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“Diasporas,” Mobility and the Social Imaginary: Getting Ahead in West Africa
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Introduction

The nature of African mobility has undergone significant shifts in the past five centuries, though still framed by global – more specifically western, capitalist – political economies. The era of Atlantic slave trade witnessed the circulation of African bodies and the creation of an African Diaspora. It was colonial rule that effectively ended slave trade and slavery in Africa, substituting a trade in commodities for the trade in people. Primary exports became the valuable output from colonial Africa, and African mobility was limited to colonial and regional migrant labor. Old African trading Diasporas such as the Hausa underwent a gradual decline with colonial boundaries and commercial competition from expatriate businesses. These expatriate businesses included those of the Lebanese, who migrated to West Africa in increasing numbers from the 1860s. There were episodic moments when large numbers of Africans became extremely mobile, for example those that served in colonial armies during the two World Wars and saw action in Europe and Asia. Their return to their home colonies energized nationalist sentiment and activity. A few colonized Africans went to Europe and North America for higher education and returned to lead these nationalist movements. Post-colonial Africa has occasioned a new era of African mobility characterized by economic migration, and refugee flows from conflicts and natural disasters. It cannot be disputed, then, that the last century has witnessed large scale voluntary mobility for Africans; and individual Africans, African governments and governments outside of Africa have mobilized to harness, define and limit these flows according to their strategic interests.

The Africa Diaspora – referring to the communities of African descent created through involuntary migration or the slave trade -- and transnationalism have entwined to become key resources in the economic planning of African governments. Individual Africans see the Diaspora and transnationalism as important strategies of survival and accumulation. Diasporic communities in the Americas represent magnets that attract contemporary Africans in search of brighter futures, who derive comfort from shared racial affinities. Increasing opportunities to forge simultaneous social networks in two countries or more – transnationalism -- have encouraged Africans to explore non-

traditional sites of migration, and today West Africans can be found in relatively new destinations such as Japan, Hong Kong, and Thailand. The jet age and the revolution in information technology bridge vast distances, shortening the emotional distance between abroad and home. In a major forthcoming work on the Gold Coast between the 17th and 19th centuries, historian Ray Kea asks what it felt like to live in 18th century Gold Coast with its context of an intensifying Atlantic slave trade, predatory native states such as Akwamu, Akyem and Asante, and a general sense of insecurity that pervaded even the lives of the socially privileged.¹ I ask what it has felt like to live in the last century in West Africa for non-African migrants who have made Africa their home, for example the Lebanese, and for West Africans who have seized the opportunity to be mobile within Africa and beyond. This is to explore the social imaginary made possible by the incredible mobility of the past century or so. Ghanaian youth are obsessed with finding “a connection” that would take them “abroad” to Europe or North America with the firm belief that they would “succeed” in life once they get there and return as “big men” and “big women.” People dress up to go to the airport as a social event just to witness those returning from overseas and traveling abroad. They imagine themselves traveling and draw comfort from their proximity to the “been-tos” and the “going-tos.” Television programs such as “Greetings from Abroad,” which aired on Ghana Television about ten years ago, and the more recent “Back Home Again” feed the social imagination about opportunities outside Ghana and possibilities on return.²

How does one capture the social imaginary of mobility to West Africa and for mobile West Africans in the past century? I will attempt this through the social biographies of Lebanese individuals who moved to Ghana in the past century, and of mobile Ghanaians who have availed themselves of the opportunities of a globalizing world. My methodological strategy combines two approaches. The first is to study the terrain where biography, history and social structure intersect as advocated by the sociologist C. Wright Mills.³ Biographies or people are framed or shaped by historic contexts and social structures and processes. By interrogating the relationship between context and social biography, I hope to give us some sense of what living in the past century meant to specific Lebanese and Ghanaian individuals. This is not to give the impression that individuals are captives of contexts. My second strategy is to examine

individual agency, including the “cumulative collective legacy of human ideas and actions” that impact on individual social experience and subjectivity, as George Lipsitz emphasizes.⁴ A good example is how chain migration promotes a tradition of migration from a community to a particular destination based on networks forged between the two places. Here, the individual decision to migrate is facilitated by the cumulative collective legacy of human actions and ideas. It is my hope that my efforts will give form and meaning to contemporary processes felt and lived through but not cogently articulated or analytically examined.

