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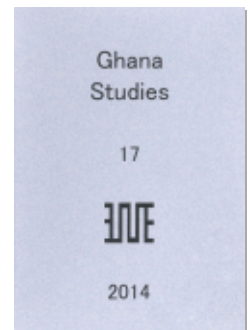
(In)Visible Diasporan Returnee Communities: Silences and the
Challenges in Studying Trans-Atlantic History in Ghana

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**(IN)VISIBLE DIASPORAN RETURNEE
COMMUNITIES:
SILENCES AND THE CHALLENGES IN STUDYING
TRANS-ATLANTIC HISTORY IN GHANA¹**

Kwame Essien

Introduction

This article's argument is two-fold. First, it shows how returnees (emancipated Africans and their offspring from the West) have contributed in significant ways to Ghana's history. Second, these contributions have been marginalized for a variety of reasons and rooted in a number of issues. I assert that returnees have made constructive efforts to make significant social and political contributions to society, by building on their experiences and expertise gained abroad. This work calls attention to the obscured history of nineteenth-century Diaspora returnee-communities in the Gold Coast, now Ghana, and its relevance to the study of reverse migrations in the twenty-first century.² I examine several factors that contributed to the historical invisibility of returnees, and how ongoing transatlantic interactions

¹ This paper is dedicated to my late father whose sudden death in Ghana, prior to the 2013 Ghana Studies Conference in Kumasi, continues to linger in the minds of those he left behind. It is also dedicated to our youngest daughter, Edinam Aba-Kraaba Essien, the last Essien to receive my father's blessing during the out-dooring ceremony two months before his death. She would continue to light the paths of those who left this life before her adulthood and other children who will come after her. I will also like to express my sincere appreciation to Hermann W. von Hesse a graduate students at Department of History, University of Ghana, Legon for his numerous feedback and assistance.

² In this article, Gold Coast and Ghana will be used interchangeably.

Ghana Studies v. 17 (2014): 63-99.

and exchanges within present-day Ghana help bring this historical development to light. It is in reference to the dearth of attention that historians have paid to cross-cultural interactions and to the history of transatlantic returnees in Ghana that I call these people and issues “invisible” or “silenced.” These topics are of great significance to the study of current Ghanaian, Atlantic, and Diaspora history. The work furthermore reconstructs the history of emancipated slaves and their descendants, as well as the contributions they made in support of various social reforms in the Gold Coast. Within these populations are those who returned to Ghanaian societies to settle permanently, as well as those who did so temporarily during the period between the abolition of slavery in the Americas and decolonization in Africa. I focus on three groups of “returnees”: Brazilian-Africans and their descendants (*Tabom*), Caribbean-Africans (West Indians), and African Americans.³ British colonial documents in the Public Records Archives Administration Department—PRAAD—refer to the former slaves from Brazil and their offspring as “Brazilians,” but in Gã oral traditions their descendants are referred to as the “Tabom,” from “tudo bom,” which means “I am fine.” Each group reflects the movement of peoples during a different period: Brazilian-Africans first settled in Ghana primarily in the 1820s; Caribbean-Africans reconstituted communities during the mid-1800s; Finally, American Africans organized in Ghana beginning in the 1950s.⁴ I discuss those who arrived from the Caribbean only

⁴ See CO 98/1A, “Minutes of Council from 4 April 1829 to 9 January 1844; CO 482/1, Gold Coast Domestic, Vol. 1, 1 March 1843 to 31 August 1847: Letters of Secretary of State to colonial officials; CO 97/2, Gold Coast Certified copies of Ordinances of 1865 to 1883; CO 879/62, “Gold Coast Telegrams related to the Ashanti War of 1900,” April 6–December 31, 1900; “Agyeman Prempeh,” *The Gold Coast Spectator*-Editorial, May 16, 1931, 69; Walton W. Claridge, *A History of the Gold Coast and Ashanti: From the Earliest times to the Twentieth Century* (NY: Barnes and Noble Inc., 1915), 173–184 and Albert Adu Boahen and Emmanuel Akyeampong *Yaa Asantewaa and Asante* (Sub-Saharan Pub &

briefly due to the limited scope of this paper and lack of available information.⁵ Taken together, however, these three groups and their communal experiences in Ghana demonstrate that their story of return is significant to the history of the nation.

The road to colonial rule was rocky and violent, as the British and other Europeans competed with one another for power, wealth and land from the eighteenth century. The British finally had the upper hand in the Gold Coast (Ghana). Although the British had enormous influence on the Southern Protectorate, which included coastal Accra from the early nineteenth century, Ghana was not a British colony until the British defeated the Asante people who were part of the Northern Protectorate (at the time, not under British control) in one of the most violent wars in the then Gold Coast. The victory gave the British total control of both the Southern and Northern Protectorate.

The history of the African diaspora and Ghana run in parallel through much of their narratives. Land reforms in the Gold Coast colony during colonial rule were of great concern to the newcomers, especially former slaves from Brazil. Chief João Antonio Nelson, for example, whom the returnees selected as the third leader of the Brazilian Diaspora in Accra from 1856 through 1900, acted swiftly in collaboration with *Gã maɲtsemɛi* (kings and chiefs of Accra) and on behalf of his community to protect their

Traders (2003). See also Irene Quaye (Odotei) "The Gã and the Neighbours" (Ph.D Thesis: University of Ghana, Legon, 1972); Samuel S. Quarcoopome, "Political Activities in Accra, 1924-1945" (MA Thesis: University of Ghana, Legon, 1972) and "The Impact of Urbanization on the Socio-Political History of the Gã Mashie People of Accra" (Ph. D Thesis: University of Ghana, Legon, 1993); David Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana : the Rise of Gold Coast Nationalism, 1850-1928* (UK: Clarendon Press, 1963).

⁵ The scope of this paper does not allow for a detailed interrogation of the history of Caribbean returnees in Ghana from the pre-colonial period. See Clifford C. Campbell, "Full Circle: The Caribbean Presence in the Making of Ghana, 1843-1966" (Ph. D Dissertation: The University of Ghana, Legon (2012).

interests. Nelson's response epitomized how early settlers reacted aggressively against the forms of exploitation they faced as newcomers in the Gold Coast. The ties that Nelson forged to oppose the British were successful. A major consequence was that British officials arrested him along with the Gã leaders with whom he had collaborated. The British fined them each £25 for their opposition to British rule.⁶ Chief Nelson's nineteenth-century actions predate the kind of pan-African consciousness that emerged in the early twentieth century.

In addition to Nelson, there are other significant Brazilian-African historical figures whose contributions remain marginal within the historical scholarship on Ghana. For example, few know that Francis Ribeiro (a Brazilian) served as the first Ghanaian Ambassador to the United States during Nkrumah's tenure; and very few know that the current Chief Justice of Ghana, Georgina T. Wood, and the former World Boxing Featherweight Champion, Azumah Nelson, are both of Brazilian and Ghanaian ancestry—the Tabom.⁷

The Brazilian returnees and their offspring, the Tabom, are not the only marginalized group, as other returnee communities have endured similar neglect for many decades. For instance, the W.E.B. Du Bois Center—named after the famous twentieth-century Pan-Africanists, intellectual, educator, and activist American-African returnee, and also the location of his grave—has received far less attention than it deserves (see figure A-A). But the creation of the Pan African Heritage Festival (Panafest) and the Emancipation Day Celebration are starting to counteract this trend. The annual and bi-annual festivities direct members of the Ghanaian public and participants from the Diaspora to the W.E.B.

⁶ John Parker, *Making the Town: Gã State and Society in Early Colonial Accra* (Portsmouth, NH: Heineman, 2000), 143.

⁷ The Brazil House at Jamestown, Accra has photographs of all the prominent members of the Brazilian-Tabom communities in Ghana including those mentioned in this article.



