years later, with globalization fully underway, people continue to act on these same impulses. The hopeful alternative to this inauthenticity, it seems, is not even possible.

In the age of globalization, Mara effectively represents the same ideals of greed and corruption that Baako and Sissie find troubling thirty years before. In *Beyond the Horizon*, Darko “reveals the unvarnished truth about the social and moral corruption that plagues Africa’s sons and daughters” (Odamtten 101). Its publication decades after *Fragments* and *Our Sister Killjoy* suggests that such moral corruption is deeply imbedded, a problem inherent not to the troubles of either colonization or globalization individually, but to the character of a materially-driven world. Baako’s millennial feelings of discontent thus foreshadow feelings to come decades later. The problems Sissie, Baako, Kofi, and Mara face are not unique to a newly-independent country (in *Our Sister Killjoy* and *Fragments*), to a colonial territory (in *The Narrow Path*), or to a globalized society (in *Beyond the Horizon*).

In both *Our Sister Killjoy* and *Fragments*, the protagonists resist the will to conform. They refuse to lose what is rightfully theirs: their own selfhoods. Sissie’s dismay with her fellow Ghanaians’ abandonment of community values leads to her own definition of community. Wilentz suggests that

unlike other exiles who have lost that sense of identity that comes from belonging to a community, Sissie becomes the eyes of her community, reporting on those lost ones who have forgotten maternal, familial, and community ties, and squinting at these men...

who refuse to return home to face national realities and rebuild their countries (Wilentz 82-83).

Sissie therefore values these ties, which so many have forgotten, so much that she becomes the very voice of her community as she ventures out of her homeland. She develops a distinct distrust of those who do not return home, which reinforces the idea that her sense of self is embedded in her sense of place. Baako, too, refuses to accept his label as “lucky”: “‘I wouldn’t call it lucky.’ His tone was flat, so hostile that it lacked even the warmth of anger” (Armah 145). They value their communities as a part of their personal identities so much that they are insulted when others do not. Sissie expresses this sentiment when she explains, “our people have a proverb which says that he is a liar who tells you that his witness is in Europe” (Aidoo 74). Those who are most connected elsewhere are unintentionally subject to the realm of liminality. Sissie wants no part of such a reality, but unfortunately, she cannot seem to escape it.

*Our Sister Killjoy*, *Fragments* and *Beyond the Horizon* again illuminate doubtful belief in the maintenance of community when their characters witness a consistent loss of grounding in response to transnational influences. Their communities’ failure to uphold the principles they themselves have set reveals a commentary on the social well-being of the nation: why do these individuals feel such disappointment and alienation when the country is a political and economic example of success? Their companions’ abandonment of their moral codes suggests that social



discontent persists beyond the success of politics and economics; victory in one realm does not guarantee its counterpart in another.

### **DUALITY: TRADITION AND MODERNITY**

One contributing factor to the characters' sense of a dissolving community is the dilemma familiar to many colonized Africans: the tension between traditional and modern lifestyles. Here, I discuss the conflict as an exposition of the tension between what one wants to practice and what one can practice, in general and in terms of community. Often, the conflict is equated to a tension between what is African and what is European, what is indigenous and what is foreign. As discussed in Chapter 1, though, this line is not always clear (see page 26 above). In *The Narrow Path*, Kofi, like many Africans, is plagued by the question of where his allegiances lie. The result is a feeling of dual identity. His father brought "the explanation of new ways, and he was the man who bridged the gap between the people and the missionaries and the government officials" (Selormey 55). Despite their strained relationship, Kofi cannot escape his father's influence, and he himself becomes a product of the bridge between tradition and modernity. Etienne Galle describes this bridge as a "double creed," for one of *The Narrow Path's* "most remarkable achievements is the balance held between the old and the new, most evident in religious belief and practice. The rites of birth, marriage and death are celebrated according to the double creed" (Galle 29). This balance defines Kofi's life, a constant struggle to embody both the old and the new. He claims his father "gave me no

opportunity to stray from the narrow path he had laid down for me” (Selormey 70), the Christian and Westernized path, but he himself strives to maintain an African identity: “he describes himself (born in the 1920s) as caught between traditional African modes and Christian ones: he is born in a French hospital at Lomé, but cured of his first illness by a witch doctor” (McDowell 219). Forced to live a certain way by his strict Christian father, Kofi attempts to find his own path by honoring his traditional past.

In *Fragments*, as in *The Narrow Path*, Baako lives in duality, his experience as a been-to giving him a double-life. By birth, he is Ghanaian, but after his schooling, his family, proud of the achievements he has earned, chooses to identify him as one who has gone and returned. Tabish Khair explains this choice between modern and traditional as a peculiar dilemma for the colonial and postcolonial situation, “the inability of the subject to posit any organic transition between past, present and future” (Khair 124). Baako finds it impossible to straddle the two realms, however, because he is caught between them, never fully a part of either. He finds there are “two distinct worlds, one here, one out there, one known, the other unknown except in legend and dream” (Armah 223). He is somewhere in the middle, part of the “twilight area,” which is also an “area of knowledge... resulting from real information in the form of incoming goods, outgoing people” (Armah 223). He is one of these outgoing people, caught in Khair’s predicament of the inability to transition. In fact he finds that “the main export to the other world is people,” been-tos like him (Armah 224). Unfortunately, for Baako, as well as for the rest of Ghana, “it is clearly

understood that the been-to has chosen, been awarded, a certain kind of death. A beneficial death, since cargo follows his return” (Armah 224). Living this duality, representing both Africa and the West, is, to Armah, synonymous with death. The experience is beneficial to those at home, for as Armah notes, the death is “beneficial” for the community, “since cargo follows his return,” but for the been-to himself, it is sacrificial, for he will forever be marked as different, gone from the community in which he was born (Armah 224). Inevitably, by living the life of a been-to, there is a necessary sacrifice, a loss of self. The opportunity of duality, Armah suggests, is not worth the consequences. Katherine Fishburn elaborates, writing that *Fragments* is “brilliant, bitter, heartbreaking” and that it “savage[s] the Western world’s effects on Africans” (Fishburn 118). This is the condition of the postcolonial: dislocation in both time and space.

Lobb argues that “Baako is concerned with the question of whether to remain alone or to become part of something larger (a relationship, a society), and *Fragments* deals essentially with the question of cosmology—whether individual things can be made to cohere into some sort of larger pattern” (Lobb 256). This is Baako’s primary concern, but he and Juana both find they cannot maintain two identities, cannot exist in the world at large; they must be either Ghanaian or European. In this dilemma, Baako experiences the millennial feeling of not belonging forty years before the dawn of the twenty-first century, when the idea of “citizens of the world” acquires new meaning in a globalized and increasingly-mobile world. But for Baako, even the choice is worthless. He no longer identifies

with his home community, disgusted by its preference for material wealth and prestige, but he also refuses to think of himself as special or enlightened because of his experiences abroad. Instead, he finds himself alone, part of a fragmented world that cannot be pieced back together—one representative of Turner's liminality (see page 9 above).