Contexts of Mobility

In the 17th century an international trading system emerged which was based on a human being – the African body – as a measure of value. This was the *pieza* system, a term borrowed from the Portuguese who first explored the western and eastern coasts of sub-Saharan Africa. It was a system that would force a confrontation between the exchange value economies of the West and the use-value economies of Africa. Linda Heywood comments on the dilemmas of 16th and 17th century kings of Kongo in Central Africa, enmeshed in trading and diplomatic relations with the West, especially Portugal and Rome. Kongolese kings were against the enslavement of Kongolese citizens, yet paid for diplomatic missions and international goods in slaves (the *pieza* system), and sought in futility to hold the line against enslaving Kongolese while condoning the enslavement of surrounding Africans. The collapse of monarchical power led to the wholesale enslavement of Kongolese from the 18th century. European slave traders manipulated Kongolese forms of wealth, buying on local markets with cowry shells, but insisting that their commodities could only be bought with the accepted international currency – slaves.⁵

The *pieza* system would place value on African bodies within societies in West Africa, as communities and societies viewed people with new eyes. African societies have always reckoned wealth in people, people being valued as followers, as repositories of knowledge, and increasingly from the 17th century as commodities or things.⁶ Stephanie Smallwood in *Saltwater Slavery* shows how these dynamics in West Africa meant that the highest prices for slaves existed on the beach front, where different

cultures and political economies – European and West African – encountered each other. It was at the coast or littoral that the commodification of captives was most intense, where people were fabricated into goods and put on ships for the Middle Passage to the Americas. Elmina and Cape Coast were sites of such active transformation. The economic reality and seductiveness of the *pieza* system meant that escaped slaves from the coastal communities or forts were almost always returned to their masters on the coast, where slaves or appropriated African bodies were most economically valuable. Local elites offered their services to Europeans to retrieve escaped slaves in the Gold Coast in the 17th and 18th centuries. Smallwood notes that “[b]ecause the price for slaves was highest along the coast . . . sooner rather than later the commercial tide inexorably returned to the water’s edge most of those who had escaped from European captivity.”⁷ The salability of the African gave saliency to cultural practices such as scarification, as the body was literally marked “Not for Sale,” not that this deterred converts to the *pieza* system.

The perniciousness of the *pieza* system was long felt after the legal abolition of the export slave trade, as even ordinary West Africans internalized the predatory character it forged. In Anlo-Ewe territory, on the southeastern frontier between the Gold Coast and Togoland -- where the numerous lagoons, creeks and ponds made some of its residents feel insulated from the imposition of colonial rule -- a guide brazenly seized his clients en route from Dahomey (present-day Benin) to Ada at the Volta estuary. The year was 1885, almost eighty years after the British abolition of the export slave trade and a decade after the declaration of a Gold Coast Colony. Akonyikoo and his wife Abooya were traveling from Dahomey to Ada. In Keta they met Agbochie, an Anlo man, who offered to guide them to Ada for a fee. As Akonyikoo later recounted to the colonial court:

When we arrived at Jellacoffe [Dzelukope] we took a canoe at the prisoner’s instigation. We traveled for three days and I then said to the prisoner, we are a long time reaching Addah. He explained that as I had so much property, it was better to go the way he was taking us. On the 3rd day we arrived at Mlafie [Mlefi] on this [Anlo] side of the Volta, we slept at a small village. I heard the prisoner tell the men of the village (which was called Tovie) to seize me and my wife. In the middle of the night plenty of men came and seized me and my wife Abooya and put me in log, the prisoner was present the whole time and directed the men . . . The prisoner then took us and offered us for sale to a man called Ahinahootor

and my wife to another person but she would not agree to be separated from me, so the man Ahinahootor bought us both.⁸

Agbochie's statement in his defense is astounding: "I do not know what made me sell them except that I was tempted so it came to my mind."⁹ Obviously tempted by the considerable property his clients possessed, Agbochie hatched a plan en route to appropriate their goods and their bodies undeterred by colonial sanctions against slave trade and slavery.

In the last quarter of the 19th century, cash-strapped Lebanese had begun to show up in the Gold Coast and other West African colonies in search of a better future. Lebanese records in Ghana cite William Ibrahim Chebib and Elias el-Khoury as the earliest Lebanese to have arrived in the Gold Coast in 1884. Maronite Christians were prominent among the first generation of Lebanese migrants, but were soon outnumbered by Shi'i Muslims. Lebanese presence in West Africa dates back to the 1860s, when the first migrants were put ashore in Dakar by ships from Marseille. Ironically, these migrants had hoped to make it to "Amerka" (America), but had been landed in Dakar through ignorance or the deceit of ship-owners.¹⁰ But it is also clear from Charles Issawi's work that America was an imprecise geographical term for early Lebanese migrants and simply meant a land of opportunity. It would come to include Senegal.¹¹ This first generation of Lebanese migrants aspired to be self employed, as the place of the commercial metropolis, Beirut, in the imaginary of Lebanese socialized even rural Lebanese to aspire to become merchants.¹² Falola comments on how the first generation of Lebanese migrants in Nigeria took to itinerant peddling, supplementing their meager earnings through street singing and musical performances.¹³ There were ample opportunities for West Africans to seize these itinerant Lebanese just like Akonyikoo and Abooya were seized in Anlo in 1885. But the *pieza* system that emerged from the early modern period was based on black bodies, not white ones, so there was a sense in which lone Lebanese bodies were more secure in West Africa far from home in the last quarter of the 19th century than West Africans themselves.

