

An Appreciation of Iconography in the Cedi Currency

تقدير قيمة الرسوم الأيقونية في عملة غانا

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ملخص:

يعتبر أمناء المكتبات النقود، مثل الطوابع، مواد قصيرة العمر لكونها لا تخضع للطرق التقليدية في التصنيف والفهرسة. ويستخدم الجميع النقود في أغراض مختلفة. وحتماً تستخدم النقود الحديثة في هيئة أوراق نقدية و عملات أيضاً في أغراض متعددة. وغالباً ما تحمل كل عملة رمزاً ما. وتحمل الرموز داخلها بيانات أولية عادةً ما يتم إهمالها. وعادةً ما يقال إن للنقود لغة، وهذا صحيح لأنها تفتح الأبواب، وتحل العقد وتستغل المواقف المختلفة لخلق الفرص واغتنامها. يناقش هذا البحث حقيقة لغة النقود ولكن في ضوء المعلومات التي يمكن التوصل إليها عند فحص الأيقونات. يركز البحث على ثلاث ورقات في عملة دولة غانا، السيدي.

Money, like stamps, is considered ephemeral material by librarians because it does not yield to the conventional methods of classification and cataloguing. We all use money for various transactions. Modern money in the form of currency notes and coins is inevitably used for various transactions. Almost every currency has a kind of symbol on it. And symbols have primary information embedded in them, information that is often neglected. It has been said that 'money talks' and it certainly does because it opens doors, unties knots and creates and seizes opportunities in different situations. This paper recognises the truth in the adage that 'money talks' but in the light of what information can be unearthed when the icons are interrogated. Three notes of Ghana's currency, the cedi are put under the spotlight here.

Introduction

Ghana has changed her currency a number of times since she gained independence in 1957 and so has the iconography found on the currency (cedi with its decimal, pesewa). Reasons for choosing the symbols remain classified information.¹ From a non-expert viewpoint, the choice and interpretation of the symbols may seem obvious whereas the relationship between obverse and reverse sides is sometimes obscure and unrelated. Currency, in its modern form of paper and coins, has been used since its inception/invention not just as a medium of exchange but also for various purposes in politics, society, economics and religion in many countries. The appellations, nicknames and proverbs in our various Ghanaian languages attest to this. While one common adage is that 'money talks', one cannot hear what it says and the message it communicates.

This paper is an interpretation of the dominant iconography on three denominations of the cedi-

the twenty cedi (¢20.00) note of the 1978 series, the twenty thousand cedi (¢20,000.00) note of the 2000 series and the ten cedi (¢10.00) note of the 1972/73 series – from the perspective of a librarian interested in the worth of pictorial information and oral literature. It is also an effort to ‘hear’ what the symbols say. Each note has been placed within the political and economic history of the country – the Head of State and the Governor of the Bank of Ghana. The notes are not arranged in chronological order but in the order in which the information I glean from each icon dovetails into the others. I have used information in oral literature in the Twi and Ga languages², history and social culture.

The Twenty Cedi (¢20.00) Note

The twenty cedi note (¢20.00) note (Fig. 1) was first issued in 1978 during the military regime of the Supreme Military Council under the leadership of General F.W.K. Akuffo, while Alexander Eric



(Fig. 1) The obverse (top) and reverse (bottom) of the ¢20.00 note.

Head of State: General F W K Akuffo, Supreme Military Council II (1972-1979).

Governor of the Bank of Ghana: Alex Ashiagbor (1977-1982); series: 1978.

Obverse: gold miner, reverse: kente weaver.

Ashiagbor was Governor of the Bank of Ghana (BoG).³ It was the highest denomination of the 1978 series. A large star sits on the obverse side which also bears the signature of the Governor of the BoG with the portrait of a miner. The reverse features a *kente* weaver at the loom. Both sides tell us about the importance of our industries: the obverse about the giant gold economic industry and the reverse about one of the relatively small cultural indigenous industries.

The Mining Industry

The portrait on the obverse, that of a miner, symbolises the importance of the mining industry to the country coming second only to cocoa as the main export income. Ghana, was previously known as the Gold Coast⁴ till 1957, when she gained independence from the British. Several mines dot the landscape gutting the earth of its store of minerals – manganese, bauxite, diamond, gold and salt. Of these minerals, gold has gained prominence because of its economic value. Principal mining communities in the country include Obuasi, Tarkwa, Aboso, Akwatia and Daboya.⁵ Mining is one of the industrial sectors in the economy though the indigenous mining industry, called *galamsey*, which pre-dates the industrial one, is still very much practised. *Galamsey* operates on small concessions, with small capital base, and its practitioners are seen as parasites on the concessions of the larger mining companies and their operations are classified as illegal. The portrait represented on the note is that of a miner from a big mining company because they are better clothed with protective gear on the job where safety standards are adhered to.⁶

Specialisation in different fields needed in the mining sector, and the practise of one’s profession is very much encouraged. Cleaners, drivers, geologists or security persons, each is dependent

on the other as their duties and responsibilities are serialised, coordinated, synchronised and dovetail with others for the eventual product of jewellery (the most common product of the gold mining industry) which we all come to admire, or that part of equipment in medicine, science, art and their applied fields, which we are less familiar with. The driver in the technical section has the sole duty of taking the shift workers to the mining site, wait till the end of the shift and drive them back to the base camp site.⁷ Of all the workers in the mining sector, the miner with the unmistakable and indispensable headlamp is the best representative for the whole workforce of professionals (who include but are not limited to geologists, engineers, scientists, architects, and surveyors) and the technical team (of blast men, electricians, cleaners, drivers, assayers, excavators, utility workers, plumbers, security personnel, etc). Work is done by gangs (of between two to ten groups, each group made up of twelve people) under a gang supervisor; each group is made up of essential core staff⁸ who report to a shift manager who in turn reports to a shift boss. The hierarchy underground is strictly adhered to with each person dependent on the others for the execution of their tasks, safety and well-being.

William Brandford Griffiths a former Chief Justice on the Gold Coast colony, in his book, *The Far Horizon: Portrait of a Colonial Judge*,⁹ mentioned one of the uses to which gold was put, a vital piece of information which seems to have disappeared with the social history. This was the cultural use of gold in funerary practice in which the bones of valiant and warrior kings of Asante were taken out and encrusted with gold before burial at Bantama.¹⁰ Apart from this preservative quality reserved for royals, it was also a traditional means of saving money for posterity.

