

THE ROOSEVELT GROUP



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*Forging
Futures*



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

01

Introduction

About	6
Foreword <i>Gaby Flouret & Madeline Pennino</i>	7
Dedication <i>Louisa Lindsley</i>	8
Contributors	9



Reversing the Resource Curse

Reversing the Resource Curse <i>Madeline Pennino</i>	12
Cultivating a Sustainable Relationship Between Man and Nature <i>Cassia-Peia Douglas-Dufresne</i>	15
The DRC's Oil Block Auction <i>Gaby Flouret & Stella Mortarotti</i>	19
The Future is African <i>Livian Stokes</i>	24
The Resource Curse Through the Lens of African Photography <i>Edamame Bello</i>	29



02

03

Futures of Ghana

Ghana: An Overview <i>Guendalina Spigarelli</i>	36
A Spirit Forged in Gold <i>Matthew Candau</i>	42
Gilded Legacy <i>Gokul Ramapriyan</i>	46
Transcending Eurocentrism: Pre-Colonial Ashante Statebuilding and Matriarchy <i>Emmanuella Ellia</i>	50
Asante Traditional Medicine <i>Daria-Gabriela Guşă</i>	54
The Refusal to Retribute: The British Museum and the Reticence of Progress <i>Coco Allen-McDonnell</i>	58



04

Closing Remarks

Closing Remarks <i>Elliott Vavitsas</i>	65
References	66
Contact	71





REVERSING

THE RESOURCE

COURSE



Reversing the Resource Curse

Madeline Pennino

In 2019, Africa produced nearly 1 billion tonnes of minerals, which generated approximately \$406 billion worth of profit. Africa possesses nearly 30% of global mineral reserves, 12% of the world's oil, 65% of the planet's arable land, and 10% of the Earth's internal renewable fresh water. Natural capital accounts for about half of the African continent's collective wealth.

Although it is resource-rich, alternate statistics can describe the increase in foreign profits and the decrease in job opportunities, wealth, and agency within African states. This outcome is a product of the longstanding historical precedent

of manipulative and exploitative actions by colonial and international institutional powers facilitated by poor domestic and foreign policy.

Herein lies the ugly truth behind Africa's glamorous-at-a-glance nickname of 'The Resource Rich Continent': the most desirable are the most vulnerable. The story of the African continent begins with Pangaea and continues today to tell a tale of rise, rape, and pillage. A tale of empires born and vanquished and of fantastical discovery met with unbridled greed. The story of continental Africa and its resources goes beyond the struggle

for power and wealth—it writes the book on the brutal, unrelenting, dominance-seeking side of human nature.

This 'story' of fruitful lands, greed and conflict greatly contributes to what award-winning Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie might categorise under the broader-speaking 'single story' of Africa. In her 2009 TED Talk, *The Danger of a Single Story*, Adichie put into words the ruinous nature of global stereotyping of the African continent throughout history. The world perpetuates 'stories' of disease, hunger, safari, giant red sunsets, dried-out savannahs, and of countries rising to power, raped and pillaged, both via internal and external forces.

Adichie noted that alongside this repeated tale of the same facts and preconceived ideas exists another set of stories—stories that detail prosperity, power, leadership, government, institution, and industry. Africa holds the stories of peoples, cultures, and religions

that date back to the first civilizations on Earth. Today, growth, rehabilitation, emerging technology, art, and education are primed to take centre stage.

The issue remains that African stories are omitted from too many discussions. Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs and Steel* theory suggests that one can understand the world and its dominant powers based on historical human migrations to geographically advantaged continents. Diamond's theory identifies that an abundance of ideal factors allowed Western Europe to reach food surpluses much faster than in other regions. The ease at which the region could produce or accumulate life necessities (food, water, and shelter) allowed Europeans to focus on innovation and state-building. In this process, leaders in Europe and East Asia were in the privileged position to travel and found, amidst their explorations, a figurative and literal 'gold mine' in terms of resources and labour: Africa.

Today, the continued suppression of the successes and plenties found within the African continent largely stems from enduring human greed. Should the world realise that African nations are regaining autonomy and changing major industries, how might that disrupt the reputations, economies, and political ties held by foreign nations?

Zimbaqua, a Zimbabwean aquamarine mining business, has succeeded in instituting good-practice mining, supporting women and small businesses, and uplifting their community. Zimbaqua exemplifies best practices and has become the world's first sustainable mine whilst only employing and empowering women of the Karoi region. Zimbaqua has given many Karoi women agency over their own lives in a socio-political environment that might otherwise discourage female employment.

Zimbaqua has succeeded in proving four notions to other African nations.