Figure A-A: W.E.B. DuBois Center (behind)

Du Bois Center and other locations to highlight these important transatlantic sites of memory. Ghanaian students' involvement in these celebrations has also brought the legacy of the returnees from the periphery to the forefront of mainstream Ghanaian society. Historical symbols, including the George Padmore Library and grave site, the Marcus Garvey Guest House in Accra, and others, remind us of these figures' transatlantic ties to Ghana. This publicity has improved visibility and created additional awareness but has not resolved the problem.

Where existing analyses tend to repeat narrowly framed debates about the general importance of sites of memories for

returnees, they only add to the obscurity of the returnee story. This paper departs from that formula. Yet due to its limited scope it does not address all aspects of the transatlantic story. The topics covered are laid out in three main sections as follows. The first section traces the nineteenth-century origins of transatlantic communities, explores their identities and origins prior to arriving in the Gold Coast, and, in addition to tracing the dates of their arrival, and addresses their reasons for relocating. The second section provides examples of returnees' contributions to the social history of Ghana beginning in the pre-colonial era; returnee history is quite prolific in that regard. Their contributions drew heavily on arrays of mobilization schemes to meet specific goals, and they took advantage of opportunities provided by Ghanaian leaders and institutions to contribute to local development projects while performing their dual heritage.⁸ The third section focuses on the challenges and silences that befall the historical study of the three returnee groups discussed, particularly regarding the lack of knowledge among most Ghanaians of the tight connections between their historical narrative and the broader history of Ghana. This section raises equally important questions about why scholars have regarded the returnees' tales and historical contributions as peripheral historiographical subjects in the field and in public school curricula in general. The final section highlights efforts by the returnees to make their story visible.

Historicizing the Origins of Reverse Migrations to Ghana from the Pre-colonial Era

Brazilian-Africans, who traveled to the Gold Coast during the early 1800s before the 1888 abolition of slavery in Brazil, arrived

⁸ George M. Bob-Milliar and Gloria K. Bob-Milliar, "Mobilizing the African Diaspora for Development: The Politics of Dual Citizenship in Ghana," in Toyin Falola and Kwame Essien (Eds.), *Pan-Africanism and Pan-Africanism, and the Politics of African Citizenship and Identity* (Routledge & Francis Taylor, 2013), 119-121.

when the British were in the early stages of building settlements among the coastal Gã communities that would become Accra. Documents in the archival collections at PRAAD describe the first wave of reverse migrations and confirm that, “as far back as the thirties [1830s] a ship load of Africans were landed from Brazil, and after they were land [sic] the Gã *mantsemei* gave them land to build on the town Accra and also bush land to cultivate.”⁹ This gift of land transformed their processes of settlement and assimilation decades later. The oft ignored Caribbean/West Indies migration story covers the second wave of reverse migration which began in the precolonial period. The scant literature includes works by Jeffrey Green and Ray Jenkins, which document the contributions of returnees in the areas they settled.¹⁰ Returnees’ contributions in economic, political, and religious reform, as well as other areas, such as entertainment, are covered in a recent work by Clifford C. Campbell, “Full Circle: The Caribbean Presence in the Making of Ghana, 1843-1966” (2013). Campbell provides the first comprehensive study of Caribbean expatriates in Ghana.¹¹ The other half of the Caribbean story began when the British colonial rulers imported skilled professional West Indians to enhance colonial projects, including engineers, medical doctors, lawyers, and others.¹² West Indian troops also supported colonial

⁹ CVA 12/52, (Peter Quarshie Fiscian v, Nii Azumah III, 13 March 1953), 42.

¹⁰ Jeffrey P. Green, “Caribbean Influences in the Gold Coast Administration in the 1900s,” *Ghana Studies Bulletin* No. 2 (December 1984), and Ray Jenkins, “‘West Indian’ and ‘Brazilian’ Influences in the Gold Coast-Ghana, 1807-1914: A Review and Reappraisal of Continuities in the post-Abolition links between West Africa and the Caribbean and Brazil,” paper presented to the 12th Annual Conference of the Society for Caribbean Studies, Hoddesdon, Hertfordshire, U.K., 12-14 July 1988, 9-10.

¹¹ Clifford C. Campbell, “Full Circle: The Caribbean Presence in the Making of Ghana, 1843-1966” (Ph. D Dissertation: The University of Ghana, Legon, 2012).

¹² See chapters two and three of Clifford C. Campbell, “Full Circle: The Caribbean Presence in the Making of Ghana, 1843-1966” (Ph. D Dissertation: The University of Ghana, Legon, 2012).

endeavors, providing, for instance, security for colonial officials traveling between African and Caribbean regions. Correspondence between colonial officials confirms that “a wing of the 4th West Indian Regiment has received orders to proceed from Jamaica to Cape Coast” to meet specific objectives.¹³

The third wave of reverse migrations began at the end of British colonial rule and came to an end during Kwame Nkrumah’s regime (1957-1966). During the 1950s and 1960s, at the pinnacle of the Civil Rights Movements in the United States, Nkrumah invited American-African intellectuals, activists, and professionals to assist him with post-independence reforms. He hoped that the returnees’ technical expertise could aid development in Ghana.¹⁴ As the first sub-Saharan African country to gain independence from European colonial rule, Ghana was a pan-Africanist Mecca for diasporan Africans inspired by its promise of national sovereignty and development. There were also North Americans of African descent who traveled to Ghana as a means to connect with their ancestral roots, or as entrepreneurs seeking to benefit from economic Pan-Africanism, or from the profit-driven use of heritage tourism and Pan-African-related activities to draw tourists to motels, hotels and services provided by American-African business owners and investors.¹⁵

American-Africans arrived in Ghana at the height of Pan-Africanism, between the end of colonial rule and the dawn of post-

¹³ ADM 1/1/21, Letter from Major General Crofton (at the War Office) to the Under Secretary of State Colonial Office, 22 August 1863.

¹⁴ Kevin K. Gaines. *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 6. See also Naaborko Sackeyfio, “African American Repatriation to Ghana, the Nkrumah Years: 1957-1966” (MA Thesis: University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2003).

¹⁵ Kwame Essien “‘Performance’ in Transatlantic Communities in Africa: The case of Brazilian-Africans and American-Africans in Ghana,” See Toyin Falola and Kwame Essien (Eds.), *Pan-Africanism and Pan-Africanism, and the Politics of African Citizenship and Identity* (Routledge & Francis Taylor, 2013), 108.

colonial reforms.¹⁶ But the American-African story is also part of a larger history of North America-to-West Africa reverse migrations beginning in the post-Reconstruction periods. Narratives about American-African migrations are unique in their own way. What set the third wave of returnees apart from the others was their background and the broader context from which they emerged—the climate of political protests in the US Civil Rights Movement (toward desegregation) during the 1950s and 1960s and its influences on decolonization in Ghana and other parts of Africa.¹⁷ Similar to the narratives around Brazilian- and Caribbean-African migrations, the American-African story involves such broad themes as slavery, revolution, emancipation, identity formation, and notions of citizenship. Besides, most of these returnees travelled to Ghana because of their memory of ancestral ties and shared cultural connections to Africa. James T. Campbell's seminal work *Middle Passages*, which traces African-American interactions and what became known as emigrationist fever to West Africa from the early 1800s pre-colonial period, underscores part of the historical, biological/genetic ties to Africa. Campbell asserts that the returnees expected Africa "to save them."¹⁸ Kevin K. Gaines' work *American Africans in Ghana* is another important contribution to the field. The work highlights the political implications of Ghana's independence to civil rights activity in the US during and after Nkrumah's tenure.¹⁹

¹⁶ Gaines 2006.

¹⁷ James Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans: Black Americans and Africa, 1935-1961* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 27-56; 150-180. See also Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

¹⁸ James T. Campbell, *Middle Passages: African America Journeys to Africa, 1787-2005* (NY: Penguin Press, 2006), (xviii).