Kofi and Baako's dilemmas are not unique. They are part of the very nature of the globalized world, and a situation common to Africans across the continent and in the diaspora. There is no solution to the problematic split, as Busia notes when she writes in 1994, "the relevance of these words remains for those of our generation who have not yet reflected sufficiently and taken action towards the resolution of this dilemma of 'being two'" (Anyidoho 24). Beyond the times of colonial rule and the years immediately subsequent, the problem persists. The rifts between self and other, modern and traditional, global and African are inherent to the nature of Ghana (and African nations at large) in an interconnected world. But in philosophy of non-essentialism, some would argue that such binaries are not necessary signifiers of self. As Nick Haslem explains, "when a social category is essentialized it is also seen to be 'inalterable': membership in the category viewed as fixed and impermeable" (Haslam 65). Non-essentialism, then, implies fluidity, the very opportunity not to be fixed. It counters the experiences of Sissie, Baako and Kofi, who cannot seem to fully be two. It suggests not only the possibility of what Busia describes as "the gift of syncretism... the ability to live in multiple worlds" (Busia 60) but further, that the categorizations of modernity versus tradition, self

versus other, and global versus local create a limited perspective. What Aidoo, Armah, and Selormey do not consider is the eradication of categorization at large.

For the characters as individuals, categorization hinders personal conception of self, as they are constantly in confrontation with the Other, assigning their own personal definitions in relation to those Others. Khair notes that “to narrate the Other *only* in words—in language—is to reduce the Other to the language of the Self-same as either basic similarity or obverse negativity” (Khair 152-153).

Describing the Other within the framework of the Self is to define based on “I,” but there is always something missing, something absent, because the definer’s worldview permeates and controls his or her thought-forming process.

Understanding is therefore blocked by the handicap of selfhood in its own right, because the individual is predisposed to think according to his or her own customs, beliefs and practices. When Sissie, Baako and Kofi find their own conceptions of self are broken, they are further handicapped, unable to see Other as anything but “not me,” but also unable to define precisely what “me” means.

In the contemporary world, Ghanaians continue to write of the same struggles of torn identity, particularly regarding the idea of transnationalism. In a collection of poetry published in 2000, expatriate Naana Banyiwaa Horne explains, “I am now severed/ from the force that defines my center./ Unclaimed./ Untouched./ Alone. I have become an island... What did I do to be so black and blue?” (Horne 65).

Migration has rendered her alone and helpless. She grieves, one of the “co-losers in this game/ of flesh-peddling, of profit and of loss./ Separated now by continents,

labeled and relabeled at the convenience of our betrayers, we are the only true losers in this game/ of skewed global commerce” (Horne 85). Historical situations are, of course, contributing factors, but the persistence of the feelings throughout time (1930s-1990s) suggests there is an underlying burden that hinders identity-formation for Ghanaians even as formal institutions change. The recurrence of Selormey and Armah’s 1960’s theme in Horne’s 2000 poetry implies the problem is foundational, a result of discrepancy between the ideal and the real, rather than situational, a result of a certain period. For Horne, the ideal is the promise of opportunity and inclusion in an interconnected world, and for Baako, it is the promise of eternal belonging in his own community. Though their ideals are different, for both, they are fiction. This same fiction exists for the imagined communities of the anthropological informants. The problem of identity, it appears, is timeless, unique not to a given political or economic state, but reflective of the limits of human nature and interaction.

Assuming an identity at all, and a Ghanaian one specifically, is, of course, subject to change. No definition is static, but as noted by philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah, “being African is, for its bearers, one among other salient modes of being, all of which have to be constantly fought for and rethought” (Appiah, *In My Father’s House* 177). For Sissie and Baako, the travelers of the world, as for Horne, this means existence in another world should not automatically foreclose their prior connections, and certainly not without their permission. Their cultural values are supposed to persist and transcend the boundaries of liminality, but they do not find

this to be true. They are instead left pocketed in isolation, scattered throughout a lonely world.

Attempting to define the location of culture, Bhabha writes

the space of the modern nation-people is never simply horizontal. Their metaphoric movement requires a kind of 'doubleness' in writing; a temporality of representation that moves between cultural formations and social processes without a centred causal logic (Bhabha).

Throughout time, Bhabha suggests, a person's representative identity fluctuates based on cultural conceptions and the processes that influence them—how the individual perceives himself based on how others perceive him. Anthropologists discuss this dichotomy as a conflict between selfhood and personhood. Peter Burke concurs, claiming, “cultural identities are often defined by opposition” (Burke 82). Baako comes to recognize himself by the negation of what he is not; he is not Ghanaian, and he is not Western. He is alone. As an individual character, Baako evokes a sense of empathy in the reader, who cannot help but feel sorry for his feelings of isolation. But in the larger context of Ghana, Armah's work suggests the need for an antidote to a dissolving cultural framework. It critiques a corrupt society that claims “a nation is built through glorifying its big shots” (Armah 190). By detailing Baako's experience, he suggests the need for a more objective shaping of identity, one not dictated by greed and self-interest. Privileging those who have already been privileged—by virtue of experience (i.e. the been-tos) or by luck (i.e. those born into wealth)—is no way to improve a culture's social values.

But the complications of privilege extend beyond the sentiments of this fictional, though realistic, boy living fifty years ago. While some African countries are sustained by remittances, the striation of privilege continues to hurt Ghana today. Economist Jeffrey Sachs explains the problem in a contemporary example regarding division between the north and south of Ghana:

In general, the farther you go north, the drier you go, and in general as you move from south to north you also go from more Christian to more Muslim communities. And as you move from wetter to drier, you go from sedentary agricultural to more pastoral. And whenever in economics you go from the coast to the interior you almost always go into a poor economic gradient (Mulholland).

In general, coastal communities, including Accra, are more economically and socially stable—they exhibit less poverty and have more access to resources, including international aid. While there are certainly complications with international aid, it has contributed to the development of high-functioning hospitals with “babies being diagnosed with HIV early enough to save their lives; men and women being restored to health after contracting TB; radiant mothers and babies at the antenatal clinic” (Mulholland). Northern communities, though, do not see such success. Instead, they have clinics lacking in supplies and vaccinations, and therefore patients lacking in recovery and health. While this example may diverge from Armah’s message of social reform in 1969, the implications are the same in 2012: when one sector of society receives all of the attention and resources—be it the high profiling of cosmopolitan businessmen in Baako’s world or medical services in the coastal communities of contemporary Ghana—moral values are disregarded and gaps in



poverty inevitably ensue. In *Fragments*, Armah hopes to lead the postcolonial world away from this division. Baako's attitude, however, compared to the attitude of *Ghanavision*, the corporation he assesses to be driven by greed and fame, suggests that while some individuals, i.e. Baako himself, may be socially-conscious, institutions are not. Because institutions drive the nation's social and economic state of being, Baako's personal revelations do not provide an optimistic attitude for the future. His name, Baako Onipa, is perhaps most telling—literally, it translates to “one man.” Its meaning is twofold: symbolic of his wish to be considered the same as any other person, despite his been-to status, and his disappointed realization that he alone cannot change a culture of institutionalized greed. He is one against many.