The Asante kings buried gold at secret locations in earthenware or brass containers.¹¹ Though the bodies of wealthy people and royals are sprinkled with gold dust in more recent times, they used to be buried with gold ornaments in the past. Gold also has medicinal properties and I recall the application of a gold ornaments as a cure for sty.¹²

The Kente Weaving Industry

The reverse of the twenty cedi note (¢20.00) note bears the picture of a *kente* weaver at his loom.¹³ A description of this indigenous fabric is aptly captured by a *Kentehene* of Bonwire as 'a hand-loom strip woven cloth with a name, design, meaning, philosophy and history'.¹⁴ *Kente* is a distinct, unique and important natural fabric in Ghana. Its home is in the Ashanti, Northern and Volta Regions of Ghana though the designs and patterns from these parts are distinct and different. Ashanti *kente*, which is the subject of our discussion, tends to have more symbolic representations than its siblings.

A symbol of prestige, *kente* is seen as the ultimate fabric in the traditional clothing industry. This kaleidoscope of a fabric was presented as gifts to dignitaries to the country and Dr. Kwame Nkrumah took this cultural ambassador with him on his travels.¹⁵ Indeed at the inauguration of the First Republic on 1 July, 1960, all members of parliament and the Head of the State during the Conventional Peoples' Party regime, were dressed in their resplendent *kente* cloth best described as a harmonic riot of rich colours.¹⁶ Those who understand the eloquence and nuances of *kente* in particular, and Ghanaian textiles in general, are appreciative of the messages conveyed in colour, motifs, quality of weave and the occasion of its use and application; they also recognise *kente* as a work of art and culture and which is highly

symbolic.¹⁷ Most Ghanaians may however choose to wear or give it as a gift more for its beauty and colour than for its symbolism while the culturally discerning will be careful when giving it as a gift or donning it. It was therefore quite an embarrassing situation when on 17 February 2009, the minister nominated for the Ministry of Chieftaincy and Culture wore *kente* for his vetting by the Appointments Committee of Parliament. Appropriately dressed to portray the office he will be taking, he could not tell the audience when questioned about the name of the *kente* he was wearing.¹⁸ This was a fine opportunity for the opposition party members of the New Patriotic party to make political capital of it – that the ruling new National Democratic Party did not have the right calibre of people for ministerial positions.

Kente features a lot in our highlife songs in which appreciation and love are expressed. Whether as a narrow single strip, sewn in multiple strips as stoles or wraps, or the broad 24-strip, this beautiful fabric has over the years elicited its inclusion in songs¹⁹ the most popular by far being Ephraim Amu's *Bonwire kentenwene* (Bonwire *kente* weaving).²⁰ Employing the storytelling art of Ghana, Amu tells of a teacher trainee of the Presbyterian Training College who went to Bonwire to satisfy his curiosity about how the fabric was made. So fascinated was he by the *kente* weaver's dexterity and coordination of hands and feet that it went to his head and all he could think and talk about was *kente* made in Bonwire. This song was composed for male voices and was performed by the University of Ghana choir (male voices), in 1968²¹ at Lincoln College, USA; it earned a seven-minute standing ovation.

Until recently, the wearing of *kente* was the preserve of the wealthy and royalty and to

date, there are certain designs that are exclusive to chiefs. The more experienced the weaver, the more intricate the design. The weave called *adwenesa* was the ultimate weave because it means 'I have exhausted my skill'. This weave has now been surpassed by *adwene si dwene so* – 'woven over another weave'. Names for *kente* designs are many and varied, often with no correlation between name and pattern. Some of the names commemorate occasions, historical events, after important people and institutions, while others take their names from plants, animals and natural phenomenon. Proverbs, as Akan art forms also feature prominently in the naming of *kente* cloth and more generally in the cloth industry in the country.²² Indeed, any festive occasion is a good one for the wearing of *kente*, a decorative piece (as illustrated below in Fig. 2) or an accessory for the commissioning of the only water pump in the village, sod cutting, graduation ceremonies, donation to an institution, etc.²³

The early practice of weaving *kente* designs in honour of important people or those who are being appreciated for their role in society has continued to date. The first three shown below (fig. 3a-c) were made in honour of political figures in the country over the last eight years. *Theresa Kuffuor* (3a) was woven in affection and honour of the wife of former President John Agyekum Kuffuor; while (3b) bears the name *Kuffuor apegya Ghana* ('Kuffuor has elevated Ghana) after the former President, John A. Kuffuor for his exemplary leadership and appreciation for what he did for Bonwire township. The third design, (3c) is called *Addo Kuffuor* named after Dr. Addo Kuffuor, one of the ministers in the Kuffuor Administration and brother to J.A.Kuffuor. The last one (3d) *Fathia fata Nkrumah* ('Fathia befits Nkrumah') was designed to commemorate an event and in



(Fig. 2) Kente used as an accessory
Kente as trimming on a minister's hood worn at a wedding ceremony held at Grace Presbyterian Church, Akropong-Akuapem. The minister would usually wear his cape without any trimming for church services. Photo credit: Korklu Laryea, Akropong-Akuapem, 17th May, 2009.

honour of the first lady of the First Republic, perhaps to signify the people's acceptance of the first president's foreign wife.²⁴

Ohemaa aba Ghana was designed to commemorate Queen Elizabeth's visit to Ghana.²⁵ While the people of Bonwire engaged their craftsmen's skill in weaving *kente* for this event, King Bruce and the Black Beats Band, a group of musicians were busy writing notes and lyrics to remind all of this auspicious occasion with *The Queen's Visit*²⁶

- 1- *This is the day five million Ghanaians will go gay*

Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip will be here that special day.

We'll drink and dance the whole day and put on kente fine,

On that Thursday, 12 November 1959.²⁷

Refrain

May God bless this fine Thursday,

When all Ghana will go gay.

Prince and Elizabeth, we love you.

Akwaaba! Awa awa atuu!

- 2- *Seven long years we waited since to Canada*

And then to Nigeria she brought jubilation.

Now hear the drummers drumming on the mighty fontromfrom!

The Queen has come at last to Ghana from United Kingdom.