¹⁹ Kevin K. Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 84. For returnees who settled in Liberia, two works Ibrahim Sundiata,

Much is not known about the first wave of reverse migrations, especially during the early period of British rule. However, narratives about Brazilian-African and Tabom history emerged immediately after the end of British rule in 1957. In fact, chronologically, attention to these stories overlaps with the American-African expatriates' story during the Nkrumah period, except that there were no physical records of migrations by freed slaves from Brazil to Ghana during this period. Ghana did establish diplomatic relations with Brazil, however, along with a number of other countries, four years after its independence. This diplomatic development took place under the leadership of former Brazilian President Jânio Quadros in 1961. Quadros appointed Raymond Sousa Dantas, a black Brazilian journalist, as the first Ambassador to Ghana the same year.²⁰ The political space that Brazil and Ghana established over a half century ago during Quadros' presidency was reinforced by former Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who visited the Tabom people in April 2005 and again in 2007.²¹ These two examples helped solidify Brazil's fledgling relationship with the Tabom people and provided the two groups with fertile ground for exploring ongoing ties in the twenty-first century.

Brothers and Strangers: Black Zion, Black Slavery, 1914-1940 (NC, Durham: Duke University Press, 2003) and Claude A. Clegg III, *The Price of Liberty: African Americans and the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004) point to the contradictions and the complexity of notions of returning to a "home" in Liberia where the freed slaves oppressed the local people.

²⁰ Alcione M. Amos and Ebenezer Ayensu, "I am a Brazilian: *History of the Tabom, Afro-Brazilian in Accra*," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana, New Series*, no. 6, 2002, 46. See also Samuel Quarcopome, "The Brazilian Community of Accra" (A Dissertation for B.A. [Honors] History: University of Ghana, Legon, 1970), 1-19; José Honório Rodrigues, "Influence of Africa on Brazil and Brazil on Africa" *Journal of African History* 3 (1962).

²¹ Nehemiah Owusu Achiaw, "Brazilian President Official Visit: Govt. Honors Lula da Silva," *Daily Graphic*, 14 April 2005, 24.

Contributions by Emancipated Africans and Their Offspring

Our understanding of transatlantic communities in Ghana relies on knowing the timeline and the different historical circumstances surrounding their arrival. There is no definite way of tabulating their populations because their arrival was relatively spontaneous or not formally organized. During the period of the Atlantic slave trade, the Atlantic was a conduit for transporting cultures, skills, medicines, and plants along with enslaved Africans.²² Returnees and their offspring contributed their labor, skills, and aspects of their culture in shaping Atlantic history from the seventeenth century onward. Certainly many freed slaves and their descendants settled in Ghana in search of new homes, new communities, or new identities, but many were interested in sharing the skills they acquired from the New World. Following abolition, the introduction of colonial rule in the early nineteenth century made Africa the target of cultural hegemonic aims, where colonial officials of the British Empire and Christian missionaries competed for dominance by promoting aspects of their civilization.²³ The influx of Tabom into Accra, meanwhile, had already introduced Islam into the region, which would have major consequences for the social history of colonial Accra. According to historian John Parker: “the insertion of the ‘Brazilian’ or ‘Tabom’ community represented a significant modification to Accra’s increasingly diverse town quarters.... The arrival of the Taboms from Brazil in 1836 represented the first influx of Muslims in Accra.... These ex-slaves and their descendants while retaining a

²² Sweet, James H. *Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship, and Religion in African-Portuguese World, 1441-1770* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Judith Carney, Judith. *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001) and Alfred W. Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural consequences of 1492* (CT, Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2003).

²³ Inventory of the Historical Archives, Pontificia Univesitas Urbania in Rome, Italy: Parocchi Acta Vol. 251 (1883), f 236, 101.

distinct identity based largely on the continuing adherence of Islam, became recognized as much a part of Gã community.”²⁴

The returnees, keenly aware of the importance of their various skills for the region, focused on making contributions to the communities: they used their agrarian skills to improve farming activities in Accra and offered their skills in tailoring, which they had acquired in Brazil.²⁵ Correspondence between Gã leaders and British colonial officials highlights the problem with poor water conditions in Accra, the British Gold Coast capital, and the need for improving this condition. The Brazilians’ arrival contributed to resolving this problem. They introduced well-drilling technologies to improve the quality of drinking water in Accra.²⁶ In general, returnees’ skills in irrigation alleviated problems of water shortage in *Gãman* (Gã-speaking territory) alongside those that British colonial officials and Basel missionaries introduced. For instance, the British contributed “reservoirs...with a total capacity of 45 million gallons” and other forms of water outlets from the Densu River to assist this endeavor when the problem persisted around 1888.²⁷ Basel Missionary records, including letters by H. Debrunner, show that the Basel Mission in Accra introduced different tools and shafts for providing water during the colonial period.²⁸

The coincident arrival of the former slaves from Brazil and the British colonial officials in Accra foretold a confrontation that became unavoidable in light of the contradictions between British abolition campaigns and harsh British colonial policies. For instance, as mentioned above, at the pinnacle of British rule in Accra, British officials arrested Brazilian-African leaders,

²⁴ John Parker, *Making the Town: Gã State and Society in Early Colonial Accra* (Portsmouth, NH: Heineman, 2000), 14; 164.

²⁵ Elder George Aruna Nelson, interview with Kwame Essien, January 10, 2009.

²⁶ Nii Azumah V, interview with Kwame Essien, August 6, 2005.

²⁷ David K. Patterson, “Health in Urban Ghana: The case of Accra, 1900-1940,” *Social Science and Medicine*, Vol. 13 B, (1979), 251-252.

²⁸ EC 6/1/1825-1851, 8.

including Chief João Antonio Nelson, together with Gã *mantsemei* when they revolted against the Compulsory Labor Ordinance of 1897.²⁹ These and other incidents demonstrate the Brazilian-Africans' contribution to anti-colonial nationalism; yet scholars have left this achievement on the historical margins of Ghanaian history. Former Brazilian President Inacio Lula da Silva underscored elements of Brazilian political contributions during his visit to the Tabom community in 2007. As he declared, "Returning to Africa, they brought the novelties which they learned on the other side of the Atlantic: the cultivation of mangoes, of cassava and beans; irrigation techniques, the knowledge of carpentry, architecture and tailoring. The returnees also brought Brazilian way of life. In the way they speak, in their festivities, in their cooking and in all the cultural manifestation."³⁰ Lula da Silva summed up aspects of Brazilian-Africans' contribution to Ghana's social and political development, and highlighted the ways in which the Middle Passage created mutual avenues for disseminating African skills on both ends of the Atlantic.

In the late-colonial period, a section of the Tabom, the Brazilian community, served in the British colonial army during World War II.³¹ A particular standout among the Tabom soldiers was Francisco Ribeiro, the grandson of a Brazilian-African returnee. After independence, Ribeiro served as Ghana's first ambassador

²⁹ Gã *mantsemei* Komeh I awarded titles of a "chief" to the Brazilian returnees to speed up assimilation and to attract more returnees. Six Brazilian-Tabom chiefs have served in this position since 1836. See Marcos A. Schamloeffel, *Tabom: The Afro-Brazilian Community in Ghana* (Bridgetown, Barbados: Lulu.com, 2008).

³⁰ The speech delivered by Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva during his first visit to the *Tabom* community on April 12, 2005 in Accra, Ghana. See also Samuel Quarcoopome, "The Brazilian Community of Ghana" (Dissertation, University of Ghana, June 1970).

³¹ See Nancy Ellen Lawler, *Soldiers Airmen Spies and Whisperers: The Gold Coast in World War II* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2002).



Figure B-B: Brazil House

to the United States,³² and a host of other members of the Tabom community became celebrated Ghanaians. In the sports arena, Azumah Nelson (relative of Chief João Antonio Nelson) held the World Featherweight Boxing Championship from 1984 to 1997.³³ In 2007, Georgina T. Wood, another Tabom, also entered the limelight in a spectacular manner: She became the first woman Chief Justice of any African nation.³⁴ Wood traces her lineage through Mama Nassu,

³² Kwame Essien, "African Diaspora in Reverse: The *Tabom* People in Ghana, 1820s" (PhD dissertation: University of Texas at Austin, 2010), 207-208.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Georgina T. Wood, interview with Kwame Essien, July 20, 2011, 1.

one of the early settlers who arrived in the 1820s. Nassu's house was renamed the "Brazil House" in 2007 (see figure B-B).