In *Beyond the Horizon*, Mara is, unfortunately, representative of the same privileging of material gain over human life. Certainly in the globalized world, where transnational migration has peaked, issues of identity have come to the forefront as the world becomes redefined by countries whose citizens are “becoming increasingly global within a transnational system” (Adebayo 3). But for Mara, Darko's protagonist, the opportunities of globalization do not propel her into a position of empowerment. Like Kofi's, her life is a combination of the traditional and the cosmopolitan; she is sold into marriage by a dowry of “two white cows, four healthy goats, four lengths of cloth, beads, gold jewelry and two bottles of London Dry Gin” and then transported with her new husband to the city and ultimately to Germany (Darko 3). But while her family is excited at the prospect of her life as a transnational, Mara herself is subject to the extremity of her husband's domination

and mistreatment, which forces her into a life of prostitution in Europe. Without a choice, her father “sells her” to Akobi, and then again without a choice, Akobi “sells her” to men everywhere. Alienation is therefore a very real sentiment in the modern world as much as Kofi’s precolonial one, or Sissie and Baako’s post-independence one. It is simply a condition of transnationalism.

### **PERSISTENCE IN THEMES DESPITE POLITICAL AND HISTORICAL CHANGE**

Though their stories are different and their time periods range from the 1930’s to the 1990’s, Kofi, Baako, Sissie, and Mara experience the same feelings of alienation and anger as a result of their migratory statuses. This commonality suggests that beyond the troubles of identity-formation in the colonial and postcolonial world there exists a larger struggle of personhood versus selfhood, the perception of self versus identity ascribed by the outside world. Anthropologists Michael Jackson and Ivan Karp (1990) pay particular attention to this concern. They borrow from Marcel Mauss’ 1939 concept of “*moi*—the awareness of self—as opposed to *la personne morale*—the ideological definition of personhood in terms of rules, roles and representations” to differentiate between self as “me” and person as “you”—personal perception versus group ascription (Jackson 15). People can never be separated from their ontological context, and, further, “concepts of the person,” they find, “seldom cover and contain the full range of a person’s *experience*” (Jackson 16). Experience, then, diverges from its appearance; as demonstrated in Chapter 1 by the informants’ reluctance to report the struggles they endured in the UK (see

page 37 above), recreating, reproducing, or retelling an experience fails to communicate the exact situation. Literature is no exception.

In *Our Sister Killjoy*, *Fragments*, *The Narrow Path* and *Beyond the Horizon*, it is clear that the characters do not actually experience community ideals as they are presented in theory. In each case, the main character feels alone and distanced, both when he or she travels and when he or she returns, unable to find a place in either the diaspora or the home, both of which are supposed to be supportive and welcoming communities. Sissie grows angry as she realizes Ghanaian emigrants are often disloyal to their original identities. Baako becomes frustrated when he discovers his community has become defined by corruption and greed, an everlasting quest for material possession and power. Kofi is disheartened by the personal defeat of his dissolved community. He has grown into a man, no longer the child he once was, but in his maturation, he has only learned the disappointment of theoretical claims of support versus the lived experience of isolation and solitude. Mara, an emblem of progress, a rural village-woman surviving on her own in the globalized world, is actually an embodiment of fallen ideals, a shattered self that has lost all semblance of its original owner. The recurrence of this theme, I suggest, is an indication that community only appears to exist; if it was truly a strong and grounded framework, authors would not continue to write of its failings decades apart.

Aidoo empowers her protagonist to find self-discovery in an alien place, certainly a triumph for African women, but she also criticizes the failures of a

community that does not uphold its principles. Sissie ends on an uplifting note, assuring her lover (and the reader) that “no amount of pseudo-scientific junk is going to make us a weaker race than we are” (Aidoo 114). But she also refuses to let Ghanaians fail their fellow countrymen. She is a strong female character, and as such, she insists that her people can do better; she cannot excuse their shortcomings, for this would weaken her own identity as an independent woman of integrity. Aidoo uses Sissie as a messenger for Ghana, the one who can be counted on to demand reform of social practices and to uphold values as established by Ghanaians, not the outside world.

Armah and Selormey provide less hope, their characters disillusioned by a troubled world. *Fragments* concludes with the hopeful thought that as we age, we “find in wonder a more fantastic world, making us fools in our own eyes to have believed that the old paltriness was all” (Armah 286). But this insight is directly followed by the counterargument that “we are fooled again, and once more taste the sharp unpleasantness of surprise, though we thought we had grown wise” (Armah 286). In *Fragments*, Armah is calling on Ghana to change, but he is also doubtful of such a possibility. *Fragments* and *The Narrow Path* are both examples of what Owomoyela explains as the “writer go[ing] beyond individual alienation to expose what he regards as a systemic dysfunction in the collective life of the continent” (Owomoyela 105). Kofi, like Baako, cannot find comfort in his home because of its divided state. Selormey, like Armah, seeks to expose a troubled countryside, but also like Armah, he has little hope. And in *Darko*, Mara is merely a tragic example of

failed hope, the mysticism of the future unable to solve the problems Baako and Kofi identify decades earlier. Each of the authors warns Ghana of the problems of dissolved community.

In each of these works, the authors are highly critical of Ghanaian society. With significant developments that include a “range of rights and liberties, as well as the emergence of a vibrant civil society and a free and independent media that increasingly holds government accountable on behalf of citizens... Ghana’s democratization has been touted as one of the political success stories in Africa” (Abudlai 2). Given political turmoil elsewhere on the continent, this label is significant, because it demonstrates Ghana’s ability to successfully implement democracy against historical odds. The roots of discontent, then, are not the factors typically problematic to the developing world: political oppression, human rights offenses, or economic instability. Instead, they are specific to Ghanaians: disintegration of community ideals, inability to maintain a dual identity, and overidealization of the West. Ghana as a nation may be doing well, but Ghanaians as a people continue to be torn; the characters of these novels serve as examples.

The fact that Aidoo, Armah, Selormey, and Darko choose to write of the same issues across time suggests there is an underlying concern of self-alienation in a country theoretically driven by emphasis on the collective. Kofi, Sissie, and Baako are alike in that they see through the illusion of the community structure, but Mara is not so lucky: “by the day’s end, the young woman finds herself still trapped in that neocolonial hall of mirrors, never sure if the image seen is the real reflected”

(Odamtten 104). Alone, a Ghanaian in the globalized world, she is essentially helpless, caught in a system of values that does not represent her original concept of self. Theoretically, she, like Sissie, Baako, and Kofi, has access to endless possibility. But in reality, she is doomed. The future, each of the authors worries, is bleak. Their characters and their themes shed light on the reality of a world torn by the impossibility of integration, and the resulting challenges of identity-formation.

### CHAPTER THREE

One major part of Ghanaian culture are Akan *adinkra* symbols, a set of ideographic and pictographic symbols that present the major beliefs and values of the Akan people. A major indigenous art form throughout Ghana, they are emblematic as expressions of identity and are iconic for their images as much as their meanings. Together these components of *adinkra* express and develop Ghanaian worldviews (“Akan Cultural Symbols Project: Introduction”). Each symbol is accompanied by an explanatory proverb that provides a moral lesson or describes a practice which “attempts to depict religious, philosophical and cultural values of the Akans” (Azindow 4). The origin of the symbols is disputed, but “*adinkra* is connected to the human soul (*okra*) which returns to take its rightful place after death,” so it is worn at funerals to express condolences for the family of the deceased and to bid farewell to the departed soul (Azindow 4). As time has progressed, however, the symbols have expanded to become representative of Ghanaian culture in general<sup>4</sup>, appearing in traditional situations, as on *kente* cloth, but also in such varying contexts as bumper stickers and iPhone cases. *Adinkra* is therefore always available for reinterpretation, rather than iconically permanent. It is an intersection of cultural ideas that combine diversified understandings under one system. *Adinkra* is impossible to overlook as an influence on Ghanaian

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<sup>4</sup> While there are many other ethnic groups within Ghana, “it is largely recognized the widespread diffusion of Akan arts and culture traits into non-Akan areas of the country (Cole and Ross, 1977; Larbi, 1992)” (“Akan Cultural Symbols Project”). Akan arts are therefore applicable and important even to non-Akan Ghanaians.

identities, and community is a major theme within *adinkra*. Together, *adinkra* and community ideals constitute a foundation of Ghanaian perspectives.