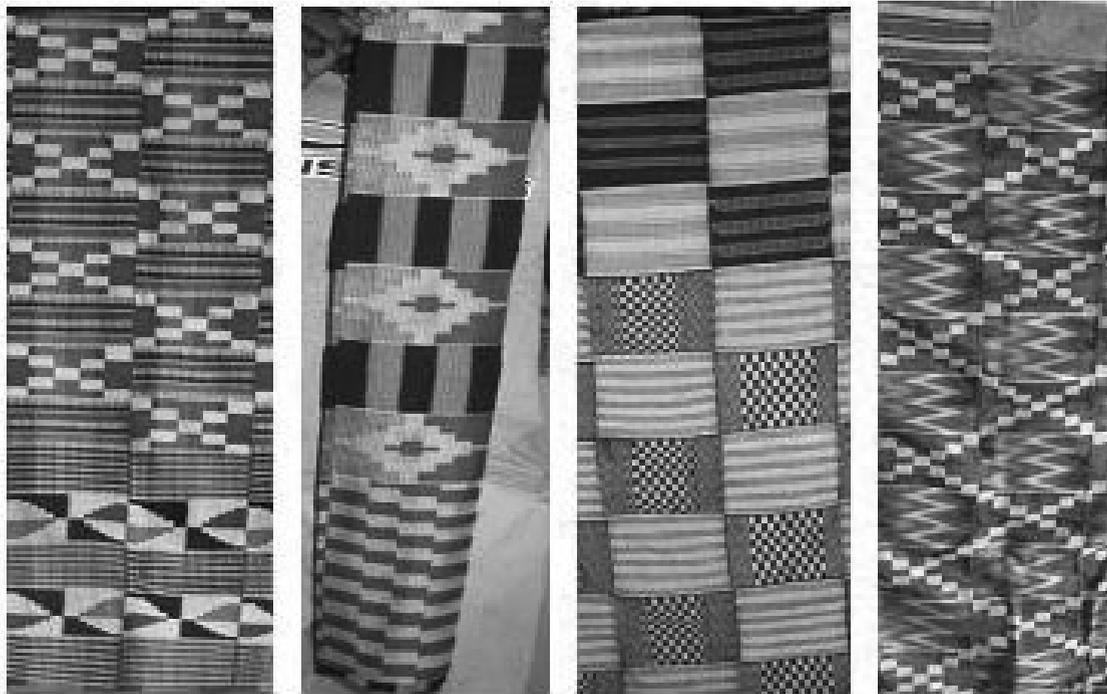
- 3- *With one accord we wish you welcome to Ghana.*

The people are rejoicing from Axim to Bolgatanga.

From our leader, Dr. Nkrumah to the lowest in the land,

We all join in this song of love, we know you'll understand.

Though many of us may not have the privilege of knowing or seeing the *Ohemaa aba Ghana kente* design, this classical piece (which still enjoys frequent air play on our radio stations) gives historical information to anyone who interrogates the lyrics. Apart from this song being for our dancing and listening pleasure, its lyrics burgeon with the following lessons (lessons which will reveal more insights with further interrogation in various areas like Geography of the land (from Axim on the coast in the south, to Bolgatanga in the savannah region in the northern belt) and draws attention to these two towns in the country; our population (of five million people);²⁸ our culture (symbolism of *kente* and the playing of *fontromfrom*);²⁹ and some history (that the ruling monarch of England paid a visit).



(Fig. 3) Kente designs From left: (a) – Theresa Kuffuor; (b) – Kuffuor apegya Ghana ('Kuffuor has elevated Ghana'); (c) – Addo Kuffuor and (d) – Fathia fata Nkrumah. Photo credits: Korklu Laryea, Bonwire, 27th July, 2009.

This song illustrates the historical role of popular literature in society; failure to take cognizance of it, to appreciate it, and to interrogate it is detrimental to our educational endeavours. Since information of and about Africa will not always come in print in a society which is largely oral, care should be taken to keep ears tuned for lyrics, chants and everything oral.

On this august occasion, The ruling government of Ghana, the Convention People's Party (CPP) commissioned and presented gifts to the Queen on this visit.³⁰ The official gift for the royal couple was equally symbolic in the design of the *kente* – *owo kofaro abode* for the exercising of wisdom in all things; a quality deemed appropriate considering the Queen's position as head of the British Commonwealth. The Duke of Edinburgh's *kente* cloth was a combination of five traditional symbols; *kodua*; symbolising

prosperity; *nkwandwa*, the soul of a society; *aban*, government; and *aperem*, the power of state; and *ntwere*, symbolizing dependability.

It follows from the foregoing that if you are inquisitive enough, a *kente* design can lead you down educational, historical, biographical, cultural or philosophical pathways or a combination of all these and more, because it is more than a fabric. Careful thought and planning went into the presentation of the *kente* called '*wo foro dua pa a, na yepia wo*' (you are given a push when you climb a good tree) to Ephraim Amu in 1992³¹ (who is discussed in the next section) because of his unflinching determination in promoting traditional music and forms.

The Twenty Cedi Thousand (¢20,000.00) Note

The ¢20,000.00 note in (fig.4) was the highest cedi denomination until June 2007.³² It was first introduced in 2002 during the second term of

the President J.A. Kuffuor while Paul Acquah was the Governor of the BoG, a position he held until recently.³³ The obverse has the portrait of Ephraim Amu dressed in traditional toga worn over a jumper. On this side is the statutory signature of the Governor of the BoG, the country's coat of arms, and *adinkra*³⁴ symbols on all sides except the left. Firmly and appropriately set on the reverse of the note is the ship-like architectural structure of the National Theatre in Accra with more intricate designs of *adinkra*. The relationship between obverse and reverse is quite obvious in that one side is a representation of one of the people who immeasurably enriched the nation's cultural heritage and the other is of the structure that symbolises that sector.



(Fig. 4) The obverse (top) and reverse (bottom) of the of the €20,000.00 note Head of State: Mr. J A Kuffuor, National Patriotic Party Era (2001-2009) Governor of Bank of Ghana: Dr. Paul Acquah (2001-2009); series: 2000. Obverse: Ephraim Amu (1899-1995); reverse: The National Theatre, Accra.