The descendants of freed slaves from the Caribbean contributed to British colonial ventures early on as engineers and medical doctors, among other professions. It is likely that the Basel Mission invited some of these Caribbean returnees to assist in preaching the Christian gospel. In subsequent years, members from this community rose to the positions of Moderator and Reverend Minister.³⁵ Danish Governor Carstensen's diary testifies to the significance of Caribbean blacks for both the colonial and missionary civilizations' efforts in Accra.³⁶ Black Americans also occupied various positions of power and prestige in Nkrumah's Ghana. These intellectuals, activists and radicals left an indelible mark on transatlantic history in Ghana. Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois, for instance, gave up US citizenship for Ghanaian citizenship in 1961 and served as a close advisor to Nkrumah.³⁷ His wife, Shirley Graham Du Bois, was the first Director of the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation in 1963.³⁸ Although these returnees made an impact during the early period of self-rule in Ghana, their contributions remain unmentioned in Ghanaian historiography. The absence of any mention of returnees' accomplishments within the scholarship is partly a reflection of how their history was not considered part of the broader post-independence story, and because scholars during this period were either occupied with other projects or focused on what became known as nationalist history.³⁹

³⁵ See Chapter 4 of Clifford C. Campbell, "Full Circle: The Caribbean Presence in the Making of Ghana, 1843-1966" (Ph. D Dissertation: The University of Ghana, Legon, 2012).

³⁶ Governor Carstensen's Diary (1842-1850), Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon (January, 1965), 4; 13-17; 53-62.

³⁷ Gerald Horne, *Black and Red: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Afro-American Response to the Cold War, 1944-1963* (NY: State University of New York Press, 1986), 345; 214-216 and 328-357.

³⁸ Gerald Horne, *Race Woman: The lives of Shirley Graham Du Bois* (NY: New York University Press, 2000), 167, 177.

³⁹ Caroline Neale, *Writing "Independent" History: African Historiography, 1960-1980* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), 60.

Problems and Challenges in Studying and (Re)Writing Trans-Atlantic History in Ghana

The previous section discussed several ways in which three returnee communities contributed to the development of Ghana, but despite these contributions their story has been largely overlooked. Many more explanations exist than can be covered in this work for why transatlantic communities in Ghana are essentially invisible, and as a result remain largely unknown. These include issues related to historiography and methodological challenges in writing Ghanaian and transatlantic history. Regarding the former, for instance, nationalist historians of the 1950s, influenced by or following the long-held belief that the pre-colonial histories were not worth writing, established a one-dimensional trend. Later in their effort to deconstruct this paradigm, these historians began a new trend that focused mainly on national history during and after the decolonization movements,⁴⁰ which only further obscured the history of transatlantic communities in Ghana. There are other numerous methodological challenges. For instance, a number of scholars writing on the “Back-to-Africa” movement of the twentieth century focused mainly on Americo-Liberians in Liberia and settlers in Sierra Leone.⁴¹ Although many scholarly works

⁴⁰John Edward Phillips (Ed). *Writing African History* (NJ: University of Rochester Press, 2006) 4, 37 and 254; Jacques Depelchin, *Silences in African History: Between the Syndromes of Discovery and Abolition* (Dar es Salaam, Tanzania: Mkuki na Nyota Publishers, 2005) xi; Sandra E. Greene, “Whispers and Silences: Explorations in African History,” *Africa Today* Vol. 50, No. 2 (2003); Luise White, Stephan F. Miescher and David William Chen, *African Words, African Voice: Critical Practices of Oral History* (Bloomington & Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001); Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition* (NY: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), 158-159; Paul T. Zeleza, *The Study of Africa Vol. 1: Disciplinary and Interdisciplinary Encounters* (Dakar, Senegal: CODESRIA), 442 and; Michel-Rolph Trouillot, In *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (MA: Beacon Press, 1995), 27; 96-107.

⁴¹ Kenneth C. Barnes, *Journey of Hope: the Back-to-Africa movement in Arkansas in the late 1800s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press,

extended this writing to other returnee communities, they limited the scope of their work to the story of the “Aguda,” the freed Africans from Cuba and Brazil who settled in Nigeria, Benin and Togo, in part because many more slaves were taken from this region.⁴² In addition, the availability of archival records for tracing the history of the Aguda at the British National Archives, Kew and archives and other holdings in West Africa,⁴³ compared with very few holdings at the PRAAD, has added layers of problems to the invisibility of the returnees’ narratives in Ghana.⁴⁴

2004) and Nemata Amelia Blyden, *West Indians in West Africa, 1808-1880: The African Diaspora in Reverse* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2000).

⁴² Solimar Otero, *Afro-Cuban Diasporas in the Atlantic World* (NY: University of Rochester Press, 2010), Solimar Otero, “Orunile: Heaven is Home, Yoruba and Afrocuban Diasporas Across the Atlantic” (Ph. D Dissertation: Louisiana State University, 2009); Law, Robin. *Ouidah: The Social History of a West African Slaving ‘Port,’ 1727-1892* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2004). Robin Law, *Francisco de Souza in West Africa, 1820-1849* in Jose C. Curto and Paul Lovejoy (eds.), *Enslaving Connections: Changing Cultures of Africa and Brazil During the Era of Slavery* (NY: Humanity Books, 2004), 189, 193; Robin Law, *The Evolution of the Brazilian Community in Ouidah*, in Kristin Mann and Edna G. Bay (Eds.), *Rethinking the African Diaspora: The Making of a Black Atlantic World I the Bight of Benin and Brazil* (Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2001), 22-28.

⁴³ Research, including Pierre Verger’s voluminous book, which partly covers the “Aguda” story and the various reverse migrations crisscrossing the Atlantic, depended extensively on the rich collections at Kew. Robin Law who also drew heavily from the collections at *Archives Nationales* in Porto-Novo, Benin, followed a similar pathway.

⁴⁴ Part of the limitation at PRAAD is not only associated with problems with the condition of the records, but the fact that: 1) in the case of Nigeria there were many more slaves from that area who were dispersed into the New World and those who returned after abolition compared with the Ghanaian story. See Slave Voyages Database on <http://slavevoyages.org/tast/database/search.faces> as well as the data used by Kwasi Konadu, *The Akan diaspora in the Americas* (NY, Oxford University Press, 2010); and 2) British abolitionist records and correspondence to and from Nigeria was more extensive than the Gold Coast perhaps because of the stark population between those enslaved in the two locations.