*Adinkra* symbols first appear in Ghanaian history starting in the nineteenth century (Seeman 112). According to oral tradition, they were introduced to Ghana at the end of the 1818 Ashanti-Gyaman War. Gyaman was a medieval state in current day Côte d'Ivoire, and according to the oral accounts, at the end of the war, Kofi Adinkra, a Gyaman chief, attempted to copy an emblem from the Golden Stool of the Ashanti, which was the symbol of utmost honor and power in the Ashanti Kingdom, and still is in the Ashanti Region today (Hackett 169). Variations of the legend claim that the Ashanti defeated and killed Adinkra, but spared his son on the condition that he would teach the Asante how to replicate the cloth the Gyaman king had been wearing at his death; thus the neighboring Gyaman introduced *adinkra* printing to Ghanaians, and it was associated as a symbolic connection between life and death (Boateng 22).

Other records suggest travelers encountered *adinkra* before this war, most specifically Thomas Edward Bowdich, who collected an *adinkra* cloth from Kumasi in 1817 (Seeman 112). Regardless of the precise origin, in all accounts, *adinkra* is associated with mourning. Some hypotheses suggest that the name means "farewell" or "good bye," and is worn at funerals to represent the continuous relationship between the living and the dead (Agbo 1). Though the accounts differ, there is general consensus that the stamps have origin in funerary rites, and that they were originally carved out of calabash fruits and dipped into a black dye derived from the



*badie* tree (Amoah Labi 49). Over time, the *adinkra* have moved away from their strictly funerary purpose and have infiltrated the culture at large.

In this chapter, I seek to establish *adinkra* as a uniting dimension between anthropological and literary representations of community values. The multiplicity of *adinkra* meaning reflects the multiplicity of identity expressed by anthropological informants, but their loss of originality echoes the literary characters' mourning of the loss of Ghanaian identity. The anthropological informants, I propose, reflect modern worldviews, while the literary characters are conservative in their quest to preserve tradition. *Adinkra*, on the other hand, are simultaneously traditional and modern, which is precisely the condition of the transnational. The fluidity of the symbols proves the adaptability of tradition, and their intersection of different meanings creates a unique platform for differing conceptions of "Ghanaianess" under one universal form. This is a unique system because it provides people who vary greatly in personal worldview—cultural relativists versus universalists, for example—a cohesive network that is at once universal and personal. *Adinkra* is less formalized than either anthropology or literature, but I propose that it is a connecting force between two disciplines that find different meaning in transnationalism.

The evolution of *adinkra* from its original customary role to its contemporary iconic one provides an excellent example of differing interpretations of transnationalism, as well as the place of tradition in modernity. G.F. Kojo Arthur explains that "the symbols and patterns in the textiles constitute a code that evokes

meanings: they carry, preserve, and present aspects of the beliefs, history, social values, cultural norms, social and political organization, and philosophy of the Akan” (Arthur 12). Their adaptation from a funerary practice to an expression of national pride indicates that *adinkra* provide the same wide-ranging interpretations as experiences of the transnational; they simultaneously bear traditional significance and a modified meaning. Regardless of which is honored, their development to fit the modern world indicates a multiplicity of meaning. As Arjun Appadurai notes,

the landscapes of group identity—the ethnoscapescapes—around the world are no longer familiar anthropological objects, insofar as groups are no longer tightly territorialized, spatially bounded, historically unselfconscious, or culturally homogeneous (Appadurai 48).

This is precisely true for *adinkra*: they are no longer confined to the traditional spaces of the Akan but have instead diffused into the globalized world. The choice of groups to proudly display *adinkra* symbols as they migrate throughout the world suggests they are a point of intersection between the physical reality of community and its expression—a crossing point between the anthropological and literary themes previously explored. Their very existence in modern forms supports anthropological notions of multiple identities, but their progression away from their original meanings to their twenty-first century multidimensionality parallels literary contentions of loss of community.

To understand the role of traditional *adinkra* symbols in contemporary practice, we must first examine the relationship between tradition and modernity in general. Appadurai, Charles Piot, and Jean and John Comaroff all explore the

implications extensively. Just as Gyekye finds “tradition is not necessarily at odds with modernity,” these anthropologists propose that modernity is itself grounded in tradition (Gyekye, *African Cultural Values* 173). Comaroff and Comaroff claim quite frankly

it should no longer need saying that the self-sustaining antinomy between tradition and modernity underpins a long-standing European myth: a narrative that replaces the uneven, protean relations among ‘ourselves’ and ‘others’ in a world history with a simple, epic story about the passage from savagery to civilization (Comaroff and Comaroff xii).

Tradition, they find, is always a part of modernity. Ideas that the two are in opposition to one another are simply untrue claims that outside, western observers make. Comaroff and Comaroff use the practice of witchcraft as an example. Claiming “the signs and practices of witchcraft are integral to the experience of the contemporary world,” they write that it is practiced “to act upon the elusive effects of transnational forces—especially as they come to be embodied in the all-too-physical forms of their local beneficiaries” (Comaroff and Comaroff xxv). Even more specifically, soul-eating, a component of witchcraft, “is thought to be driven by an appetite for money, a hunger unleashed, as local commentators stressed, by European colonialism” (Comaroff and Comaroff xxv). “Traditional” practice of witchcraft, then, is driven by “modern” desires colonizers themselves introduced. At the intersection between tradition and modernity, each force acts on and changes the other.

Appadurai further emphasizes the reciprocal relationship of tradition and modernity, arguing that globalization's influence on media and migration develops an intricate reciprocity between old and new that redefines cultural semiotics. Deterritorialization—the process by which communities become less grounded in physicality and more so in communicative relationships—is a major factor in this cultural redefining, for “as group pasts become increasingly parts of museums, exhibits, and collections, both in national and transnational spectacles, culture becomes... an arena for conscious choice, justification, and representation” (Appadurai 44). When developing frameworks to create an image of culture, people are presented with the opportunity of choice. In terms of modernity and tradition, this allows for the introduction of new meanings to old concepts. According to Appadurai, media and migration are the specific forces that reassign meaning, as they form “a theory of rupture” that affects the “*work of the imagination* as a constitutive feature of modern subjectivity” (Appadurai 3). *Adinkra* symbols in transnational contexts fit this model exactly: a form of media, their integration in non-Ghanaian settings prompts a re-definition of their traditional meaning and purpose.

The symbol of *mate masie (ntesie)*, “I hear and keep,” is a relevant starting point, as it depicts the importance of tradition as a foundation of Ghanaian values:



Figure 1. *Mate masie (ntesie)* symbol. Source: K. Arthur & Centre for Indigenous Knowledge systems, "Themes Encoded in the Akan Symbols." 2010.