Colonial rule gradually halted the circulation of African bodies as commodities, as the "civilizing mission" of France and Britain emphasized making Africans productive in their home territories. Colonial peace reduced the sense of insecurity, and colonial

transport encouraged many Africans to venture far beyond their old geographical horizons. The gradual extension of colonial law and order discouraged acts such as that of Agbochie cited above and colonial empires came to constitute veritable diasporic and transnational spaces. In French and British West Africa, labor migrants were encouraged to move between resource-poor areas and resource-rich ones. So migrants came down from Mali and Upper Volta (present-day Burkina Faso) to the Ivory Coast, just as residents from the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast and the Upper Volta came down to the mines and cocoa farms in southern Gold Coast. The colonial government in the Gold Coast even built “rest stops” in the Northern Territories to accommodate tired prospective labor migrants who walked all the way to the south.¹⁴ Small African communities also emerged in European cities, especially sea ports such as Liverpool and Marseille that had historic ties to West African ports. Africans sailors who served aboard European ships were among the early settlers in these European cities, enjoying some mobility even during the era of the Atlantic slave trade.¹⁵ African students in the colonial period would add their numbers to the African communities in European cities, and the early years of independence would witness an increase in their ranks as scholarships were given by newly independent governments in a hurry to Africanize their governments and modernize their economies. Ease of movement within the British Commonwealth and the French Community facilitated travel for former colonial subjects as visa requirements were waived on their behalf.

This began to change from the mid-1980s, as a stronger European Union encouraged an inward-looking Europe and former colonial powers loosened their ties to their former colonies. The increased flow of African migrants now became worrisome and European immigration policies tightened to limit African immigration and to select desirable migrants – those with education and marketable skills. Even within West Africa independent countries expelled foreign nationals: Ghana notably under the Busia government in 1969, which heavily affected Nigerians; and Nigeria in 1983, which compelled about a million Ghanaians domiciled in Nigeria to return home with very little notice and with few of their material acquisitions.¹⁶ The post-colonial period has thus witnessed the flows and blockages of a globalizing world: with some Africans being more mobile than others.¹⁷

There is a curious sense in which kinship bridges the social and geographical space class should have created in Ghana and other West African societies. Researchers have commented on how the working poor instead of bonding with other working poor in a class-conscious confrontation with the rich rather admire the rich and aspire to be like them. This defuses class antagonism.¹⁸ Kinship has meant that poor people often know and/or are related to rich people. There is a sense in which they share symbolically – if not substantively – the wealth of rich kinsmen and women. The obligations of kinship secure accommodation for the poor when they visit cities. Often, the rich and the poor live side by side, the mobility and material acquisitions of the rich inspiring the imagination of the poor. Class is jumbled in the juxtaposition of wealth and poverty. These processes and social imagination have received a boost from technology, liberalization and the consumption of modernity. Gone are the days when secondary school or university students had a monopoly on latest western music and clothing. Today, even street peddlers in Accra have mobile phones, which also serve as radios. Second-hand electronics have made stereos and portable televisions very affordable. Villages in Ghana have a dense concentration of television antennae, and arrangements that allow local televisions to broadcast CNN and BBC at certain times of the day means that Ghanaians and Americans and Europeans literally consume some news simultaneously. The circulation of global images in local spaces stimulates the social imaginary of “going abroad” and the conviction that one would prosper in the West. To travel is to get ahead.

Getting Ahead in West Africa: Mobility and Economic Opportunity

How did travel promote social mobility for the individual in the twentieth century, and how was this imagined? The following draws on a few select life histories of Lebanese residents in Ghana over the past century and Ghanaians who have sojourned abroad. I use two Lebanese biographies and two Ghanaian ones to explore the social lives of individuals whose combined lives spanned the twentieth century. Their life histories provide insight into a century of travel and living abroad. I have conducted research among the Lebanese in Ghana since 2001. Life histories have been at the center of this work. In the past decade I have had the privilege of friendship with Maurice Maroun

Aouad, who has been working for some years now on a comprehensive history of the Lebanese in Ghana. He has been kind enough to share his materials with me, including several interviews with deceased Lebanese who lived in Ghana in the mid-twentieth century. Aouad has been resident in Ghana since 1952. I include his biography as his life captures continuity and change over the past half century of travel and residing outside one's native country. I use the life history of Omar Captan to underscore opportunities and constraints that faced non-African residents in Ghana in the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁹ The two Ghanaian biographies are those of Joseph Appiah (b. 1918) from his autobiography, especially his years of travel and sojourn abroad between 1940 and 1954, before Ghana's independence in 1957; and my reconstruction of the career of drug baron extraordinaire Raymond Amankwaah in the 1990s from Ghanaian and foreign newspapers.²⁰ Through these life histories, I show how the twentieth century has been one of incredible global mobility for individuals, African and non-African, and how travel, study and work overseas have become important resources and strategies for accumulation and self-improvement. This was a reality for non-Africans before the twentieth century; for individual Africans – as distinct from sailors and social elites – mobility has largely been a twentieth-century phenomenon.