Archival holdings pertaining to the post-colonial period present similar challenges. A search of the National Archives located throughout Ghana, for example, yielded no meaningful leads, and the records were insufficient for tracing the history of the Caribbean migrations into Ghana. However, missionary records and colonial collections which include memoirs and private papers offer useful insight into the activities of returnees. Returnees from the West Indies contributed to establishing Presbyterian churches across towns such as Aburi, Akropong and areas in coastal Accra. Some of the returnees from the Caribbean who served missionaries and preached, built schools, and supported plantation systems in Ghana, returned to the Caribbean around 1915. Two Jamaican returnees, however, stayed in the Gold Coast and achieved higher ranks within the mission. Reverend Nicholas T. Clerk became the First Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ghana, and Reverend Peter Hall served as the Synod Clerk in the Presbyterian Church.⁴⁵ According to Campbell, “the arrival of the missionaries from the Caribbean drastically altered the educational landscape in the eastern districts of the Gold Coast where they landed.”⁴⁶

Outside of the discrete histories of these religious communities, these contributions have remained essentially silent. The extent to which these three returnee groups, from Brazil, the Caribbean, and North America, successfully integrated into the cultures and communities of the Gold Coast and, later, an independent Ghana, reflect in large part the stark differences in the time periods at which they each arrived. Their distinctive arrival

⁴⁵ See lecture by James Aquandah, “Ghana-Caribbean Relations from Slavery times to Present,” Lecture to the Ghana-Caribbean Association in Accra, Ghana in 2006. <http://www.ghanaculture.gov.gh/privatecontent/File/GHANA%20CARIBBEAN%20RELATIONS%20pdf.pdf>

⁴⁶ Clifford C. Campbell, “Full Circle: The Caribbean Presence in the Making of Ghana, 1843-1966” (Ph. D Dissertation: The University of Ghana, Legon, 2012), 163.

time, in turn, shaped their experiences. Thus, the Brazilian-Africans who settled around 1820 integrated steadily into Gold Coast society, established their belonging in the Ghana's historical timeline, and constructed their niche—dual identity. Conversely, both Caribbean- and American-African returnee groups who settled over a century later remain in relative obscurity, with only disparate historical ties, with respect to the social and cultural history of Ghana. In the case of the former, recent study shows that a small group arrived in the late 1800s.⁴⁷

The varying arrival points of the emancipated Africans and their offspring contributed to the processes of assimilation and transformation over time. For the Brazilian-Africans and the Tabom, intermarriages between Brazilian settlers and Ghanaians hastened their integration, and over generations they assimilated deeply into the local cultures and norms—and proudly so. According to *Maɲtse* Nii Azumah V, “As now, we identify with *Gã* [the ethnic group that welcomed the first generation of Afro-Brazilian slaves to the Gold Coast] but that does not mean that we have lost our identity. We maintain our identity...When we came we still maintained our identity. The concept...takes precedence over Brazil so we say incidentally or accidentally that we come from here, we come from Africa. I call it incident or accident that took us there [Brazil]. Fortunately, we are back.”⁴⁸ The voice of the Brazilian *maɲtsemei* indeed does not represent the experiences of all the members of the Brazilian Diaspora in Ghana, but it speaks to issues about their double consciousness and aspects of identity crisis.

⁴⁷ See Clifford C. Campbell, “Full Circle: The Caribbean Presence in the Making of Ghana, 1843-1966” (Ph. D Dissertation: The University of Ghana, Legon (2012).

⁴⁸ Nii Azumah Nelson V, interview by Kwame Essien on July 4, 2007. The Caribbean returnees and American-Africans have not been successful in this area or invested much effort to establish cultural ties with Ghanaians mainly because of how their history evolved in Ghana. In the case of the latter, very few of them have made efforts publicly to be identified as “Ghanaians.”

Besides *Manjse* Nii Azumah V's statement about their ties to Ghana and Brazil, structures such as the Brazil House physically express the narratives of the returnees as monuments to their relevance and represent a symbol of their permanence in Ghana; but the same cannot be said of other settlers. Despite the prominence of returnees from the West Indies who served as medical doctors, engineers, and lawyers during British colonial rule,⁴⁹ no sustained efforts have been made to preserve their legacy. One reason for this difference was that they did not establish communities similar to the Brazilian-Africans. It is, in fact, nearly impossible to trace the histories of these returnees in terms of their daily activities or their interactions with the culture, society, and Ghanaians outside the confines of the British colonial apparatus. Attempts to trace their descendants in Ghana have likewise been problematic. As for freed US slaves and their descendants who returned to Ghana, many argue that the assimilation cannot be achieved because of the factors I have mentioned above (including silences in the archives), or because most of returnees from the US do not generally identify as Ghanaians.⁵⁰ According to the late Robert Lee, an African American dentist and former school mate of Nkrumah in Lincoln University, Pennsylvania in the United States, there are limits to the extent to which returnees can assimilate into local Ghanaian cultures. He was among the first African Americans of the Civil Rights era to settle in Accra at Nkrumah's behest. During the 1950s and 60s, his advice to the returnees was that, "we need to stop trying to be Fante, Ashanti, Ewe, Gã or whatever. We have our own tribe, that tribe born in America, in Europe, in the

⁴⁹ See Ray Jenkins, "'West Indian' and 'Brazilian' Influences in the Gold Coast-Ghana, 1807-1914...", paper presented to the 12th Annual Conference of the Society for Caribbean Studies, 12-14 July 1988.

⁵⁰ Maya Angelou, *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* (NY: Vintage Books, 1991).

Caribbean and other parts of the Diaspora.”⁵¹ This suggests that the second wave of returnees was not very interested in becoming Ghanaian.

In addition to the time that they arrived and the place from which they came, levels of visibility within Ghanaian society and the distribution of limited resources and funding for preserving and restoring memorial sites in Ghana also shaped differences between them. These priorities unavoidably depend on the relative significance of different returnee groups. The trouble with this stems from the one-dimensional approach used in the tourism sector, which fails to provide balance in deciding which memorial sites to include in the subsidized version of events in Ghanaian transatlantic history. In other words, Ghanaian institutions have applied a static model for important transatlantic accounts to popular historical sites such as the Elmina and Cape Coast. These two middle-passage landmarks are the primary tourist reference points for American-African and Caribbean-African returnees. Whereas funding for the sites of memories in the Tabom communities was put off or ignored for considerable time, eventually Tabom elders and *Maɲtse* Nii Azumah were able to work jointly with the Brazilian Embassy to restore the Brazil House, which opened for tourists by 2007.⁵² The Ghanaian government’s approach contributed to silences and added to various challenges in studying returnee history in Ghana. They were more interested in targeting African Americans, because of their relative spending power and cultural interest in sites of

⁵¹ See Kwame Essien, “African Americans in Ghana: Successes and Challenges, 1985 through 2005” (MA Thesis, Center for African Studies, University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign, 2000), 30; <http://books.google.com> and <http://www.worldcat.org>.

⁵² See Mae-ling Jovenes Lokko, *The Brazil House* (2011); See also Kwame Essien, “A abertura da casa Brasil: A History of the *Tabom* People, Part 1” in Kwesi Kwaa Prah *Back to Africa Vol. 1: Afro-Brazilian Returnees and their Communities* (Cape Town, South Africa: CASAS Book Series, 2009).

historical memory. The forts, dungeons and castles which were the point of departure for enslaved Africans, remain central historical sites and, for many, “sacred” spaces, for rearticulating fledgling transatlantic ties between the returnees and Ghana. Various Ghanaian leaders, together with the Ministry of Tourism and Diasporan Relations, have worked to preserve, re-package and re-market historic landmarks to both diasporic and non-diasporic consumers in recent times, thereby improving the situation.⁵³

In addition to historical developments covered earlier, other factors shaped the returnees’ story. With regard to American-African returnees, Nkrumah made the political mistake of not keeping them outside his close-knit circles and stringent framework of post-independence reforms. During the period of self-rule, Nkrumah sought to create a larger grassroots constituency, including younger generations from the Ghanaian Builders Brigade, to serve a much broader agenda.⁵⁴ Some returnees who worked closely with the Nkrumah government during the 1962 and 1964 assassination attempts⁵⁵ claimed that they were accused of conspiring with the American CIA to either kill or topple Nkrumah.⁵⁶ His 1966 departure from power and the ensuing witch-hunt and persecution of American-African expatriates overshadowed the returnees’ role in reforms in Ghana. Prior to the ascendancy of Nkrumah, there were others such as Chief Nelson who became dominant forces in the Pan-African

⁵³ Sandra L. Richards, “What is to be Remembered: Tourism to Ghana’s Slave Castle-Dungeons” *Theatre Journal* 57 (2005), 617.

⁵⁴ Jeffrey S. Ahlman, “A New Generation of Citizenship: Youth, Gender, and Generation in the Ghanaian Builders Brigade,” *Journal of African History*, 53 (2012), 87-93.