The accompanying proverb is *onipa wua, ne tekyerema mporow*, "whenever a person dies his tongue does not rot" (Azindow 11). Representative of the permanence of tradition, the symbol teaches that "through the maintenance of unbroken tradition, we keep what has been bequeathed to us by our ancestors" (Azindow 11). Tradition, by its very definition, lives on from past to future, but as it does, it changes, for permanence of tradition is a fantasy. Citing customs like gift exchange, subsistence farming, and rituals to spirits and ancestors, Piot exemplifies this point exactly. He writes

I want to suggest that these apparently traditional features of Kabre society are in fact 'modernities'—that they were forged during the long encounter with Europe over the last three hundred years and thus owe their meaning and shape to that encounter as much as to anything indigenous (Piot 1).

In Ghana, *mate masie (ntesie)* also emphasizes such cultural interaction, urging an incorporation of the new with the old, because this integration drives the development of tradition itself. Through contact with modernity, tradition proves its adaptability and remains at the core of Ghanaian life. Evolution of *adinkra* from

cloth to jewelry to cell phone cases is completely accepted by this ideal, as it maintains the importance of the old even as it takes on new forms. In terms of memory, *adinkra* is a reminder of original indigenous constructs, even if its presentation or meaning has changed.

Piot dedicates his work precisely to this interplay between tradition and modernity. He finds

Kabre—a group of cereal farmers living in the heart of the West African savanna at some remove from today’s centers of global commodity production, and thus a group bearing all the markings of the most traditional of anthropological communities—is nevertheless... as cosmopolitan as the metropole itself (Piot 23).

People often assume that the remote, indigenous, and traditional are always opposed to the modern. In fact, precisely the opposite is true: those in Kabre do not “see their culture as antithetical to modernity. Indeed, and in spite of appearances, they welcome and appropriate many things Western” (Piot 23). Tradition, Piot finds, is not in contest with modernity, but part of it. The very same can be said of *adinkra*, which connect traditional presentation and meaning with contemporary application and interpretation.

Such transformation proves the dynamism of tradition. As David Brokensha explains, “all societies are constantly changing in some degree, so tradition itself is changing” (Brokensha quoted in Warren 31). This is certainly applicable to *adinkra*, which constantly acquires new symbols to maintain an up-to-date index of the culture’s values. Examples include car company logos, like Mercedes-Benz, and President Obama’s face, which has been integrated as a symbol of African

achievement and leadership. Arthur explains that infusion of *adinkra* symbols with “contemporary symbols such as the Mercedes-Benz logo reflects the dynamic nature of the language of the Akan as well as the creativity of the cloth designers in adapting symbols to express the new ideas and concepts that have become a part of the Akan experience” (Arthur 14). *Adinkra* is an indigenous form that is not only compatible with the contemporary world but is in fact nurtured by it. Expressing new identities is a very different aim than preserving tradition, but through this dichotomy, we can understand Piot’s argument of traditional as modern. Preserving tradition, to an extent, actually means developing it, because such evolution allows for its future continuity. Such plasticity, some would certainly warn, is dangerous, as it threatens the strength of the tradition’s foundation. Permanence in its purest form, though, is an unrealistic objective, and so tradition adapts to encourage its own survival; even if a specific aspect of the tradition is altered, its ultimate goal lives on because it persists in the contemporary world. Eric Hobsbawm discusses this change as a kind of “invented tradition,” which “are responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition” (Hobsbawm 2). In *adinkra* specifically, the indigenous system develops with contemporary trends that impact and change Ghanaian values, proving its dual significance as a preserver of indigenous customs and a perpetuator of future development. In anthropology, this is reflected in the informants’ claims to dual identity.

He explains that “where they are invented, it is often not because old ways are no longer available or viable, but because they are deliberately not used or adapted” (Hobsbawm 8). This is definitely true for the transnational: an expatriate businessman carries an *adinkra*-decorated cell phone not because he cannot wear traditional *adinkra* cloth but because in his current context, it is more feasible and beneficial to wear western business attire and represent his roots elsewhere, as on his cell phone. In the novels discussed in Chapter 2, the characters, particularly Baako, object to this adaptation, claiming it is merely another way of honoring the colonial oppressor (see page 71 above), but they do not acknowledge the possibility of maintaining a Ghanaian self in other ways. During Baako’s lifetime, cell phones of course did not exist, let alone dominate social interactions as they do today, but the idea is still relevant, even if applied to earlier technologies or personal belongings. Baako condemns fellow migrants as shallow and empty when they do not maintain his version of the Ghanaian identity, but he fails to recognize that it is his version specifically, and that they may have other versions. In the literary present and in today’s world, modernized versions of *adinkra* provide new possibilities of representing Ghana, opening a new avenue for maintaining cultural values. But according to Baako, those cultural values are simply not upheld. His community is broken exactly because the members do try to take advantage of him, to honor him solely for his been-to status and reap him for the new connections he has made and the materials they hope he has acquired. This does not reflect the values



embedded in the cultural framework, of which *adinkra* is a major part. The symbol *ese ne tekyerema*, “the teeth and the tongue,” is one example (Azindow 9):

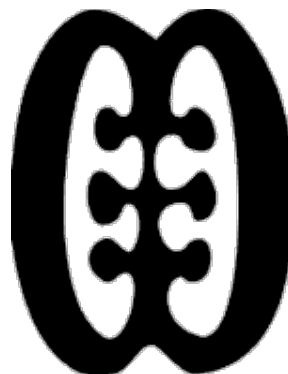


Figure 2. *Ese ne tekyerema* symbol. Source: Adinkra.org. “Ese Ne Tekyerema: ‘The teeth and the tongue.’” 2007.

Azindow summarizes that

the teeth are strong and the tongue weak, yet the teeth do not take advantage of the frailty of the tongue as they perform their duties in unison. Similarly, no family community or group can achieve its objective without cooperation and unity of purpose (Azindow 9).

Baako in fact finds just the opposite: the collective of the teeth, represented by his community, seeks to take advantage of the one weak tongue, Baako himself. He finds his relationships one-sided, his friends and family concerned only with what he can do for them.

But here Baako’s contentions diverge from the anthropological evidence; the subjects in Burrell and Anderson’s study claim ICTs do indeed allow them to maintain a reciprocal relationship (see page 19 above). These different claims are examples of different understandings of *ese ne tekyerema*, for they depict different meanings of what Azindow calls “unity of purpose” (Azindow 9). Burrell and

Anderson's informants suggest a purpose that involves interaction with the home and maintenance of homeland traditions, while Baako's friends are concerned with the purpose of their own self-interests. Regardless of the positive and negative connotations of these different purposes, they demonstrate the variability of the cultural values. Baako condemns his companions—and understandably so, given the way they treat him—but it is a problem of different life goals, Baako yearning for the simplicity of his pre-abroad life and his companions for the comforts of material gain. Armah certainly suggests the moral values rooted in the community's intents are questionable, but regardless, the two groups—the fictional characters in one and the living informants plus Baako in the other— simply use transnationalism to justify different purposes. Moral status aside, the variability of *adinkra* meanings supports this divergence.