Ephraim Amu (1899-1995)

As an ethnomusicologist, Amu believed in his culture and was in his time an advocate on African tradition and culture; Amu had wanted to be a minister of the Basel Mission/Presbyterian

Church of Ghana but his strong belief in portraying the African culture in the pulpit by the wearing of the traditional toga earned him an expulsion from the country's premiere training college, the Presbyterian Training College.³⁵ Well known for his musical compositions, he, to a large extent, kept a record of the historical events that surrounded his works. As a librarian, I was fascinated by the meticulous diary entries he made over sixty years until he was too ill to do so. Each entry, made in his mother tongue, Ewe, ended with the time, thus, giving an idea of when he went to bed. His endeavour to write in his mother tongue encouraged me to take my own mother tongue more seriously.³⁶ It is possible that his pride in the African personality was what earned him this enviable on the country's currency note.

He wrote the greatest patriotic song of the land, *Yàn ara asase ni* ('This is our land'). Considered our 'unofficial national anthem', it has been adopted by the national broadcaster, the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation's television wing, as its signature tune to end the day's transmission. *Yàn ara asase ni* was first composed in the Peki dialect of the Ewe ethnic group (found in the Volta Region and along south-eastern Ghana, Togo and Benin) in 1929 and was later translated into other Ghanaian languages, most of which made Amu squirm.³⁷ It was created in response to a request made by a teacher who used to be a former pupil of the composer, and who wanted to celebrate Empire Day (then celebrated the Monarch's birthday 24 May on) with an African touch. In *Yàn ara asase ni*, he cautioned Gold Coasters against the negative tendencies of vain head knowledge which is devoid of deep spiritual insight and understanding, cunningness and selfishness that wreck nations. While these

have to be eschewed, he encouraged the practice of the virtues of obedience, respect, compassion and dedication to everyone's needs and peace which empower and foster national growth and development. How the nation fared depended a lot on how its people conducted themselves. It was Amu's reference to *mogya a nananom hwei gui nya de too hô maa yèn* (translated as 'the blood that our forebears shed for us') that inspired Theodora Okoh (designer of the Ghana flag) to choose red as one of the colours of the national flag.

When he was expelled in 1933 from the Presbyterian Training College, Akropong, for what was considered his stubborn insistence on preaching in the pulpit in African garb against 'Christian principles', he composed *Nkradi* (Farewell) which was sung at his last concert in Akropong. His choice of the chameleon (*ôbosomakâterâ*), to bid his friends and colleagues farewell was both poignant and symbolic. Why did he not choose another creature? Perhaps, he thought of the graceful, gentle and maybe ponderous gait of the chameleon; or its ability to adapt to its surroundings. In this piece, he might have subtly given a message that he will adapt to any new environment he found himself in.³⁸ But it was also a prayer for the departing friend – that gentleness should mark the path trod and on every side and every turn, that love widen his path, and joy accompany him with every blessing. The lyrics of this song are reminiscent of this *Irish Prayer*:

May the road rise to meet you,
 May the wind be always at your back?
 May the sunshine warm upon your face,
 The rains fall soft upon your fields.
 May green be the grass you walk on,
 May blue be the skies above you,
 May pure be the joys that surround you,

May true be the hearts that love you.
 And until we meet again, May God
 hold you in the palm of his hand.³⁹

Worth mentioning here is one of my favourite songs of Amu in '*Wo nsam na mewô*'⁴⁰ (I am in Your hands) which reflects some of his deep theological reflections and faith. It often comes to mind at the end of an experience which leaves all my being exhausted in every sense of the word. Its comforting and prayerful lyrics are balmy for those experiences which leave you bereft of human understanding, sympathy and comfort. And like the previous song, it is also a prayer for the small, helpless, powerless and defenceless man in a world of uncertainty and depending on the One who has ultimate, universal and infinite authentic power.

When invited to compose a song for the inauguration of the Akrofi-Christaller Centre for Mission Research and Applied Theology (now Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission and Culture)⁴¹ in 1986, he wrote – '*Kasakyerâwfo, nimdefo mo!*'⁴² congratulating those with the knowledge of writing and teaching language especially the two personalities after whom the Center was named; Christaller and Akrofi. This song like all his compositions has become a classic and could be Amu's version of 'Now praise we great and famous men'.

Unlike the songs afore mentioned, there is no historical setting to *Tete wô bi ka* (The past has a lot to say). Indeed, the past has a lot to say and must be taken seriously. If we lose the past, there is no foundation for the building of a good nation; for our thoughts and ideas are of past experiences which teach us. For no matter how bitter and warped by memories or circumstances our thoughts and ideas of past experiences are, they are to be taken seriously through sober

reflection. Was it Amu's observation about the Ghanaian tendency of not learning from history and experiences that inspired this composition? Was he thinking of the youth who tend to classify dated things as 'colo' – that is colonial in Ghanaian lingo – and were therefore of little or no use and had to be discarded? If his remonstrations fell on deaf ears then, he did well in putting it in song. For to date, it resonates in prolonged strains after it was first sung!

The National Theatre

The ship-like architectural edifice that graces the reverse of the twenty thousand cedi note is the National Theatre situated in the heart of Accra. It is not surprising to discover the tortuous and checkered journey it has had. Its present location, design and every brick and tile, plaster and woodwork dovetails into the spatial distribution of the city of Accra and the politics and workings of government. The architecture is a replica of another theater found in China. Construction of the Theatre started in 1990 and was completed within two years after which it was commissioned on 20 December, 1992.⁴³ As part of Ghana-China cooperation, the China National Complete Plant for Import and Export Corporation (COMPLANT) put up the structure with some technical support from their Ghanaian counterparts through the Architectural Engineering Services corporation (AESE). The Theatre houses three resident performing companies, namely, the National Symphony Orchestra, Theatre Players (formerly Abibigroma, the Resident Drama Troupe), and the National Dance Company (formerly Ghana Dance Ensemble). Artists in residence include the Pan African Orchestra, Efrititi Concert Party, the Dance Factory and African Youth Orchestra.

The National Theatre was mandated to develop, promote and preserve the heritage of the country through performing arts. Several people in the arts have contributed to this building including playwrights like Kobina Sekyi, Joe de Graft, Efua Theodora Sutherland, F.Kwasi Fiawoo, Henry Ofori, Saka Acquaye, Sackey Sowah and Efo Kojo Mawugbe, to name a few. Mohammed Ben Abdallah, himself a playwright and at the time of its construction was a member of the Rawlings provisional National Defence council (PNDC) Administration, and was instrumental in the execution of the project. This venue has provided and continues to be an outlet for talents through regular programmes like Keysoap Concert Party, Fun World, Arts Institute for Teachers, Kiddafest, Basic Technology Competition, African Composer Series, as well as musical concerts, drama festivals, beauty pageants and book fairs organised by individuals and corporate bodies.