Firstly, African nations should, can, and have reclaimed their industries as their own. Secondly, it is possible to reclaim the industries that have spawned environmental and humanitarian crises. More importantly, they have improved upon the standards and conditions set by foreign exploiters ahead of Africa's commodity reclamation renaissance. Lastly, the effect of industry reclamation may be felt beyond the financial benefits; industry can also catalyse political and social shifts, thus reframing outsider perspectives on the African continent. The story of Zimbaqua is just one account of the continent's many successes in changing peoples' 'single story' assumptions. The world created a powerful, long-standing image of the African continent once before, riddled with foreign perspectives and characterised by constantly reinforced representations of poverty, humanitarian disaster, and economic stagnation. Given the ease with which the 'single story' gained traction, it is worth considering how positive stories like Zimbaqua and those propagated by Adichie can generate a prolific, uplifting, and equally accurate narrative on the continent. The story of African nations reclaiming their land, their products, and their profits is no longer a display of human greed, but of human adaptation, drive, and innovation. Reversing the resource curse into a socioeconomic and political blessing sets a new global precedent that Africa, a continent previously buried by monofaceted narratives, truly is a continent on the rise.



Courtesy of Zimbaqua.

Cultivating a Sustainable Relationship Between Man and Nature

A Deeper Look at the North Rangelands Trust of Kenya

Cassia-Peia Douglas-Dufresne

Humans used to coexist with wildlife— a relationship severed throughout colonisation, rapid economic growth, modernization, and urbanisation. With human populations soaring, wildlife became a nuisance. And for wildlife, humanity has become the driver of extinction.



Growing up at the forefront of sustainable wildlife conservation in Kenya, I have seen first-hand how the conservation industry works. The sheer number of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) is impressive, yet I question their true impact on the environment and whether their money trickles down to support the people and places that are the most desperate for it. I have seen countless attempts to conserve Kenya's rich biodiversity and the range of flora and fauna that inhabit its ecosystems, but few have managed to recognize, employ, and integrate the knowledge and participation of traditional communities.

The Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT), a community-led initiative established in 2004, works to address the challenges facing wildlife conservation and acts as a "shared resource to help build and develop community conservancies, which are best positioned to enhance people's lives, build peace and conserve the natural environment." Operating in 39 community conservancies spread over 4.4 million hectares in 10 Kenyan counties, the NRT provides crucial opportunities

to over 480,000 people. The NRT has the scope and power to greatly transform lives and wild spaces.

The NRT has been successful in promoting sustainable land management practices and reducing poaching and human-wildlife conflict due to a resilient community-integrated participatory model. The community conservancies provide people with the platform to be heard and the agency to develop sustainable livelihoods that are directly or indirectly linked to conservation. Involving local communities in the management of local natural resources is vital, as it ignites a greater sense of ownership and responsibility towards wildlife and the environment.

Through a participatory model, local communities can understand the importance of implementing sustainable land management practices, such as rotational grazing and reforestation, to safeguard their future and help protect the environment upon which their livelihoods depend. The direct benefits received from these conservation

activities aid the communities' livelihoods and counteract their dependence on unsustainable activities like poaching and charcoal production.

Many of the conservancies are home to critically endangered and endangered wildlife, making them a direct target for poachers. One of the key approaches that NRT has adopted to combat poaching is the establishment of community-led anti-poaching teams. These teams are made up of trained community rangers who work hand-in-hand with the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) to patrol the conservancies and protect wildlife from poachers. The rangers are local to the areas, meaning they have a better insight into community dynamics and a greater connection to the land they protect. Thus the KWS rangers have a better ability to work closely with locals to gather intelligence and identify poaching hotspots. The rangers are armed with GPS tracking systems and communication radios to enhance their effectiveness. Equipped with these tools and their traditional knowledge, NRT's community-led anti-poaching approach has proven to yield impressive results in the fight against poaching.

The improved security for wildlife in conservancies has significantly reduced ivory poaching of elephants from a peak of over 100 in 2012 to one elephant in 2022. This represents a reduction of over 95% in

elephant poaching in the region which proves that NRT's tactics have been successful in reducing poaching numbers.

However, as poaching declines, another issue arises: human-wildlife conflict. Since 2012, there have been reports of at least 27 people killed and 28

injured by elephants in NRT-member conservancies. This human-wildlife conflict is now one of the highest causes of elephant mortality in the NRT landscape, thus positioning the reestablishment of peace between humans and wildlife as the top priority to increase the elephant population. NRT and the conservancies are working to address this challenge through awareness programmes, conservancy-run compensation schemes, and elephant fencing on farms. By providing the local communities

with education and awareness on the importance of conservation, their attitudes towards wildlife have changed. This enables local communities to appreciate their value to the ecosystem and reduces the demand for illegal wildlife products such as elephant ivory. The NRT combats human-wildlife conflict at the source by working closely with the communities surrounded by wildlife day in and day out.