In Chapter 1, I argued that differences in understanding prevent the possibility of a true conception of community because too many experiences influence the formation of those conceptions. *Adinkra*, though, provide a unifying platform for these different experiences—the symbols always portray the same virtues, based on their pictorial representations and accompanying proverbs, though they have different meanings to each person who displays them, depending on context, including transnational influences. Based on each individual's experience, then, the communal understandings become personalized. As Warren explains, the Akan view art “as a dynamic cultural process involving change based on creativity which emerges from within the Akan ethnic group as well as through

contact by Akan with other ethnic groups” (Warren 31). Naturally, *adinkra* develop based on external contact. Through their adapted and modernized forms, *adinkra* capture and portray indigenous values while simultaneously integrating the influence of the transnational’s host culture. There cannot be a unified conception of community among all Ghanaians, nor can there be one transnationalism, but there can be an intersection of all the diverse definitions under one system; this is *adinkra* itself.

But the fact that *adinkra* evolve while the literary themes discussed in Chapter 2 persist also signifies a cultural resonance of disappointment. As traditional systems successfully adapt to transnational influences, novels continue to explore the complications of such influences, and the failure of Ghanaian migrants in transnational contexts. This is significant especially because the novel as a genre was first composed outside of Africa, and is therefore a transnational influence itself. Intuitively, this would suggest the authors would be responsive to changing notions of “Ghanaianess.” The persistence of abandoned community as a literary theme suggests it is a considerable problem in Ghanaian culture, but is perhaps overshadowed or discounted because of other successful fusions with the transnational, like *adinkra*. Viewing Ghanaian notions of community strictly through the lens of *adinkra*’s presence in the transnational world, it may appear that the transition is smooth and community is upheld; after all, they teach lessons of community, and they persist in modern form as reminders of those traditional lessons. But when read against the experience of the literary characters, and

considering their changing uses in the world, there is something the *adinkra* do not capture, despite their presence. When viewed on a cell phone case in the UK, they certainly can be a reminder of Ghanaian notions of community, but because of their context, they do not have the same meaning as those found in their original frameworks. Instead, the old tradition adapts itself to carry a modified meaning into a new world; in Hobsbawm's words, it is invented (Hobsbawm 1). The process of *adinkra* interpretation is reciprocal, as the modern and the historical are always in dialogue, meanings always contested. This echoes the characters' cries that values of community are lost in transnational migration, because the original meaning of *adinkra* symbols are also lost; *adinkra* itself is both active and passive, shaper of and by modernity.

Boatema Boateng addresses this concern directly, objecting to formal regulation of the meanings through intellectual property rights, because this practice stifles the purpose of the tradition: transcribing cultural values in the context of their historical presents. She finds that

as different players invest *adinkra* and *kente* with different kinds of significance through intellectual property regulation, through narratives of tradition and heritage, and through the production and consumption of imitations, the locus of power shifts depending on which meanings become dominant either explicitly or implicitly (Boateng 15).

In 2011, Boateng recognizes that *adinkra* are multidimensional, but that complications ensue when formal, legalized definitions are imposed upon the system under the name of intellectual property. *Adinkra* is a unique case in the

argument of regulated property rights, as “different kinds of claims over *adinkra* and *kente* reveal their multiple and contested meanings in relation to gendered, ethnic, national, and racial identities” (Boateng 15). No symbols forever have the same meaning—they are always changing—but when formalized regulations are forced upon them, this development is stifled. Their role as cultural determiners falters, because outside forces determine their meanings, rather than the relationship between the symbol and the bearer. Such regulations challenge the reciprocity that is at the very heart of *adinkra* symbolism: a simultaneous creation of and reverence to preexisting worldviews.

The characters in the Ghanaian novels studied above are also concerned with what they perceive as their fellow countrymen’s loss of self. Sissie and Baako both claim that to become transnational is to unintentionally lose a sense of self. But Piot’s evidence declares that such loss is precisely not true: “Cultural mixing in Africa is seen not so much as a loss of culture as an addition to it” (Piot 24). The development of *adinkra* supports this claim, simply exemplifying the undeniable truth that cultures change along with their people; being part of the Ghanaian transnational culture does not mean one has to lose his or her identity. Instead, the values of interdependence, as established by Gyekye and Dogbe, can be amplified. *Adinkra* represents interdependence in the symbol of the chain, *nkonsonkonson* (Agbo 17):

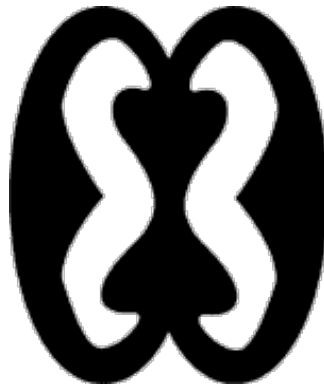


Figure 3. *Nkonsonkonson* symbol. Source: Adinkra.org. "Nkonsonkonson: 'chain link.'" 2007.

Agbo explains, "the strength of the chain depends on the individual units. When one unit becomes weak, it causes a break in the chain. This symbol signifies the strong bond between people of common blood relations which is difficult to break apart" (Agbo 17). Baako and Sissie do not find this value upheld, as they both feel their communities have weakened, individuals forgetting their obligation to the whole. In this sense, both Baako's and Sissie's hopes and the symbolism of the *adinkra* are aspirational: they want their respective truths upheld, but they do not find them so. This aspirational mindset resonates with the discrepancies between expatriate and repatriate conceptions of community discussed in Chapter 1; in both situations, community exists only as an aspirational ideal when the person is not physically present, never when the informant is actually ingrained (see pages 38-39 above). Agbo elaborates that *nkonsonkonson* "teaches that unity lies in strength," which Baako and Sissie do not find, nor do the informants when they are actually in Ghana (Agbo 17). Instead, they feel betrayed, the chain broken as soon as transnationalism

becomes an influence. *Nkonsonkonson* aspires to represent Ghana as a place of community and solidarity, but it does not achieve this end.

The persistence in themes of disappointment in abandoned community in Ghanaian literature underscores an undercurrent of social discontent with transnational continuity of Ghanaian ideals. The ideal of community is found in several different symbols. *Funtummireku-denkyemmireku* is specifically important, as it “represents the community that is nourished by individual actions,” which is presented in the image of two crocodiles sharing one stomach (Martin 962):

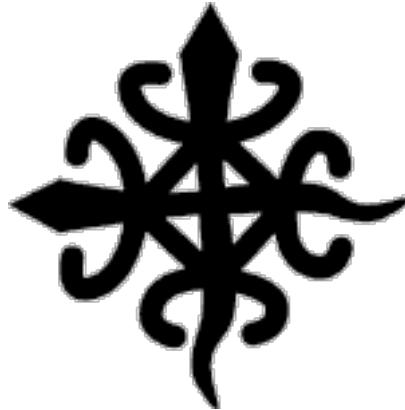


Figure 4. *Funtummireku-denkyemmireku* symbol. Source: Lewis, Sandra. “Tapestry: A Resource Manual for Cultural Competence in Mental Health Services.” Montclair State University.

This implies that transmigrants’ contribution to their home communities persists despite relocation, because the individual always nourishes its whole, rather than vice versa. Baako and Sissie disagree, claiming that transnationals tend to forget their homeland, but Agbo further explains *funtummireku-denkyemmireku* by emphasizing it “signifies the unification of people of different cultural backgrounds for achieving common objectives despite their divergent views and opinions about

the way of life” (Agbo 12). This is the precise aim of transnationalism, to nurture understanding by bridging divergent cultures into compatible lifestyles. Baako and Sissie may feel betrayed by countrymen who do not maintain Baako and Sissie’s own standards of community, but according to the widespread value of *funtummireku-denkyemmireku*, the very act of migrating is an act that benefits the community, because it encourages union of cultures. Baako and Sissie are rightfully upset by the disappointment they find, but there are other interpretations of their countrymen’s actions, including this multicultural approach. Merely leaving Ghana does not mean abandoning it; *funtummireku-denkyemmireku* instead promotes commonality across cultures.