The Ten Cedi (¢10.00) Note

The currency note below (fig.5) was nicknamed '*jato*' (red in Hausa) by market women because of its red colour. The note, which was first issued in 1972 features the portrait of an 'anonymous' old man smoking a pipe on the obverse and an architectural structure of the Akosombo Dam, the country's electrical power generating plant on the reverse. J. H. Frimpong-Ansah was the fifth Governor of the Bank of Ghana from 1967 to 1973 served three regimes: the National Liberation Council of J. A. Ankrah, the Progress Party of K. A. Busia and the National Redemption Council of I. K. Acheampong. On the obverse is the picture of an elderly man dressed in traditional toga fashion (but without the jumper) smoking a pipe. Compared to the other two notes, this one is devoid of intricate designs and security features.



(Fig. 5): The obverse and reverse of the ₵10.00 note
 Head of State: I K Acheampong (1972-1975)
 Governor of BoG: J H Frimpong Ansah (1967-1973); series: 1972/73
 Obverse: elderly man smoking pipe; reverse: Akosombo Dam.

An Anonymous Elderly Man

We have here an *anonymous*⁴⁴ elderly man smoking a pipe and it is not possible to say why he was chosen to adorn this cedi except that it may be in honour of the elderly in our society. He could be anybody (perhaps a farmer, fisherman, blue or white collar worker) having a relaxing and reflective time after the labours of the day as the sun dipped beyond the western sky. He may also be a well-educated man who just abhors the thought of wearing anything western after spending his working life wearing the obligatory western-styled garments.⁴⁵ For all we know, he might have thought it was fashionable to have a pipe and was therefore not smoking at all. It could have been just a status symbol for him,⁴⁶ the smoking of the pipe is the prerogative of elderly men among a fair number of ethnic groups. There refrain of a popular Ga song in the 1970s was:

*'Akee abakò, bèlè kukuè ni nnkè yeò nkomò.'*⁴⁷

To wit, 'I hear somebody has taken my short pipe [which I smoke] when I am ponderous.' Indeed, some pipes got shorter as smokers had the habit of biting the tip of the stem (instead of nail-biting) as a sign of frustration. A bread mill operator from Benin once lived at Teshie nicknamed *Bèlè Kuku* (Ga, meaning 'short pipe') because he was said to always ponder about the future and make plans to return to his country. He often made reference to this song when asked what made him ponderous.⁴⁸

At a point in the national psyche, the wealthy with money to spare, were those who could afford to smoke regardless of the health hazard. The pipe was what was used for tobacco smoking. Pipes, like several other things, come in different shapes and sizes; there are those made from clay, briar, meerschaum (of the African block type, Missouri or plain meerschaum), calabash, hookah, or glass, corn cob, ebony, bakelite, animal horn or Lucite. They come in different shapes and sizes as well. There is information on how to care for your pipe.⁴⁹ Traditionally, it is the old and wise who smoke tobacco in pipes; it is not for the young who have seen nothing of the world.

The man represented on the currency note in fig.5 is in a long piece of cloth for males, worn in traditional toga style with one end of the six-yard cloth flung over the bare left shoulder or over a jumper (as in Amu's portrait above).⁵⁰ This is the required attire for traditional kings and is considered to be the attire of the uneducated male. It was therefore considered offensive for the educated to be so clad. Men who had had the benefit of western education dressed in shirts, trousers and the accompanying tie and wore shoes.⁵¹ Ephraim Amu's insistence on dressing like this (with a jumper underneath) for preaching assignments was what incurred the displeasure of the Presbyterian Church of the Gold Coast.

The Akosombo Dam

On the reverse of the note is the Akosombo Dam which has appeared on two notes (the one under discussion and the ₵1 note of the 2007 series). The site of the dam had been identified in 1915 as suitable for such a purpose by the British Colonial government. When Dr. Kwame Nkrumah became leader of government in 1951, he lost no time in fulfilling an election promise to harness the power of the Volta River for commercial smelting of aluminium and to diversify the predominant agricultural economy.⁵²

Construction of the Akosombo Dam started in 1961 by an Italian company, Impregilo & Co. (Gh.) Ltd. during the CPP regime of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah. It was commissioned in January 1966 and said to be one of the last official duties of the late President before he was ousted on 24 February 1966. It was completed ahead of schedule and provides much of the electricity used in Ghana and other neighbouring countries. Komla Agbeli Gbedema (1913-1998) first as Minister of Commerce and Industry and later as Minister of Finance in the CPP government, has been credited for the pivotal role he played in the implementation of the Project. Amenumey said,

'At a time when the government of the United Kingdom and international investors were unwilling to lend huge sums of money to an untried African government, it was the dogged determination of Gbedema that made it possible for the country to realize its dream. As Minister of Commerce and Industry he provided justification for the use of the power. As Minister of Finance, he was responsible for mobilizing international resources and had the courage to commit the

country's resources in order to attract critical foreign funding.'⁵³

the suggests that the politicians who end up cutting the sod for the commencement or the commissioning of a project are not the important or significant people to acknowledge. Rather, it is those behind the scenes, those who will ever remain anonymous and faceless, those whose sweat and toil will never appear on the plaques and tablets. But our politicians still use this utility as a bait for votes in communities that have not been linked to the national grid. And if the structure is further interrogated and the story of the Dam and its ancillary and allied services unfolds, we will discover several other people of different professional backgrounds with their own stories to tell.

To commemorate the construction of this landmark which led to the formation of the Volta Lake,⁵⁴ a *kente* cloth rewoven called *Akosombo nkanea*; it had earlier in the century been referred to by Rattray as 'Dado' or 'Ansaku'.⁵⁵ This historical event also became a philosophical expression in an appellation to describe those considered as mentors, generous, leaders, loving or helpful. This is what Obinini Takyi, a Ghanaian musician meant in his song *Akosombo Kanea* in 1980.⁵⁶ Takyi's *Akosombo kanea* (that is his friends, helpers, lovers, and sympathizers) included Charlie Pee a friend in time of need, his wife in whom he found true love, and friends like Yaw Fosu Abrantee, Nana Otuo Akyeampong, Big Sir Ofori and his wife, Mercy, Akua Brobbey, and Kwaku Mari for being a good father.