Lebanese in Ghana

Omar Captan's career maps a trajectory of prospering in the Gold Coast in the first half of the twentieth century and a confident outlook at Ghana's independence. But Captan would become a casualty of hardening West African nationalism as new African governments became hostile to the accumulative strategies of aliens, both African and non-African. A factor in this changing climate was the decline in the world market prices of African's commodity exports from the later 1950s, which fed a growing sense of economic xenophobia. The Busia government (1969-1972) passed an Aliens Compliance Order in 1969 and a Business Promotion Act in 1970, which would transform the terrain and business atmosphere for foreign nationals in Ghana. The first expelled illegal aliens. The second Act limited foreigners to wholesale and manufacturing industries that required larger capital investment and reserved retail business for Ghanaians. Four Captan brothers had immigrated to Ghana in the 1930s. They became prominent in the

cinema business and had established a string of cinema halls by the end of the colonial period in Kumasi (Odeon) and Accra (Opera, Orion, Plaza and Dunia). Omar Captan, managing director of the Captan group of companies, was eligible for Ghanaian citizenship through naturalization on independence but opted not to apply, evidently reassured by Kwame Nkrumah's expansive outlook that included all foreigners who genuinely sought Ghana's interest. Nkrumah particularly extended an invitation to African Americans to assist in the building of the first black African nation south of the Sahara.²¹

The overthrow of Nkrumah's government in February 1966 witnessed assaults on Lebanese properties, including those belonging to naturalized Ghanaians. Heads of prominent Lebanese families that were victimized in these attacks, such as the Mattouk and Eid families, returned to Lebanon. Omar Captan, obviously worried by these disturbing developments and the implications for his business, filed for Ghanaian citizenship in June 1969. In late September 1969, two weeks after the return of civilian rule under K. A. Busia's Progress Party, Omar Captan's resident permit was withdrawn. In the run-up to the elections of August 1969, members of the Progress Party viewed Captan as sympathetic to the interests of K. A. Gbedemah and his National Alliance of Liberals (NAL), as he had allowed Gbedemah to use his Accra residence for a political meeting. After an unsuccessful legal battle contesting the withdrawal of his resident permit, the sixty-year old Captan on February 5, 1970 left Ghana after 35 years of residence. He settled in Lagos and passed away the following year. Two-thirds of the 12,000 Lebanese in Ghana left for neighboring countries, the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia with the passing of the Aliens Compliance Order of 1969. The Lebanese community in Ghana never regained its numerical strength.²²

The careers of other Lebanese from the early decades of the twentieth century underscore the ease with which some set up businesses in the Gold Coast. That of Azis Youssef Rammous (aka Azis Faddoul) is a good example. Born in Lebanon in 1910, he boarded a ship in 1935 for Monrovia (Liberia) in 1935 after his secondary school education. This was in response to an invitation from a neighbor who had relocated to Monrovia, one of the Salame brothers. Monrovia proved a challenging business environment, and Faddoul together with the Salame brothers set sail for the Gold Coast.

He gained employment in Sekondi with John Manzour and Sons, and after just a year opened his own shop with George Khoury in 1937. Such success was facilitated by the support of Lebanese networks for newcomers and the extension of credit by expatriate commercial companies to Lebanese businesses. Though the colonial government was not particularly enthused by the growing Lebanese presence in the Gold Coast, expatriate companies considered them more hardworking and reliable than African agents, and whiteness had its advantages. Independence and Nkrumah's all-hands-on-board attitude actually improved the business climate for some foreigners in Ghana. In the early years of independence, Faddoul set up the Wonderbird Water Factory in Takoradi for the production of soft drinks. It is with the overthrow of Nkrumah in 1966, criticized within Ghana for his patronage of pan-African and Third World causes, that we see a closing of doors to foreigners in Ghana, a stark example of economic nationalism. The Business Promotion Act of 1970 formalized the growing antagonism towards foreign businesses. Ivory Coast with its more open attitude towards foreigners under Houphöet Boigny was a major beneficiary of the expulsion of Lebanese from Ghana, and the Lebanese entrepreneurial class would be at the center of Ivory Coast's industrialization drive. The Aliens Compliance Order of 1969 signaled a turning of the tide in immigration that would become more evident from the 1980s across world: in West Africa Nigeria would expel its "aliens" in 1983, and Europe would earn a reputation as a fortress that barred out African immigrants. Whereas Ghana's 1969 expulsion order was aimed at alien privilege, countries in the West have in general displayed a bias in favor of the educated and skilled in their immigration policies. Captan was an early victim of the tension between nation-states and transnationalism that is more evident today.