⁵⁵ “Kwame Nkrumah is Our Shepherd, We Shall Not Want,” *The Ghanaian Times*, 14 September 1962, 2. See also “Be More Vigilant—Says Nkrumah,” *The Daily Graphic*, 15 August 1962, 2d.

⁵⁶ Maya Angelou, *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* (NY: Vintage Books, 1991).

movement and influential figures in the anti-colonial movement,⁵⁷ but such returnees have not been given the recognition they deserve. Nelson has been systematically excluded from historical accounts. Similar marginalization is visible elsewhere especially as it relates to the contributions of American Africans, as in the cases of Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois, his wife, Shirley Graham Du Bois,⁵⁸ Julian Mayfield, and others.⁵⁹ In general, American Americans' contributions to the improvement of Ghanaian society remained largely unseen and unheard. Opposing this trend, Panafest and Emancipation Day Celebrations in Ghana, which began in the early 1990s, have indeed shed new light, for instance on the role of the Du Bois and other US expatriates. These annual and bi-annual celebrations have created awareness of the oft-ignored impacts of the Diaspora on Ghana and inspired new generations of returnees to join contemporary voyages to Ghana, including Rita Marley, wife of legendary Jamaican Reggae star, Bob Nester Marley. Rita Marley's house at Aburi showcases the Caribbean presence in Ghana and draws visitors to the area in considerable number. Most of these returnees and tourists visit the grave of a Jamaican woman known only as Crystal whose body was reinterred at Assin Manso in the Central Region in 1998. Returnees perform various rituals at this tourist site (see figure C-C).⁶⁰ The opening of the Brazil House for tourism in 2007 also created a spectacle and provided new insight into the existence of the Brazilian in Ghana.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Pierre Moukoko Mbonjo, *The Political Thought of Kwame Nkrumah: A Comprehensive Presentation* (Lagos, Nigeria: The University of Lagos Press, 1998), 121-158; and C.L.R. James, *Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution* (Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill & Company, 1977), 75-77.

⁵⁸ See the following files at PRAAD: SC/BAA/355, "W.E.B. Du Bois 27/1/61-24/2/64 and SC/BAA 242, "Shirley Du Bois."

⁵⁹ Kevin K. Gaines. *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

⁶⁰ Janet Quainoo, "Remains of two African slaves buried" *Daily Graphic*, August 8, 1998, 13.

⁶¹ George Aruna Nelson, interview with Kwame Essien, January 10, 2009.



Figure C-C: (above) Inscription of Crystal's name; (opposite) grave site of Crystal (Jamaican) and Samuel Carson (African-American)

New Obstacles: When the Historiography also take a U-Turn in the Trans-Atlantic story

There are a number of challenges and contradictions that stem from the limitations of the one-dimensional approach that characterizes historiographies about returnee communities in Ghana. This narrow approach does often showcase Ghana's influential role in Pan-Africanism, but in picturing that role the significance of returnees is overshadowed or completely left out of the history.⁶² Recent

⁶² Pan-Africanism is used here to show the ways in which Ghana contributed to this consciousness to facilitate not only the common heritage between Ghanaians and blacks in the diaspora but to emphasize the importance of cross-cultural interactions and exchanges between them. For other use of Pan-Africanism see Toyin Falola and Kwame Essien (Eds.), *Pan-Africanism and the*



political and economic developments in Ghana and Africa generally complicate the matter, as when African nations and the international community refer to Ghana as exemplifying a stable African democracy.⁶³ As Ghana's impact on individuals and groups throughout Africa and the diaspora is often underscored, the scholarship on the African diaspora overlooks those who have helped shape politics and society in Ghana. Chief Nelson, for example, who was a trailblazer of anti-colonialism, is one among many marginalized figures from the history of returnees in the Gold Coast who contributed to anti-colonial radicalism and activism before other

Politics of African Citizenship and Identity (NY, London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2013).

⁶³ "Jubilation Herald Supreme Court Judgement at Nima," Graphic Online August 31, 2013, <http://graphic.com.gh/Politics/jubilation-herald-supreme-court-judgement-at-nima.html> and "Ghana Supreme Court upholds John Mahama's win," <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-23878458>

prominent figures as Dr. Kwame Nkrumah emerged on the national and transatlantic stage.

Scholars from multiple disciplines with a variety of research interests have addressed these entangled issues, but have ignored the challenges and silences. As a result, their interpretations and conclusions rarely penetrate beyond the narratives of tension over sites of memories. These works have, nonetheless, enhanced scholars' understanding of certain complexities of the transatlantic experience. Some of these works claim that Ghanaian leaders, institutions and individuals exploit returnees by making profit from returnees who visit the slave forts, castles and dungeons. Other reverse migration studies have taken an interest in the emotional journeys taken by returnees seeking to reconnect with lost "ancestors," whose only remains are the invisible spirits claimed to dwell in the Atlantic archaeological sites such as the Cape Coast and Elmina Castles and forts. There is notable irritation among returnees over the lack of connection that stems from cultural differences. As one of these scholars points out, "We [returnees] were encouraged to mourn because it generated revenue, but our grief struck no common chord of memory, no bedrock of shared sentiment [with Ghanaians]."⁶⁴ Part of these utterances also asserts that some of "the descendants of slaves [who visit Ghana] were welcomed with the red carpet treatment. They mourned their ancestors in great public ceremonies where chiefs assembled to atone for the past and to collect alms."⁶⁵ There is some truth to this claim. However, those who express them and especially scholars who analyze these important interactions ignore other exchanges that aid in drawing balanced conclusions.

⁶⁴ Saidiya V. Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007) 171 and Bayo Holsey, *Routes of Remembrance: Refashioning the Slave Trade in Ghana* (IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2008).

⁶⁵ Saidiya V. Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 164.

Discourse on reverse migrations or “going back home” to Ghana has drawn considerable attention in other scholarship. Katharina Schramm’s book, *African Homecoming: Pan-African Ideology and Contested Heritage*, for instance, examines the geographical trajectories of Pan-Africanism and reverse migration to Ghana. She mainly focuses on ongoing interactions between African Americans and Ghanaians. A major part of the book addresses the phenomenon of “homecoming.” She argues that the various journeys of those who return are undertaken in pursuit of an “authentic African self . . . [that] must be analytically linked to the simultaneous affirmation of a diasporic identity.”⁶⁶ Schramm’s work leans heavily on the popular view on one side of the debate, and emphasizes that returnees searching for Ghanaian heritage need not alter their American identity, which they maintain by conscious effort (strategically) as one half of their dual heritage. Yet she cites evidence of an identity crisis among returnees, which she justifies by adding that homecoming embodies many things at once. Lastly, according to Schramm, many scholars overstate the importance of the intersections of homecoming and tourism in Ghana.⁶⁷

Other literature juxtaposes the search for a home in Ghana with nostalgia for acceptance, a sensitive subject highlighted in world-renowned author and poet Maya Angelou’s *All God’s Children Need Traveling Shoes*.⁶⁸ Similarly, Leslie A. Lacy, who, like Angelou, was a returnee in Ghana during Nkrumah’s tenure, underscored this matter in his memoirs tracing his travels through Ghana and other parts of Africa.⁶⁹ Returnee Pauli Murray, on the other hand, opposes the concept of identity transformation

⁶⁶ Katharina Schramm’s book, *African Homecoming: Pan-African Ideology and Contested Heritage* (CA: Left Coast Press 2012), 38.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Maya Angelou, *All God’s Children Need Traveling Shoes* (NY: Vintage Books, 1991), 21-22; 80.