But despite this encouragement from *adinkra* themselves, literary themes of abandoned community continue throughout the twentieth century, even beyond the formative years immediately following Ghana’s independence. Appearing in Selormey’s 1966 *The Narrow Path* and still present in Darko’s 1991 *Beyond the Horizon*, the persistence of disappointment suggests that this is an ongoing cultural problem that is not easily resolved. *Adinkra*, however, are changing, adapting as new ideas and technologies alter the cultural framework. Tradition—the *adinkra*—is more responsive to a dynamic social climate than is literature. As Warren explains, “it is evident that what persists among the Akan must be form with symbolic content, a surface and a deep structure, forms which facilitate cultural communication and participation within the society, forms which are, in fact, active” (Warren 41). By evolving to reflect contemporary situations, this is precisely what



the *adinkra* do: they maintain cultural credence by preserving their iconic images but prove the adaptability of tradition by demonstrating its fluidity in the contemporary world. The symbols' survival as cultural scripts is testament to the dynamic nature of the cultural framework, for they simultaneously preserve historical values and propel new initiatives.

As these initiatives emerge, memory plays a key role in cultural conscription of values—formalized in *adinkra* symbols—just as it does in the anthropological studies discussed in Chapter 1. Imagination is clearly a driving force of artistic production, and as such, of the *adinkra* system. But Appadurai assures that “the work of the imagination... is neither purely emancipatory nor entirely disciplined but is a space of contestation in which individuals and groups seek to annex the global into their own practices of the modern” (Appadurai 4). Again *adinkra* becomes a transnational concept in its own way, as it perpetuates the culture's memory of itself. The Accra-based Centre for Indigenous Knowledge Systems (CEFIKS) explains that “these symbols form a system of writing that preserves and transmits the accumulated cultural values of the Akan people” (“Akan Cultural Symbols Project”). As values change, the art form itself evolves to reflect new ideas. Through this development, the tradition changes, again raising questions on the plasticity of the system. Some certainly see danger in a value system that is too plastic, but plasticity itself is what allows *adinkra* to survive. It is not in contest with its original self, but rather a reformed version of it, at once representative of both the original and the contemporary situation. The evolution is subtle, marked only by

the addition and modification of symbols, but through this process, the encoded memory itself changes. *Adinkra* is a historical art form, but as political and social movements develop, the memories it records and the values it emphasizes both change; continuity of tradition is not the lived experience. This kind of altered memory is not unlike that of the informants in the anthropological studies, who imagine their communities through a nostalgic lens (see page 32 above).

Arthur addresses this concern directly, explaining that “the *adinkra* text encodes some of the people’s significant historical events and describes their institutions and their fundamental beliefs that have been preserved in the collective memory of the people” (Arthur 20). The fact that each symbol comes into existence is itself telling, for it highlights that specific value as important to the Akan at that specific time. As a result, it influences future generations. Despite its original meaning, later generations may interpret it differently and pass along its meaning with slightly different implications. In each succession, the community, which is “a continuum of society members consisting of the dead, the living, and the yet-to-be-born,” emphasizes the same value, because it understands the former importance of it (“Akan Cosmology”). But memory can only take a community so far; at a certain point, each generation creates its own significance, perpetuating the memory of its ancestors according to current interpretation. Hobsbawm agrees: “Inventing traditions, it is assumed here, is essentially a process of formalization and ritualization, characterized by reference to the past, if only by imposing repetition”

(Hobsbawm 4). As the tradition of *adinkra* changes, it preserves the past through revised memory.

Arguably, as *adinkra* changes, realities of the Akan change. For Arthur, symbols are socially constructed, and they refer not to the intrinsic nature of the objects and events but to the ways in which human beings perceive them... Symbols are important as they create, change, maintain and transmit socially constructed realities (Arthur 11).

As the dominant indigenous art form throughout the Ghanaian landscape, *adinkra* plays a major role in the construction of Ghana's social realities. As the symbols develop, they come to mean more than their latent significance; they determine how people view the world, even independently of their intentional message. For Charon and Ritzer, "symbols allow people to imagine alternative realities" (quoted in Arthur 11). As the most omnipresent system, *adinkra* shape people's lives regardless of their social, economic, or even geographic context. Individuals develop different understandings of the symbols, but for each person, those symbols create a reality. This very plasticity is key to *adinkra's* survival.

Differing conceptions of community values as understood by the anthropological informants and the literary characters can be bridged through *adinkra*. The expatriate informants find their communities upheld, and the repatriate informants find them definitely not, leading to the conclusion that community exists only when the informant is not actually in Ghana. It is constructed by the individual's desired image, just as the *adinkra* symbols are utilized and understood on an individual basis. They do, of course, have standard meanings, as

demonstrated above, but it is the individual who determines how he or she will understand, utilize, and portray that meaning. In the literature, the characters may object to their fellow migrants' apparent abandonment of community, but the perpetuation of *adinkra* in the transnational context provides an outlet to maintain loyalty to the home community while simultaneously embracing the new situation. *Adinkra* provide a medium for those betwixt and between, as Turner says, to connect the old with the new, home with abroad. Originality may be sacrificed, which the characters lament, but significance still persists.

## CONCLUSION

Through three different disciplines—anthropology, literary study, and indigenous art—I have explored Ghanaian conceptions of community in the transnational context. The anthropological informants and the literary characters are both initially hopeful of continuity in community values, but both experience a discrepancy between what they expect to find and what they actually do find. In the anthropological studies, informants generally had a progressive view of community, believing they could actively participate in community at home and away, while in the novels discussed, the characters generally had a conservative view of the same idea; they hoped to find such multiplicity possible, but did not. Memory is a key influence on these conceptions, as it skews realities of community maintenance based on perceptions the informants hope to find. The informants were excited by the possibility of a dual identity, their lives defined by a multiplicity that allows one to live away from the physical community and still feel a connection to it. The literary characters, on the other hand, instead find disillusionment and disappointment, as they discover their fellow migrants are not interested in maintaining the same kind of diaspora communities they are accustomed to in Ghana, nor are their Ghanaian communities receptive to their homecoming in the ways they promise. Both groups are in a condition of liminality, in which they cannot fully integrate with either group, but instead become “betwixt and between” (Turner 95). *Adinkra*, I propose, is connecting point for these betwixt and between

peoples, a bridge between traditional and modern, home and away, imagination and reality.