Other Lebanese stayed on, especially those who had the larger capital needed to move into manufacturing or wholesale trade or who were not in business. Maurice Aouad straddled this divide, involved in broadcasting and education with some stints in business.²³ Aouad was born in Elmidane-Bekassine, Lebanon, to Maroun and Amissah Aouad in 1931. One of a family of four brothers and two sisters, he schooled in Lebanon, obtaining a license in letters from the Academie dex Beaux Arts. His uncle Elias Joseph Aouad, a prominent businessman who had settled in Ghana in the early 1940s, served as the magnet for emigration to Ghana. All four brothers – Antoine, Maurice, Joseph, and

Milad – eventually immigrated to Ghana. Of the two sisters, one immigrated to the United States, and the second suffered an untimely death in Lebanon. Maurice arrived in Ghana in 1952 and has led a rich professional life ranging from an early foray into business to being a producer, translator and announcer in the Arabic section of the external service for Radio Ghana from 1966 to 1974 to becoming the director for programs for the Ghana-Lebanon Cooperation Center in Accra from 1972 to 1978. This last was a professional institution for the training of Ghanaian students financed by the Lebanese community in Ghana. On several occasions, Maurice has acted as a consular officer for the Embassy of Lebanon in Ghana. Since the mid-1990s Maurice has served as roving deputy general secretary of the African Continental Council of the Lebanese World Cultural Union, seeking to promote relations between the Lebanese in the diaspora and their host countries. Maurice’s career has thus covered business, broadcasting and journalism, education, diplomacy, and cultural and social work for the World Lebanese Cultural Union. During a visit to Techiman in the early 1960s, Maurice met Cecelia Frema Amoah, a Ghanaian woman whom he married, and the marriage produced five children – Emmanuel, Manasseh, Michel, Yassemine and Roy. A fifth son, Munir, was born to Maurice through an affair with his secretary.

Though Maurice retains his Lebanese nationality, like many Lebanese in Ghana his visits to Lebanon are infrequent, and this seems to be the norm once the immigrant loses his or her parents. His visits to Lebanon in 1978, 1988, and 1990-91 were in relationship to the activities of the Lebanese World Cultural Union. His parents never met his children in their lifetime. Maurice’s social world does not revolve around Lebanon. Though committed to Lebanon and the agenda of the Lebanese World Cultural Union, Maurice has become a “cosmopolitan patriot,” a “citizen of the world” who improves the place he resides, even though that place is not the place of his “literal or original citizenship.”²⁴ Maurice’s recent visit to Lebanon in 2009 was to seek healthcare, returning to Ghana and the house of his son Roy to recuperate. Non-involvement in politics and minimal connections to business has protected Maurice from the volatility of the Ghanaian political climate. He recalls vividly the insecure times of 1969-1970 and the Rawlings regimes of 1979 and 1981, when many Lebanese left Ghana from a sense of vulnerability. His half century residence in Ghana from the 1950s indicates ways of co-

existing with nationalist African governments, a development that pushed Omar Captan out of Ghana. Maurice's Lebanese-Ghanaian family and his immersion in education and cultural activity put him on a different trajectory from the business-oriented Captan, keenly aware that politics shaped the business environment in Ghana. Economic liberalization policies from 1983 and the influx of foreign businesses and expatriates to Ghana particularly from the 1990s have made the Lebanese less conspicuous in Ghana.

Mobile Ghanaians

Joe Appiah's career was an extraordinary one and from the Ghanaian perspective exceptional. But his detailed and fascinating autobiography provides us with a lens into his life and his times, the first part of which overlapped with a period when white racial superiority and privilege was assumed. Born in November 1918 to an Asante aristocratic family in which traditional office and wealth converged, Appiah definitely did not internalize European presumptions of African inferiority, even though he grew up in colonial Ghana. Indeed, Joe's resentment of the pretentiousness and presumptuousness of the British Empire, sentiments he shared with the community of Adum in Kumasi, where he was born and grew up, was only matched by his passion for learning and the English language. At 14 he entered Mfantsipim, the most prominent boys' secondary school in Ghana, commencing a distinguished academic career that would lead to England and the bar. After graduating from Mfantsipim in 1936 with distinction and two years of cooling his heels in Adum, as his grandmother opposed his plans to further his education at Cambridge, England, Appiah took up employment with the United Africa Company (UAC) in 1938. He displayed his talents in the transport and shipping department of UAC in Accra and Takoradi, and was posted to Freetown during World War II, an important port in the British war effort. It was his first trip outside of the Gold Coast. Already, superiors at UAC in Accra and Takoradi with misplaced notions of African inferiority had found in the young Appiah their intellectual match. Indeed, his intellect enabled him to observe Europeans and Americans who came through the Gold Coast in the employ of UAC or on ships, conducting as it were an ethnography of whiteness and race relations. A sharp intellect backed by moral courage and integrity meant that superiors who placed value on performance admired the young Appiah, who got away with much that his Gold

Coast contemporaries would not have dared. This was a time when the racial assumptions on which colonial rule had been based had its internal critics, and higher management in UAC had obviously marked Appiah as someone with a future.