The expression *Akosombo kanea* also implies that there are different sources of light used by Ghanaians and reflect of the quality of light emanating thereof. One such source of light is *bobo*, *kpatashi* or *osonor* which gives a flickering

and smokey source of light which is simply wick dipped in a container filled with kerosene. It is the common source of light for food sellers not seated near street lights. There is also the lantern, which is more dignified and a dependable alternative when the *Akosombo kanea* power fails. I recall the ‘lantern [university] graduates’ of 1984 when for the first time in the country’s history power was rationed and students in the country’s three universities had to study using lanterns supplied by university authorities when power, that is *Akosombo kanea*, was off. Incidentally, it is an offence to study by such sources of light in Ghanaian secondary schools because of the danger they pose.⁵⁷ There is also light from hand torches – and the quality of light is also different from those mentioned earlier. The kind of light generated from these torches depends on the type of wood used.

Those who were adversely affected by the construction of the Akosombo Dam however did not laud its creation wholeheartedly for various reasons. For one, it led to the formation of the Volta Lake, considered to be the world’s largest man-made lake for several years, measuring some 374.8 sq. km and displaced people along its banks. Others lost their means of livelihood. It also brought in its wake an unprecedented growth in the population of water borne diseases and fertile breeding grounds for mosquitoes. Tsikata has examined the long-term impact, the State’s neglect and the everyday responses and livelihoods of communities (both at the lakeside and downstream) affected by the Dam.⁵⁸ Many years down the line in 1972, Ghana’s university students had cause to demonstrate outside the embassy of United States of America in Accra demanding a review of the VALCO (Volta Aluminium Company) Agreement. Later in the

early part of the PNDC rule, the same embassy become the focus of regular demonstrations which finally resulted in re-negotiations between 1982 and 1985. The demonstrations were necessitated by the skewed agreement which saw VALCO as the sole beneficiary of electrical power with low tariffs for consumption from the onset while the country’s own industries did not benefit from such low rates and contributed to the country’s debt burden and balance of payment.⁵⁹

Conclusion

It has been said that people will pray for the American bill, work for it, cheat for it but never take a good look at it. I believe the same can be said of all currencies and perhaps of all things considered ephemeral. But we do know that money talks; but do we stop long enough to listen to what it has to say whether in loud clear notes, or through the subtleties that emanate from the ‘trivia’ found thereon, or the innuendos from personal interpretation? Interrogation of each note is essential if we want to ‘hear’, appreciate and comprehend history in all its forms, as well as the social, religious, educational and philosophical insights they reveal while keeping in touch with popular literature, the arts and pedestrian knowledge. At different levels, these converge and together give a fuller understanding of our country. The three notes I have appreciated have led me into our history (political, economic and social), culture, the world of architecture and biography; into fields I would not have ventured into on my own volition but have because I have been inquisitive and paused long enough to ‘listen’ to what the icons are saying. What I gleaned from these notes is by no means exhaustive; it constitutes just a very minute tip of the iceberg.

Notes:

- 1 Efforts to identify who chooses the symbols have yielded no results. It is hard to tell if it is the government in power or the Bank of Ghana.
- 2 The Akan language is in three dialects – Akuapem Twi, Fante and Asante– and is the most widely spoken language in Ghana. Those belonging to this language group are made up of 550,000 Akuapem, 1,900,000 Fante and 2,800,000 Asante, according to http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=aka accessed on 15 Aug., 2009.
- 3 A.E. Ashiagbor's tenure as Governor of the Bank of Ghana spanned four military regimes and one constitutional government. See E.S. Ayensu, *Bank of Ghana: Commemoration of the Golden Jubilee*, (Accra, 2007), 51. He was the seventh Governor of the Bank.
- 4 So named by the British because of the abundance of gold that was found along its shores.
- 5 K.B. Dickson, G. Benneh, *A New Geography of Ghana* (London, 1988), 65.
- 6 *Galamsey* operators hardly have any protective gear and are thus, the mining concessions they parasite on and other miners who may be working on the concession.
- 7 On a recent visit to the Anglogold-Ashanti Mines at Obuasi, 25 June, 2009, I interviewed three miners (an electrician, a blast man and a driller) who had just returned from their morning shift – 6 am to 2 pm. There are three shifts a day with workers working at different levels. There are several levels in a shaft at 100 feet intervals.
- 8 The essential staff that goes down the shaft consists of a miner, an electrician, a mechanic, safety representatives and security persons, a geologist, surveyor and geo-technical personnel. Information supplied by miners interviewed at Obuasi on 25 June, 2009.
- 9 W.B. Griffith's, *The Far Horizon* (Devon, 1951) is a collection of the author's memoirs and diary entries as an officer of the British Empire serving in the colonies.
- 10 None of the people I interviewed, except one (Mrs. Adelaide Ofosuhene-Djan at Aburi) seemed to have a clue about this practice. It is also possible that this is a closely guarded secret among royals lest royal mausoleums become favourite venues of desecration by grave looters.
- 11 Griffith, *The Far Horizon*, 170. The brass containers come in various sizes called *kuduo* or *forowa*. He also believed that there was much gold buried in Accra, most of which will never be found. I believe this method of handling gold (which was a form of currency for some time in the Gold Coast) was common practice among the wealthy, king, chiefs and goldsmiths as a security measure in the absence of banks.
- 12 It is hard to tell if it was the gold that healed the swellings or something else in the jewellery. But I vividly remember, on more than one occasion, when cousins afflicted with some eye swelling had a gold earring or locket applied to the swelling. This alternative medicine seemed to work and gained popularity in traditional medical practice.
- 13 The man has been identified as onetime *Kentehene* at Bonwire. It is very likely that he posed for this picture since *kente* is not usually worn when working at the loom. This is because it gets into the way of the weaver who needs all limbs to work in coordination and with dexterity. It is here worn in the traditional toga style without a jumper. See: M. Danquah, 'The Saga of *Kente* and How It Is Worn'. *The Ghanaian* 3, (Sept. 1958), 25.
- 14 O.B. Sarfo Kantanka quoting the *Kentehene* (first created by Osei Tutu I in or around 1698 on one of the Bonwire chiefs, either Nana Kuragu and Nana Ameyaw) in his article on '*Kente* origins, history, development and cultural significance' from *Fact About the Origin, Discovery and Evolution of Kente*' by O.B. Sarfo Kantanka, J. Oti-Awere. 'Bonwire *Kente* Festival Brochure', 1998, <http://www.ghanaculture.gov.gh/>, accessed 13 March, 2009.
- 15 Danquah, *The Ghanaian* 3 (1958); K. Antubam, *A Brochure on the Symbolic Significance of Ghana's state presents to His Excellency Josip Broz Tito, President of the Federal People of Yugoslavia and Madame Jovanka Broz on the Occasion of their State Visit to Ghana* (1961); K. Antubam, '*A brochure on the symbolism of Ghana's state gift to His Excellency President Antonin Novotny and Madame Novotny on the occasion of the State visit of Osagyefo Kwame Nkrumah, President of the Republic of Ghana to the People's Republic of Czechoslovakia*' (1961). Kwame Nkrumah, until he became President (from 1 July 1960 to 24 February 1966) also held different leadership positions: Leader of Government Business (from 1951 to 1952) and Prime Minister (from 1952 to 30 June 1960)
- 16 *Ghana: Ten Great Years* (Accra, 1960), 7.
- 17 For joyful occasions like festivals, worship, birth and child-naming ceremonies, puberty, marriage and death the fabric worn is white or white-dominated. Generally, the dark colours of brown, dark red and black symbolise sorrow though the Ga wear white for the funeral when the deceased attained more than 70 years of age. Kweku Ofori-Ansah, *Kente is More than a Cloth: History and Significance of Ghana's Kente Cloth*, (Madison, 1993) – apart from being an illustrative chart on *kente* designs, it gives some information on colour symbolism among the Akan.