⁶⁹ Leslie Alexander Lacy, *The Rise and Fall of a Proper Negro: An Autobiography* (NY: Macmillan, 1970), 148-156; 166-170.

and reconstruction.⁷⁰ Unlike other expatriates, she was not searching for a home, or African heritage, or anything else missing from her life, but was basically occupied by the daunting task of exporting her understanding of American democracy and constitutionalism on Ghanaians.⁷¹ Murray was one of the American-African expatriates who joined the first waves of migrations to Ghana to assist with post-independence reforms. Murray played a major role in the establishment of the University of Ghana Law School, where she was a visiting lecturer. Her stay during the early 1960s was cut short, however, by her sudden return to the United States, allegedly in connection with her criticizing Nkrumah's government. She had labeled Nkrumah as a dictator. Murray's attitude was certainly perceived among a section of the Ghanaian population, especially Nkrumah's followers, as a reflection of a stereotypical viewpoint popular among returnees.⁷²

ABABIO- He/She who Returned (2009), an anthology by members of the American-African expatriate community and a number of residents from the Caribbean in Ghana, has also missed the mark. The contributors who represent diverse class, educational, and religious backgrounds skillfully reveal their diverse experiences, successes, expectations, and frustrations. However, they each follow a similar line of thought that presents them as victims of African society (Ghana), suggesting that Ghanaians treat them as outsiders or ignore their cultural and social needs. All of the contributions are blunt in their analysis, which perhaps functions in unearthing their horizontal experiences via

⁷⁰ See Murray's experiences in Ghana. *Pauli Murray: The Autobiography of a Black Activist, Feminist, Lawyer, Priest, and Poet* (University of Tennessee Press, 1989) 318-358; and Sarah Azaransky, *The Dream is Freedom: Pauli Murray and American Democratic Faith* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 85.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² See Robert Weisbord, *Ebony Kinship: Africa, Africans, and Afro-Americans* (Westport, C.T.: Greenwood Press Inc., 1973).

daily or trivial interactions with Ghanaians, as well as their vertical exchanges with government leaders and institutions. In all, though an important anthology, it fails to break out of the paradigm of exploitation that some scholars associate with Ghanaians. It is interesting to know that the returnees who contributed to this important anthology also benefit from the historical landmarks as well as annual or bi-annual cultural Pan-African activities, and have control over other commercial activities including economic Pan-Africanism.⁷³ This story is missing in *ABABIO*—which in Akan means “you have returned again.”

Indeed, the returnees thrived as they joined new exodus to Ghana and negotiated complex cultural and social systems in their “motherland.” However, the fact that they have returned does not necessarily mean they have been successful in articulating the challenges of return. *ABABIO* as other works of its ilk is silent about this important achievement by the returnees: their success and monopoly in economic Pan-Africanism. What might prevent scholars interested in the American-African reverse migration experience in Ghana from addressing how these returnees—especially the investors and the CEO’s among them who own and manage hotels, motels, car rental services, tourist buses and different forms of entrepreneurship—facilitate tourism to and from the sites of memories? The answer lies in the fact that such an acknowledgement would contradict widely held notions that the Ghanaian government and local vendors at the Cape Coast and Elmina castles and dungeons are the only ones who benefit from heritage tourism.⁷⁴

⁷³ The following pages in the book highlight the returnees’ investment in Ghana: Seestah Imahkus Njinga, *He/She Who Has Returned: A 21st Century Anthology of African Diasporan Returnees to Ghana* (Cape Coast, Ghana: One Africa Tours and Speciality Services Ltd., 2009), 104 and 128.

⁷⁴ Bruner, Edward. “Tourism in Ghana: The Representation of Slavery and the Return of the Black Diaspora,” *American Anthropologist* 98 (June 1996): 294-304.

There are other reasons for this omission. Some of the entrepreneurs prefer to remain silent about (profiting from) their use of economic Pan-Africanism, perhaps leery of revealing conflicts of interest, or because of the lingering memory or the ongoing ripple-effects of a case of embezzlement from the early 2000s that tainted the image of investors in Ghana. The story involved Juliet Cotton, an American-African businesswoman invited by former Ghanaian President Jerry John Rawlings (1979; 1981-2002) to assist with post-revolutionary economic reforms in Ghana.⁷⁵ Cotton was later caught embezzling \$20 million of Ghanaian tax-payer money, which sparked an enormous backlash not just against investors, politicians, and government development projects, but against the American-African returnee community.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Joe Bradford, "Africa Needs Economic Freedom: President Declares," *Daily Graphic*, July 31, 1998, 1.

⁷⁶ Editor, "Quality Grain Scandal: Preprah Gave \$2m to 'Sexy' JR," *The Ghanaian Chronicle*, 13 September 2000, 1; Kofi Koomson, "The 180 Bil. Quality Grain Scandal: An African American Beauty with a full bossom dissolves \$27m of Ghanaian Taxpayer's Money in Rice Deal," *The Ghanaian Chronicle*, 5 September 2000, 1. Indeed, this was not the first time returnees from the US have been placed under close surveillance. During Nkrumah's tenure, American blacks came under scrutiny after they were accused of their involvement in two failed assassination attempts on Nkrumah's life. For coverage on the assassination see "Blood on Their Hands," *The Daily Graphic*, 3 August 1962, 2d, "Kwame Nkrumah is Our Shepherd, We Shall Not Want," *The Ghanaian Times*, 14 September 1962, 2 and others. According to Maya Angelou, the general consensus in Accra was that America was capable of using black expatriates from the US to destabilize Nkrumah's government or end his tenure in office. Maya Angelou, *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* (NY: Vintage Books, 1991), 21-22; 80. See also Leslie Alexander Lacy, *The Rise and Fall of a Proper Negro: An Autobiography* (NY: Macmillan, 1970), 148-156; 166-170. The rice scandal that occurred at the dawn of the twenty-first century gained global attention and media sensation in Ghana. Rawlings' political opponents used this scandal as part of their political manifesto to paint a picture of out-of-control administration. In fact, spontaneous outrage by Ghanaians raised suspicions about other investors who were involved in genuine projects in Ghana. There were other ripple effects: Ghanaian government ministers who signed the contract were imprisoned after a long trial; Cotton also served jail time

(Re) Making Us—the Returnees Visible

Whereas neither scholarship nor Ghanaian institutions have thoroughly addressed the silences and challenges in the returnee experience, returnees have improvised through individual and collective efforts. Indeed, looking for methods of addressing these issues beyond the academia, the Ghanaian government and especially the Ministry of Tourism and Diasporan Relations, the Tabom communities and their leaders, individuals, returnees groups, and associations such as the African-American Association in Ghana and the Caribbean Association in Ghana, have used forums to add their voices to the complicated conversation. Returnee communities have made great strides in their engagements with major actors in reverse Diaspora exchanges in Ghana, especially the organizers of Panafest and Emancipation Day celebrations, to play active roles in the annual celebrations and inviting tourist to visit historical sites such as the Brazil House. Importantly, the involvement of Ghanaian students from both public and private schools in educational tours to Brazil House and their participation in Panafest and Emancipation Day celebrations since the 1990s has made the Pan-African connections even more visible for younger generations.

In addition to these gradual reforms at the dawn of the twenty-first century, the residue of Pan-African consciousness and connections has made a number of individuals visible. For instance, although Marcus Mosiah Garvey, the flamboyant

in Atlanta, US. On the day of her sentence, Cotton declared that, “I did nothing crooked, nothing illegal...[she claimed that her name had been] scandalized on two continents. I’ve been lied on, misunderstood.” “The Quality Grains Scandal: Cotton Jailed 15 Years-She’s told to refund \$20m to Ghana govt,” *The Daily Graphic*, October 26, 2002. See also Esi Asante, “Ibrahim Adam Opens Defense at Quality Grain Trial,” *The Ghanaian Times*, 20 December 2001, 3; Kwaku Sakyi-Addo, “Ghana’s \$20 Million Rice Scandal,” February 21, 2002; <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/1832416.stm>; Shocking Revelation from the Rice Scandal: Mills was dribbled, May 19, 2003, <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/artikel.php?ID=36607>

Jamaican referred to as “Black Moses,” did not fulfill his dream of visiting Africa, his legacy remains: the Black Star engraved in one of the major monuments around the Independence Square in the heart of Accra epitomizes Pan-African consciousness and symbolizes his ideology about the “Back-to-Africa” Movement. The Marcus Garvey Guest House located on the compound of the Du-Bois Center showcases aspects of the Jamaican reverse Diaspora migration story in Ghana.⁷⁷ For intellectual memory, the George Padmore Library and grave in Accra, as well as the George Padmore Primary School in Tema, all showcase other dimensions of Caribbean presence in Ghana.