Maintaining this security and peace for wildlife simultaneously addresses the threats of trophy and bushmeat poaching. The Grevy Zebra, a highly endangered species with a population of less than 3,000, also lives within conservancies managed by the NRT. Due to efforts in reducing poaching and promoting sustainable land management practices, the Grevy population has begun to increase, which is an important step in the right direction for their dwindling population. This community-led approach has been successful. One of the rangers said, “Now that I know the importance of wildlife conservation, I have a duty to educate my community on the need to protect these animals since we have all seen benefits ranging from employment, education scholarships and community development projects.” This demonstrates the impact that NRT has had not solely on environmental conservation, but also on the individuals and communities who live alongside and within these areas.

To sustain these successes, committed conservancy leadership is required. This entails strong management teams, sufficient resources, healthy partnerships with stakeholders, innovation, and flexibility to address emerging threats and

ensure the commitment of indigenous communities to conserving wildlife on their land.

Although it is evident there is a global conservation crisis, it is not a lost cause. Instead, it is an opportunity for conservation to be reformed and restructured while taking into consideration the agency that lies within the communities that have co-existed with wildlife for centuries to work together to create effective long-term strategies. Reflecting upon this and my experiences, the way forward is to work cooperatively with local communities and empower them with the tools needed to pursue positive and sustainable conservation that not only benefits the ecosystems but all who live within them. The NRT has proven that this is effective and vital in obtaining the results we need to save the environment as we know it. Through this approach, wildlife and communities could, once more, live and flourish alongside one another.

The DRC's Oil Block Auction

Hedging Economic Growth Against Environmental Conservation

Gaby Flouret & Stella Mortarotti

Officials from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), on April 8th, 2022, approved a proposal by Didier Budimbu, DRC Minister of Hydrocarbons, to put 27 oil blocks and three gas permits up for auction. The DRC's decision has not only caused outrage amongst environmental and humanitarian groups, but has set a price tag on regional influence and untapped resources. The lands for auction have an estimated total of 16 billion barrels of crude oil which, at current prices, are worth north of \$650 billion—a tremendous sum for one of the world's five poorest nations. Groups within leading Western nations find themselves split between wanting the oil blocks, denying China another geopolitical gain, and prioritising the environment. The DRC has exercised its sovereign right, and this has stumped leading nations trying to exert influence.

The DRC has long faced ongoing conflict, terrorism, political instability, and oppression, all of which culminated in the Congo Wars in the late nineties and early 2000s, the deadliest war in modern African history. Violence is still rampant today from militia groups like the March 23rd Movement (M23). The DRC is host to the largest and most expensive UN peacekeeping mission in the world, MONUSCO, operational since 1999. The Ituri province, located in the northeast of the country, is repeatedly shaken by ethnic tensions and terrorism, often accentuated by issues concerning the availability of natural resources. The DRC is the major copper producer in Africa and has the world's largest cobalt mines managed by European, U.S., and Chinese entities. Focus has turned more recently to the DRC for issues surrounding their prospective exploitation of plentiful

crude oil reserves, located within the Congo rainforest.

The DRC's current daily crude oil production rests at about 25,000 barrels a day due to a relatively small number of onshore and offshore oil blocks. Run by France's Perenco SA, they are becoming obsolete and provide relatively low financial returns. Most of the DRC's revenue comes from their mines. Nevertheless, nearly all of the DRC's civilians do not benefit from its resource-rich land. Decades of war, corruption, and domestic unrest have left 73% of the Congolese population living on less than \$2 a day.

Though the subject of environmental, political, and humanitarian projects, decisive action by the West to help uplift the DRC has fallen short, hence the government's decision to take charge. Minister Budimbu has said, "We're not doing this to destroy the rainforest, we're doing it for economic gain."

The DRC does not believe they should withhold themselves from an improved lifestyle to satisfy the developed world's geopolitical and environmental interests. Historically, the West has approached the DRC when involvement was beneficial to the interests of powerful states. The U.S., throughout the latter half of the Cold War, supported Mobutu's dictatorship (1965-1997) for his anti-USSR sentiment. Subsequently, throughout the First and Second Congo Wars (1997-2007), U.S. President Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair considered the DRC to be a 'low-intensity conflict.' Both were preoccupied, especially the U.S., with the war on terror following 9/11. However, the U.S. needed some degree of stability in the DRC to protect mining interests—a

task they deferred to French President Jacques Chirac who also perceived the DRC as a secondary priority on the African continent.