Indigenous Ghanaians define the community as a network of the living, the dead, and the not-yet-born (Dogbe 786; “Akan Cosmology”). It is marked by values of cooperation, interdependence, and reciprocity, and unofficially governed by a system of *weism*, which privileges the community over the individual (Dogbe 789). Individuality is important, of course, but there is a definite emphasis on the well-being of the collective, which is especially significant because the collective extends beyond the present into the past and the future. Theoretically, this applies geographically as well as temporally, which is why the informants in Burrell and Anderson’s study report a close connection to home through ICT use (Burrell and Anderson 207). Baako, Sissie, Kofi, and Mara all object, though, reporting feelings of alienation, loss, and disappointment (Armah 279; Aidoo 119; Selormey 51; Darko 3). Anthropological and literary evidence therefore diverge on matters of transnational continuity of community values. The difference across these disciplines is significant, as it implies a cultural dissonance in terms of community. For a culture founded on *weism*, there is an obvious lack of centrality. The concept of *weism* itself, then, is aspirational. The structural framework of community is fragile, not truly there when people need it most, and as a result, people feel disappointed and alone, let down by a structure that is supposed to be their guiding strength.

The fact that the theme of abandoned community is recurrent throughout literature signifies that it is a feeling that definitely does exist; the novels’ very

success speaks to their impact. Different evidence across disciplines simply provides a platform to discuss divergent beliefs about Ghanaian communities in the transnational world. Literature, a kind of art, is a place to critique culture, whereas anthropology is a place to expose, understand, and explore it. Aidoo, Darko, Selormey, and Armah write their novels to highlight what they perceive as cultural failings, condemning their own culture for alienating a sector of its population, whereas anthropologists provide empirical data to uncover the inside perspective of transmigrants' understanding. Although the complaints that Aidoo, Darko, Selormey, and Armah offer may not be mirrored in the anthropological evidence, they cannot be ignored, because their widespread persistence indicates they are very palpable for certain members of the culture; the repetition of these themes suggests they are problematic for the culture and not otherwise addressed. Literary themes call attention to cultural needs, which is precisely what each of these authors hopes to do. As Burrell and Anderson note, it is often difficult for transnationals to admit to the struggles of their lives abroad, because those at home expect a certain tale, and if the migrant does not live up to it, he or she may be considered a failure (Burrell and Anderson 2007). This reluctance is precisely where anthropology and literature intersect, for the authors and the characters they create do discuss their struggles, and their transitions back to life in Ghana and with Ghanaians are indeed problematic. Anthropology and literature offer different insights, but combined, they fuse the reality of the transnational in a position of liminality.

*Adinkra*, I argue, bridges the complications of anthropological and literary dissonance in three ways: its evolution integrates traditional components with modern equivalents, its existence throughout the world indicates it is itself a transnational force, and its teachings determine the individual reality of each person who honors them. *Adinkra* is simultaneously conservative and progressive, maintaining the traditional system of ethics in a modern context and developing to reflect changing Ghanaian values. The plasticity of *adinkra* does not undermine its significance, though, because it simply proves the dynamism of tradition. As Hobsbawm reminds us, “novelty is no less novel for being able to dress up easily as antiquity” (Hobsbawm 5). The novelty of *adinkra*—its modern forms, like Mercedes-Benz logos and iPhone display cases—is a new play on an old form, a mechanism for propelling cultural development while simultaneously preserving tradition. Whereas Baako and Sissie lament their inability to maintain their Ghanaian identities once they become been-tos, *adinkra* provide a platform to demonstrate Ghanaian ideals and transnational lifestyles all at once.

Anthropology, literature, and indigenous art are all disciplines that contribute to the construction of Ghanaian identity. Anthropology exposes real people’s real experiences, while literature offers theoretical examples that serve as analytical examples of cultural experience. *Adinkra* act as a record of important cultural values, showcasing the ideals that build the foundation of Ghanaian life. Of course, every Ghanaian will not ascribe to or believe in these foundational elements, but *adinkra* do provide a comprehensive account of Ghanaian values at large. In a



world where modernity is influenced as much by tradition as by innovation, anthropology, literature, and *adinkra* work together as an interactive system that redefines the meaning of Ghanaian community values. Considering these disciplines interactively, we find that transnationalism is a dynamic process that is redefining global notions of self, identity, and ultimately, nationality. Transnationals change as individuals, but when enough individuals change, their collectives do, too; hence, through individual evolution—a change in personal perspectives and worldviews—nations, too, evolve. If we can reinscribe notions of *adinkra* to reshape their significance in a new context, the same must be possible for notions of identity. The problem, though, is that identity is interactive—other people ascribe it to us, even if we do not want them to, as much as we ascribe it to ourselves. Even if one person changes his or her personal notion of identity, others may not. In *adinkra*, though, the form has to evolve in order to survive, and, as mentioned before, it is a collective consciousness. People shape its meaning together, but when ascribing personal identities, people have less control because the identity is both something that belongs to the individual and that the collective gives to the individual. In order to rethink notions of identity, we must shift away from a constant contest between the self and Other, a contest that does not exist in *adinkra* and therefore allows it to reshape and reform its meaning.

Theoretically, through decolonization, Africa and Ghana both became self-defining. Transnationalism has pushed self-definition even further, beyond the limits of statehood. *Adinkra* maintain tribute to Ghana, but their changing meanings

suggest pure continuity of tradition is not the lived experience of Ghanaians. In addition to Piot's notion of cultural mixing as additive (see page 102 above), this suggests transnationalism is creating a new space of its own, where new emergences define people and things no longer connected to their point of origin, or their current place of residence. To philosopher Edward Casey, "to be is to be in place" (Casey 15). But with transnationalism, this is not so. Yes, informants and characters always physically exist in a certain location, but, as noted by those discussed in both chapters, that location is not always what is most defining or most comfortable. When Baako travels to study in the United States, he is recognized precisely because he is not in "his" place, Ghana, and when he returns to Ghana, he is recognized again by the place where he is not, the United States. In both situations, he exists, for others, in a negative state, according to where he is not. He is never truly "in place," because those around him are constantly negating it, recognizing him for what is absent. This recognition, though, does not negate his existence; he still *is*, despite the fact that he is defined by where he *is not*. Increased transnationalism, then, has pushed the limits of typical associations and ascriptions, requiring a new classification of people, places, and ideas.

Baako's example, one of many, suggests liminality, a condition which has existed for all kinds of groups through all different historical periods, is on its way to becoming the most dominant one. In 2012, perhaps the global community itself is in a temporally liminal position betwixt and between a nationally-defined world and a post-national, post-African one. Some may warn that such a world would be

cultureless, bland, homogeneous. But as *adinkra* has shown, culture is both transmittable and integrative; it is not always lost and abandoned. Africa is a logical place to catalyze a movement away from the national towards the personal, considering, as previously noted, “Africa,” like “Ghana,” was an idea constructed by Western colonizers. If there was no unified conception of Africa to begin with, and the past 50 years have been a contest to create one, it is the perfect platform to launch a post-national world; nationality, here, is irrelevant. This is the cornerstone of Appiah’s philosophy of cosmopolitanism: “the recognition of our responsibility for every human being” (Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism* 8). Nationality does not matter, because humanity is responsible for all who belong, and that is everyone, period. Competitively disadvantaged in many other global arenas—economics, development, and political stability, for example—Africa is arguably the continent most capable of demonstrating that the world need not be national. Logistical barriers, of course, stand in the way, but, as Ghanaians move throughout the world, carrying *adinkra* with them, they may be the most powerful agents in the development of a post-national world. After centuries of exploitation, Ghanaians and Africans now have the opportunity to prove that they are indeed the face of innovation—in fact that the non-national world they created centuries ago was, indeed, workable. Reversing the world order by eliminating the current power structure in favor of post-nationalism, Africa and Ghana, can both be forerunners in the redefinition of the world’s political and social landscape.

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