The history of returnee communities has not been given the attention it deserves as an integral part of Ghanaian history from the pre-colonial era to the present. Recent major transformations in how returnees showcase their contributions and significances to transatlantic history in Ghana, as expressions of agency, have demonstrated the will of returnees to no longer remain silent while waiting for the Ghanaian government or institutions to grant them public exposure. Returnees have a mission based on a vision of self-determination, to control their own destiny in the process of reconstructing Diaspora history in Ghana using historical landmarks. Such transatlantic symbols in Ghana are indeed significant embodiments of Ghana’s ties to the middle passage experience.⁷⁸ The recent work by Edmund Abaka, *House of Slaves and “Door of No Return”* (2012), resounds with the message that

⁷⁷Kofi Owusu Aduonum, “Ministry Moves to save Marcus Garvey Guest House,” *Ghanaian Chronicle*, April 27, 2009. <http://www.modernghana.com/news/213142/1/ministry-moves-to-save-marcus-garvey-guest-house.html>.

⁷⁸Brempong Osei-Tutu, “African American Reaction to the Restoration of Ghana’s Slave Castles,” *Public Archaeology* 3 (2004): 198-201. See also S. Benson and T.C. McCaskie, “Asen Praso in History and Memory,” *Ghana Studies* 7 (2004): 93-113; and Laurajane Smith, *The Cultural Moment in Tourism* (Routledge & Francis Taylor, 2012) and Ann Reid, “Gateway to Africa: The Pilgrimage Tourism of Diaspora Africans in Ghana” (Ph. D Dissertation: Indiana University, 2006).

discourse regarding the middle passage cannot be complete unless the broader dialogue acknowledges the giant voiceless walls—the Gates of silences that sit on the coastline of Ghana.⁷⁹ In any case, returnees from the United States in particular have transformed historical monuments into vehicles for profit, such as the “ships of permanent anchor.”⁸⁰ In so doing, they created what has been referred to here as economic Pan-Africanism. Some returnees have succeeded in this daunting task through appropriation, performances of various hues, and strategic placement as they amass wealth through the tourism sector.⁸¹

African American returnee and writer, Imahkus Njinga Okofu, along with other returnees, made demands and wrote petitions for many years. They finally convinced the Ministry of Tourism and Diasporan Relations, as well as other interested parties, to establish the “Door of Return” as part of the Cape Coast Castle monument to showcase the story of *return* (see figure D-D). It is against the backdrop of the middle passage narrative that these diasporic perspectives, interactions, and dialogues in Ghana evolved in full circle—particularly in the twenty-first century.

Other constructive approaches to this transatlantic encounter, which have been mentioned above, contribute to countering the largely silent history of reverse migration discourse. Abaka’s *House of Slaves* and “*Door of No Return*” shifts slightly from this stringent narrative mentioned earlier, and brings attention to returnee success stories. For instance, the “Door of Return” is a

⁷⁹ Edmund Abaka, *House of Slaves and “Door of No Return”: Gold Coast/Ghana Slave Forts, Castles & Dungeons and the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2012), 66. See also Christine Mullen Kreamer, “The Politics of Memory: Ghana’s Cape Coast Castle Exhibition ‘Crossroads of People, Crossroads of Trade,’” *Ghana Studies* 7 (2004): 79-91.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 40.

⁸¹ Appropriation is used here to describe the diverse ways in which individuals, private groups and institutions draw, adopt and borrow a particular practice while “performance” represents the public act of displaying aspects of appropriation.



Figure D-D: The Door of Return

*All pictures taken by Kwame Essien

metaphor for the audacity of returnees to revisit the historical site characterize by Abaka as “ships of permanent anchor to shift the focus from the horrors of the middle passage to show that the descendants of slave have thrived: they were not in bondage as their ancestors.”⁸² The “Door of Return” concept has made the contributions of the returnees more visible: by replacing the “Door of No Return,” which highlights the dominant horrific narratives of their ancestors, who passed onto awaiting ships to the New World, with the “Door of Return,” they move the dialogue to focus on the “return” of slaves’ offspring to the historical crime scene (see figure D-D). Essentially, the “Door of Return” metaphor responds

⁸² Edmund Abaka, *House of Slaves and “Door of No Return”: Gold Coast/Ghana Slave Forts, Castles & Dungeons and the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2012), 40.

to some of the neglects of their ancestral heritage. These historical symbols which were once sites of torture now stand as go-betweens, silent sacred bedrocks for World Heritage Sites projects, nuclei for tourism in Ghana and major sites for reconnecting returnees with their heritage.

Abaka's work not only makes the returnees' contribution visible, he also explains several ways of rewriting and retracing reverse migrations to Ghana by showing crisscrossing and tangential motion across the Atlantic, placing the historical mark in the center of future analysis. The tangential and sometimes circular movements emphasize the collision of voices of anguish, pain and violence that became associated with the horrific history of the middle passage experience. Abaka says it more eloquently when he states that, "the slave forts, castles and dungeons have situated slavery, its legacy and African Diaspora history back in popular discourse."⁸³ This work credits the returnees for explaining their connections to the transatlantic narrative and for demanding change in the ways in which the forts and castles are managed and imagined. The returnees are not only interested in reverse migration or their physical presence in Ghana. They wanted the inscription "Door of Return" to remain as a permanent reminder and a powerful symbolic footprint of their return for posterity's sake.

Conclusion

In this article, I have sought to highlight the various historical, social and cultural factors that have contributed to the invisibility of diaspora returnee communities from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth, and the silences and challenges in studying this important transatlantic story. In addition, I have sought to

⁸³ Edmund Abaka, *House of Slaves and "Door of No Return": Gold Coast/Ghana Slave Forts, Castles & Dungeons and the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2012), 346.

document returnees' efforts to reverse this trend. There are important factors underlying the lack of visibility of stories of the diasporan returnee communities, despite evidence of enormous contributions to Ghanaian history from returnees since they arrived in West Africa. In contrast to abundant literature on other returnee groups, such as the Americo-Liberians in Liberia and the Aguda in Nigeria and Benin, the communities of Brazilian-African, Afro-Caribbean, and American-African descent in Ghana are scarcely covered. This dearth of research and scholarly work on the Brazilian-Tabom, Afro-Caribbean/West-Indian, and American-African returnees has been a major contributing factor in silences and lack of visibility regarding these communities.

Another limitation in literature focusing on interactions between Ghanaians and the transatlantic returnees within Ghana relates to dialogue-restrictions imposed by the one-dimensional approach popularly employed. Discourse about economic benefits of the sites of memory, for instance, is one-sided. The strategic essentialist approach to the discourse, which offers narrow coverage and analysis of the interpretation of degrees of visibility or lack thereof, has also complicated the issue. Some authors in this category, previously discussed, move between theories in a way that allows them to establish notions that Ghanaians are the only economic beneficiaries of tourism or heritage sites (sites of memories). For instance, rather than exploring the differences between their historical experiences, or the ways socio-cultural and global transformations inform Ghanaian-returnees' understandings of the middle passage, these works dwell on returnees' claims that ancestral spirits reside within sites of memories as a lens for establishing the notion that the returnees are overlooked. A portion of the Ghanaian populations do not feel connected to historical landmarks as the returnees. Some scholars use the returnees' sense of entitlement and deep attachment to these "sacred places" as a platform for generating a uniform

interpretation or single dimension in their analysis. As a result, these scholars often obscure the diverse views that Ghanaians have about the significance of sites of memories. Such works fail to explain why both the returnees' transatlantic experiences and reverse migrations are absent from broader Ghanaian historiography.