- 18 The minister was Mr Asum-Ahensah. Unfortunately the public was no wiser about the name of the *kente* he wore, and an opportunity to give some education eluded most of us. Neither did Nanabanyin Dadson's article 'Forgive him for he knows not the *kente* he wears' *Daily Graphic* (21 March 2009), 18 which is informative in drawing attention to the symbolism of *kente*.
- 19 Songs extolling the beauty of the fabric and its worth can be appreciated in J.T. Essuman's *Daa daa kente*, Wuta's *Kutu sa* and Ebo Micah's *Mesi wo hema*.
- 20 Ephraim Amu, *Twenty-Five African Songs* (London, 1933).
- 21 E. Amu trained and led a male choir of the University of Ghana to participate in the World Universities Choral Convention in New York. Though D.E.K. Amenumey in *Outstanding Ewes of the 20th Century: Profiles of Fifteen Firsts* (Accra, 2002), 7 puts the date for the performance at the Lincoln Center, New York at 1969. Amu himself in an interview granted to the Media Research Unit, Language and Literature and Music Section of the Institute of African Studies puts the performance a year later. See P.T. Laryea's thesis, *Christianity as Vernacular Religion: a Study in the Theological Significance of mother tongue apprehension of the Christian Faith in West Africa with reference to the works of Ephraim Amu (1899–1995)*, (Ph.D. thesis, Univ. of Kwa-Zulu Natal, 2006), 19. In any case, Amu saw it one of the most exciting moments in his life.
- 22 D.H. Ross, *Wrapped in Pride: Ghanaian Kente and African American Identity* (Regents of the University of California, 1998), 62, 116, 118 and 119 for *kente* made to commemorate the visit of Queen Elizabeth to the country in 1961, one derived from a proverb, the Akosombo Dam and for Fathia Nkrumah. This colourful publication explores *kente* from various perspectives including symbolism, its use inside and outside Ghana, technological applications in weaving and historical accounts from Ewe land.
- 23 The opening of Parliament, Presidential sessional address to Parliament, the visit of dignitaries to the Parliament is often awash with *kente* clad audience against a *kente* backdrop which hangs behind the Speaker's seat in the Parliamentary chamber. Horn blowing and the beating of *fontomfrom* often held these occasions. See also *Ghana, Ten Great Years*, 31 of a picture of people clad in *kente* on the occasion when running water was brought to a village and *Ghana Year Book 1960* (Accra, 1960), plate 4 showing a picture of the Ghana Market Women Association and the Duke of Edinburgh.
- 24 At least on source, E. Asamoah-Yaw, *Kente cloth: introduction to history* (New York, 1982), 43 recalls the public outcry about Dr. Kwame Nkrumah's choice of a spouse when he married Fathia Halen Ratzk in December 1957. A weaver had designed this commemorative cloth for the event. Some historical sources indicate that the Ghanaian public had not been too happy with their president taking a non-Ghanaian wife. See O B Sarfo Kantanka, 'Kente Origins, History, Development and Cultural Significance', <http://www.ghanaculture.gov.gh/>, 08/04/2006 accessed 13 March 2009.
- 25 Ross, *Wrapped in Pride*, 114.
- 26 K. Bruce, Black Beats Band, 'The Queen's Visit', *Golden Highlife Classics from the 1950s and 1960s* (Accra, 1997).
- 27 The Queen's visit originally scheduled for 1959 had to be postponed because she was pregnant. That changes the day when the visit actually took place in 1961. See Exhibit 1 of Willis Bell Photo Exhibition *Ghana through the lens: A Journey* at Nubuke Foundation, East Legon, 21 April-5 May 2009.
- 28 The first population census in the new country was in 1961, in which 6.7 million inhabitants were counted. Source, http://wapedia.mobi/en/Demographics_of_Ghana accessed on 14 March 2009. It is possible that the composer(s) used the figure more for its effect than for its accuracy. It could also be an estimated figure for 1959 received from credible sources.
- 29 *Kente*, as a unique fabric has already been mentioned in the article. The *fontomfrom* is a set of drums which is only played for royalty and is the most important ensemble of royal drums played on special occasions and accompanies dignified drum language and dance. The chief does not have the pleasure or privilege of asking for the *fontomfrom* to be played; they can only be played on specific times as in times of state crisis, outbreak of fire or war and during celebrations like the enstoolment of new chiefs and the swearing of allegiance, state funerals and festivals by a particular people who have been trained to do so. There is a close association between drums and chieftaincy in most Ghanaian communities and no chief will attend any official gathering without the appropriate retinue of drummers and horn blowers.
- 30 K. Antubam, *The Symbolism of Ghana's State Gifts to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Head of the British Commonwealth and His Royal Highness the Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh on the occasion of their visit to Ghana* (Accra, 1961) give an interpretation of all the gifts that were presented on this occasion. The gifts included *kente* cloth, *abenema* (native sandals), *abengua* (tradi-