Posted to Freetown in August 1940, Appiah as part of management in the UAC refused to travel in the second class cabin of the Elder Dempster ship “Apapa.” His insistence on traveling first class as all management did and a demand to talk to the general manager of UAC produced a first class cabin ticket. On board the ship, he was given a lone seat in the first cabin restaurant as the Europeans would not mix with the only African in the cabin.²⁵ After three years in Freetown, Appiah began to worry that his ambition to read law might be side-tracked by his comfort in Freetown and the temptation to settle down. In late 1943 he planned his escape from Freetown, and he arrived in Liverpool in January 1944 to pursue the passion of his heart – law. Colonial education had created new African networks in the colonies, which extended to the larger empire as colonial subjects circulated within imperial domains. On arrival in London and at the West African Students Union (WASU) hostel, two students from Mfantispim recognized Appiah and run to greet him. His reputation from Mfantispim as an eloquent head prefect had preceded him. Members of the WASU were eager for news from West Africa and evidence of nationalist stirring. Appiah would become the president of WASU. Appiah also joined the Students’ Movement House and Youth House in London, providing him with access to student activity of all descriptions and to students from all over the world.

It is clear that empire created diasporic and transnational spaces not only for the colonizers, but also for colonial subjects, forging networks that would underpin the international alliance against colonialism and the birth of a Third World Movement. So in London, Appiah enjoyed his visits to “Swaraj House” near Warren Street tube station, where Indian nationalists and others interested in colonial freedom generally met.²⁶ Another active spot where colonial subjects met for trenchant discussions on communism, Trotskyism and anti-imperialism was the London apartment of the West Indian communist George Padmore. Regular guests included Jomo Kenyatta, Richard Wright, Ras Makonnen, Peter Koinage, Peter Abraham, C. L. R. James. Dudley Thompson, Yacoub Osman, Burnham and later Nkrumah.²⁷ This was space that was qualitatively different from that of the diaspora in the United States, perhaps reflecting

the distinctions between empire and the legacies of slavery. When Nkrumah arrived in London from his studies in the United States, his fear of white officialdom and his timidity of white women were notable. The advent of self government, though at differing pace across sub-Saharan Africa, might partly explain the different response of British authorities in the 1950s to the inter-racial marriages of Seretse Khama of the Bamangwato (to become independent in 1966 as Botswana) and Joe Appiah (Ghana had become self-governing in 1951). Already in the 1950s, the world was becoming a very different place for Africans.

The early 1950s witnessed the birth of Raymond Amankwa, another Asante born into a middle class family in Kumasi. Handsome and with a good education, traits he shared with Joe Appiah, Amankwaah achieved national and international notoriety in the 1990s. He lived abroad mostly in the 1980s and 1990s and on trips to Ghana kept a low profile. He appeared a genuine businessman and in the mid-1990s he owned a beautiful home in the exclusive Airport Residential Area and was building an ice cream factory in an industrial part of Accra. He had a registered company, Himpex Limited, under his real name with offices on Kwame Nkrumah Avenue, but no one knew its line of business. Then in April 1995 the British police, after an eighteen-month operation, busted what was described then as possibly the biggest single crack cocaine ring in the world. At the center was crack cocaine worth £1 million, found at a luxury apartment in Park Lane in central London. The ring was led by a Ghanaian called Chanda Keita, certainly not a Ghanaian name, described as “highly intelligent, charming and very obviously well-heeled.” According to the London daily, *The Times*, three others, Mariame Keita, the wife of Chanda Keita, André N’Guessan, described as his number two man and Charles Oppong had been remanded by the Southwark Crown Court. The police believed that during their 18 months of operation this family-run West Africa gang had supplied crack cocaine worth over £5.3 million. Chanda Keita, described as the world’s most prolific crack dealer could not be found.²⁸ By June 1995 Chanda Keita had been identified as Raymond Kwame Amankwaah. Further investigation in subsequent months revealed that Interpol had issued an arrest warrant for Raymond Amankwaah on September 17, 1990 on behalf of France for drug trafficking. Amankwaah apparently owned several passports under different nationalities, including an Ivorian one with the name Kouame

Amangouah issued on November 15, 1985. In 1996 Amankwaah was arrested in Quito, Ecuador, for drug trafficking. French attempts to extradite him proved unsuccessful²⁹ Amankwaah disappeared, but his hand was still at work and in November 1998, two women arrested with several kilograms of cocaine in New York claimed they were couriers for Amankwaah.³⁰

Conclusion

From the scale of his international operations Amankwaah certainly qualifies as a “drug baron.” How did a Ghanaian become a drug baron in the 1980s and 1990s with international connections in West Africa, Europe, North and Latin America? And what do his networks tell us about mobility and accumulation in the twentieth-century? It is clear that in the “lost 1980s,” when most African economies collapsed, drug trafficking became a crucial lifeline for recapitalizing or starting businesses in West Africa.³¹ For a decade or two, West African businessmen and women took advantage of their mobility in a globalizing world to source heroin from Asia and cocaine from Latin America, channeling these through West Africa to Europe and North America. As both heroine and cocaine do not originate from West Africa, security in Western airports did not wise up to the West African decoy for about a decade, and Ghana seemed flooded with mysterious cash in the latter 1980s and 1990s. As attention turned to West Africa as a transit area for drugs to the West, the initial businessmen and women withdrew and channeled their exports through paid couriers, including the staff of national airlines. Manchuelle in *Willing Migrants* demonstrated how it was the social elite among the Soninke who traveled regionally and internationally as labor migrants in the 19th and 20th centuries in their quest for resources that would enable them maintain their elite status back at home. In the late 20th century, West Africans mobile through their education, skills and business acumen coupled drug trafficking to their business travels, welding travel and accumulation in literal ways, nurturing the social imagination of Ghanaians that linked travel with connection and wealth.

Equally intriguing is the international composition of drug gangs that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s. Trans-national gangs emerged in West Africa, Europe and the Americas. One major heroin ring that was busted in the United States in November 1993

involved Ghanaians, Nigerians, Turks and Vietnamese. Do the legacies of empire help to explain the international composition of these gangs, a coming together, as it were, of people from the Third World, to strike at the First World, a world that had benefited for centuries from the appropriation of African labor and natural resources? What do we learn about African mobility and networking in the second half of the twentieth century by juxtaposing Appiah's and Amankwaah's international networks?

Amankwaah's world is very different from Appiah's, and in the 1940s colonial subjects who traveled in Europe or North America – such as Nnamdi Azikiwe, Kwame Nkrumah and others – went to further their education. Africa's merchant princes were definitely in decline, and Appiah's grand-uncle, Yaw Anthony, with business investments in Africa, Europe and North America was a rare breed in the scale of his business enterprises. The strictures of empire and blatant racism curbed African mobility and ingenuity. There is a real sense in which political independence and membership of bodies such as the Commonwealth in the mid-twentieth century opened up opportunities for travel for broader classes of Africans. Gaines speaks of the novelty of African diplomats at the United Nations in New York in the 1950s and 1960s at the height of the civil rights struggle in the United States.

And Ghana over the 20th century has gone through phases of being open and closed to foreigners. Colonial rule, as I have argued, created space for both diaspora and transnationalism. The first decade of independence was an exuberant, multi-racial period in Ghana where business and government was concerned. The Africanization of the civil service saw the decline of expatriates in the 1960s, and the Business Promotion Act eliminated foreigners who were not well-heeled. State-owned enterprises became the vehicle of industrialization until the introduction of structural adjustment programs from the early 1980s and the liberalization of the Ghanaian economy. The profound urban and economic transformation brought about by the influx of foreign capital from the 1980s is documented in Richard Grant's study of the globalizing city of Accra.³² I wonder what Omar Captan, pushed out of the country in 1969, would make of "Oxford Street" in Osu today. With its prominent Lebanese businesses, it is described as the most commercialized strip in Ghana. For most Lebanese, the lesson has been to focus on business and stay out of politics, a reality that explains the stability of Maurice Aouad's

life. For a Lebanese diaspora which is a century and a half old, and which had resulted with more Lebanese living outside Lebanon than in Lebanon, travel, opportunity and accumulation are intricately linked. For Ghanaian transnationals and their admirers at home, travel and getting ahead are connected. Lebanese and Ghanaian social imaginaries promote these expectations. It is the twentieth century, historically, that have provided opportunity for denizens of Africa, the African diaspora, and the so-called “developing world” to be mobile. Living in late twentieth-century Ghana has been distinctly different from living in late nineteenth century Gold Coast. Whereas Akonyikoo and Abooya were physically unsafe in the short journey from Dahomey to the Gold Coast in 1885, a century later Amankwaah with his multiple passports would own homes and businesses in several countries in Africa, Europe and the Americas. African mobility once interrogated reveals a fascinating social history in the past century or so.

NOTES

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¹ Ray A. Kea, *A Cultural and Social History of the Gold Coast (17th-18th Centuries)*, (forthcoming, Edwin Mellen Press).