- tional stools), jewellery, Ghanaian postage stamps, a pen and recordings of traditional music for the couple and for their children. The Queen's *kente* design won the first prize of the competition while the Duke of Edinburgh's took the second prize.
- 31 Ross, *Wrapped in Pride*, 116 for design.
- 32 A redenomination of the cedi was done on 1 July 2007 to make it easier to handle. In this exercise, four zeroes were removed and the pesewa, which had for several years been neglected in transactions was reintroduced.
- 33 At the time of writing this paper, Kwesi Amissah-Arthur had been named successor to Paul Acquah, eleventh Governor of the BoG.
- 34 *Adinkra*, meaning 'goodbye' is a philosophical and religious art form of the Akan and is believed to have originated from Ivory Coast. A. Kofi Quarcoo's *The Language of Adinkra Symbols* (Legon, 1994) captures within its pages, a number of *adinkra* symbols and their meanings, the history and technique of production of the fabric. Since its appearance, other publications have emerged giving different interpretations vis-à-vis Christianity.
- 35 The Presbyterian Training College, established in 1848, is the second oldest post-primary institution on the West African coast after Fourah Bay College, Sierra Leone.
- 36 English as the official language of Ghana is used for formal communication and as a medium of instruction. Born in a part of Ghana outside my hometown, attending school where English was used as the language of instruction throughout the educational system, I had little opportunity to study any local language, and they have held little weight in my world-view, much to my disadvantage. To date, English is still used as the medium of instruction despite calls to use the first language of students as the medium of instruction at the lower levels of education. Sadly, it is deemed 'backward' and 'unenlightening' by some to be literate in the local language(s).
- 37 Laryea, *Christianity as Vernacular Religion*, Appendix A, 15.
- 38 Laryea, *Christianity as Vernacular Religion*, 91.
- 39 The Prayer was on a poster I received as a parting gift from a friend in 1997.
- 40 Laryea, *Christianity as Vernacular Religion*, 124.
- 41 Johannes G. Christaller was a German missionary with the Basel Mission who served on the Gold Coast. His association with young converts and royals in the hilly and healthy community of Akropong enabled him to publish the first Akan dictionary in 1868. A century later, Clement Anderson Akrofi, a teacher at the Presbyterian Training College also worked on Akan Grammar. It is interesting to note that the first language of these two people was not Twi; Guan was C.A. Akrofi's mother tongue. Taking a cue from them, the present Institute requires students pursuing academic degrees to write an abstract in their mother tongue besides the required English language.
- 42 Laryea, *Christianity as Vernacular Religion*, 89 and Appendix P. *Now Praise we Great and Famous Men*, composed by William George Tarrant (1853-1928), is often sung to eulogize pioneers.
- 43 Former President J.J. Rawlings had seen a theatre like this in China on a visit. Following this visit, he asked for one to be built in Accra. So, in 1990, work started. Information about the National Theatre was provided by Becky Adjei, Public Relations Officer of the National Theatre. Unfortunately, no documentation (in the form of plaques) was available about it pertaining to its sod cutting or commissioning. She gave the cost of the building as twenty million dollars (\$20,000,000.00) to which I had no document proof.
- 44 A striking resemblance to the mirror image (P0000002154.jpg) of this icon was found in the Willis Bell Photograph Archive, Accra on 19 June 2009.
- 45 I remember seeing several men with blue collar jobs who wear cloth in toga fashion (with or without a cotton jumper) to church all year through. Most male students in our secondary schools are required to wear traditional attire (toga fashion which is popular in the southern part of the country or *fugu* which is popular in the northern parts) for church service. This might have been made popular by Dr. E. Amu.
- 46 Though my father never smoked in his life, he sometimes had a pipe to get some attention for certain public services he badly needed; and it worked for him almost all the time! The stems of pipes held a fascination for him and he ended up collecting pipes as a hobby at a point.
- 47 The composer of this song, '*Sane ko 'ndô me*' ('I am upset about an issue') which was quite popular in Accra during the late 1960s and early 1970s has been identified simply as T.K.
- 48 My grand mother was a baker and we had to have the dough milled at this man's shop which was situated at the Teshie market, Adonsee in the 1970s. I also gathered from Christina Afole Laryea (resident at Beulah Villa, Adaaso Street, Teshie) that the song was a favourite of his.
- 49 <http://www.notsoboringlife.com/pipe-smoking> and <http://www.pipetips.com> are just two of the sites from which information about pipes can be found. Both sites were accessed on 7 August 2009.

- 50 Danquah, *The Ghanaian* 3, 25 shows the process for wearing *kente* in toga style. The cloth is worn following the same process.
- 51 Among the Fantse, women who dressed in the three-piece cloth were called *efuratamfo* ('cloth-wearers') identifying where they belonged on the social ladder. If you went to school, you dressed differently and exhibited manners of a 'lady' and spoke English, the medium of instruction. People who wore 'ladies' clothes and spoke no English were dismissed with the shortened phrase which translates as 'never-been-to-school and can't speak English' yet donning borrowed robes (of the educated).
- 52 *Ghana Year Book* (Accra, 1965), 14.
- 53 Amenumey, *Outstanding Ewes of the 20th Century: Profiles of Fifteen Firsts*, 82. Gbedema later founded his own political party, the National Alliance of Liberals, when the National Liberation Council government restored political activity in preparation of returning the country to civil rule in 1969.
- 54 The Volta Lake is the world's largest man-made lake occupying some 6500 sq km of the country's surface.
- 55 The former name is believed to be that of the wife of one of the weavers of Bonwire, credited with the introduction of *kente* into Asanteman. The latter is the name of an Akwamu king. See Ross, 118.
- 56 Lyrics for the song were obtained at <http://museke.com/index.php?q=node/1053>, 13 March 2009.
- 57 Prolonged drought in 1983-84 severely curtailed power generation of the two hydro-electric plants at Akosombo and Kpong as the water level in the Volta Lake reduced beyond the minimum operating level. This resulted in a mandatory rationing of power to all customers of the Volta River Authority whose principal function was to generate electrical power. The practice of studying using candles, lanterns or torch light has many sobriquets in our secondary schools and there is a penalty when caught.
- 58 D. Tsikata, *Living in the Shadow of Large Dams: Long-term responses to Downstream and Lakeside communities of Ghana's Volta River Project* (Leiden, 2006).
- 59 Tsikata, *Living in the Shadow of Large Dams*, 37-84.