² Both programs underscore how transnationalism has become a fact of life in contemporary Ghana and a resource or avenue for social mobility. Both programs have been hosted by Nana Adwoa Awindor. Accra has become the hub of Ghanaian return migrants and transnationals, as evidenced in Richard Grant, *Globalizing City: The Urban and Economic Transformation of Accra, Ghana*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2009).

³ C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959).

⁴ George Lipsitz, *Time Passages. Collective Memory and American Popular Culture*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990).

⁵ Linda M. Heywood, “Slavery and its Transformation in the Kingdom of Kongo: 1491-1800,” *Journal of African History* 50, 1 (2009): 1-22.

⁶ Jane I. Guyer and Samuel M. Eno Belinga, “Wealth in People as Wealth in Knowledge: Accumulation and Composition in Equatorial Africa,” *Journal of African History* 36, 1 (1995): 91-120.

⁷ Stephanie Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to the American Diaspora*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 55.

⁸ Public Records and Archives Administration Department (PRAAD), Accra, ADM 41/4/1. *Regina v. Agbochie*, Keta, District Commissioner’s (DC) Court, June 3, 1885.

⁹ *Ibid.*

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- ¹⁰ N. O. Leighton, "The Political Economy of a Stranger Population: the Lebanese of Sierra Leone," in William A. Shack and Elliot P. Skinner, eds., *Strangers in African Societies*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 86.
- ¹¹ Charles Issawi, "The Historical Background of Lebanese Emigration, 1800-1914," in Albert Hourani and Nadim Shehadi, eds., *The Lebanese in the World: A Century of Emigration*, (London: Center for Lebanese Studies, 1992), 30.
- ¹² C. L. Gates, *The Merchant Republic of Lebanon: Rise of an Open Economy*, (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998); L. T. Fawaz, *Merchants and Migrants in Nineteenth-Century Beirut*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 123.
- ¹³ Toyin Falola, "Lebanese Traders in Southwestern Nigeria, 1900-1960," *African Affairs* 89 (1990): 529.
- ¹⁴ PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 4/3/1. Annual Report on the Gonja District, 1939-40, notes the construction of a labor refuge camp at Salaga during the year as a rest camp for itinerant laborers assign to and from the south.
- ¹⁵ François Manchuelle, *Willing Migrants: Soninke Labor Diasporas, 1848-1960*, (London: James Currey, 1997); David Killingray, ed., *Africans in Britain*, (Portland: F. Cass, 1994).
- ¹⁶ Lynne Brydon, "Ghanaian Responses to the Nigerian Expulsions of 1983," *African Affairs* 84, 337 (1985): 570.
- ¹⁷ For an insightful commentary on the flows and blockages of globalization for Africans, see Frederick Cooper, "What is the concept of globalization good for? An African historian's perspective," *African Affairs* 100 (2001): 189-213.
- ¹⁸ This fact is noted for Ghana in Richard Jeffries, *Class, Power and Ideology in Ghana: The Railwaymen of Sekondi*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); and across Africa by Bill Freund, *The Making of Contemporary Africa: The Development of African Society since 1800*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).
- ¹⁹ Interview with Maurice Aouad, Accra, July 31, August 3, and August 7, 2004. The biographical profile of Faddoul is from Aouad's private papers. I am deeply grateful for his scholarly generosity.
- ²⁰ Joseph Appiah, *Joe Appiah: The Autobiography of an African Patriot*, (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1990). On Raymond Amankwaah, see also Emmanuel Akyeampong, "Diaspora and Drug Trafficking in West Africa: A Case Study of Ghana," *African Affairs* 104, 416 (2005): 429-447.
- ²¹ Kevin K. Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Emmanuel Akyeampong and Ama de-Graft Aikins, "Ghana at Fifty: Reflections on Independence and After," *Transition* 98 (2008): 24-34.
- ²² Emmanuel Akyeampong, *Race, Political identity and Citizenship in Ghana: The Example of the Lebanese*, (Accra: Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2006).
- ²³ On Aouad's life history, see also Emmanuel Akyeampong, "Memories of Place and Belonging: Identity, Citizenship, and the Lebanese on Ghana," *Ghana Studies* 7 (2004): 25-42.
- ²⁴ Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 241.
- ²⁵ Appiah, *Joe Appiah*, 125-7.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 150.

²⁷ Ibid., 159.

²⁸ This composite picture is constructed from newspaper reports in *Daily Graphic*, April 18, 1995, *The Independent*, May 10, 1995, and *Daily Graphic*, August 13, 1996.

²⁹ *Daily Graphic*, August 23, 1999.

³⁰ *Daily Graphic*, August 23, 1999.

³¹ Akyeampong, "Diaspora and Drug Trafficking in West Africa."

³² Grant, *Globalizing City*.