Though the West continues to receive criticism for their involvement, or lack thereof, in the DRC, the Chinese too played a role in the region. By 1994, Mobutu had recognized his waning relationships with the West and turned to China. During a state visit, Mobutu visited Chinese arms factories and purchased \$5m worth of military equipment. Three years later, after Mobutu's exile and President Laurent Kabila came to power, the Chinese involved themselves again in the DRC's affairs. In 1997, Joseph Kabila, President Kabila's son, completed a military studies course at the University of the National Defense in Beijing. Joseph Kabila went on to become president in 2001, following his father's assassination.

"We're not doing this to destroy the rainforest, we're doing it for economic gain."

- Minister Didier Budimbu

The DRC's decision-making has been moulded and induced by foreign actors. Today, said influence has taken a less violent form, though the West and China still exert heavy influence on the DRC to secure their own environmental and geopolitical interests. China, in 2018, welcomed the DRC to join the Belt and



Courtesy of Africanews.

Road Initiative (BRI), banking on the partnership for a continued cobalt supply and further entrenching themselves in the African continent. The West has publicised a different approach, counting on their once uncontested leverage. A Western-dominated coalition, the Central African Forest Initiative (CAFI), agreed to dole out \$500 million over five years provided the DRC attains certain environmental milestones. In 2022 CAFI nevertheless specified that their goal was to increase gas extraction to replace widespread dependence on the logging industry. At COP26, leading EU nations, the U.S., Japan, South Korea, and the Bezos Earth Fund pledged \$1.5 billion between 2021 and 2025 to the DRC to avoid deforestation. While it is a step in the right direction, a potential offering of \$2 billion is trumped by a \$650 billion deal through crude oil extraction, especially since approximately 21% of the pledge had been collected and disbursed by the end of 2022, but no further spend updates have been released since.

Failures to secure adequate funds prompt the DRC to turn to gains that would benefit the nation in the short term. The DRC's Vice Prime Minister Lutundula, in an August 2022 joint event with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, echoed Minister Budimbu's attitude that the DRC wants to avoid damaging its ecosystem; however, he claims he first wants to do right by his people. \$650 billion can go a long way in a nation whose ministers approved a 2023 budget of 29,551 billion Congolese francs (about \$14.3 billion). Minister Budimbu said he wants to use the returns to build and improve schools, infrastructure, and hospitals. This may produce scepticism, as corruption is rampant. Former DRC President Joseph Kabila's family has been involved with BGFIBank in handling over \$100 million in bribes from Israeli businessman and U.S.-sanctioned Dan Gertler to DRC officials.

The DRC's decision to auction off oil blocks and licences is a show of sovereignty in the face of governments

wanting to prioritise environmental concerns. Ironically though, three of the oil blocks up for auction have been sold to North American companies—two American and one Canadian. Even as these three companies closed their deals, reports indicated that Minister Budimbu considered extending the deadline in the hopes of obtaining other offers.

The West has indeed expressed significant concern over the environmental impact that drilling would have, and the global climate consequences of such operations. Around 68% of the DRC is forest land. Only 9% of its GDP comes from forest resources since protection efforts thus far have reduced the possibility of further exploitation. In the charcoal trade, trees are (usually illegally) logged to be burnt, producing charcoal that the majority of the population in Kinshasa, the capital of DRC with 15 million citizens, rely on for cooking. Forest land is also increasingly cleared for agriculture. Environmentalists express alarm at the large-scale clearing of the rainforest that would be required to install infrastructure for oil drilling. While arguably the infrastructure improvement would have long-term benefits for the country, scientists around the world fear the loss of such biodiversity. More importantly, it would irreversibly damage this rainforest that alone absorbs 4% of the world's entire annual carbon emissions.

Additionally, the DRC is home to the world's most extensive tropical peatlands. Peat is created by the gradual accumulation of organic material that does not decompose due to the anaerobic, waterlogged, and acidic conditions of the soil. If these dry out, a procedure carried out during the exploitation of oil land for

easier access, this alone could generate greenhouse gas emissions at a volume of over 10% of the total emissions observed in 2022.

This is not the first time the rainforest has come under threat for oil drilling. In 2014, Soco International and Dominion Petroleum wanted to explore a particularly vulnerable area of the rainforest, the Virunga mountain gorilla sanctuary, home to around half the population of this endangered species. Figures such as Jane Goodall and Leonardo Di Caprio got involved in the 'Re:wild' movement which effectively impeded the exploration and exploitation projects. However, with increased global concern for oil supply and income, the DRC has relaunched the possibility of exploration. This time, the DRC and energy companies presume that they will face less opposition since the Russia-Ukraine war has catalyzed nations to diversify their energy providers.

The need for crude oil will outweigh the effect of people campaigning for the protection of the Congo Basin. As Minister Budimbu stated, "This time we will not stop."

A lasting issue that will be caused by the eventual oil drilling is the effect it will have on the local population. A Greenpeace study showed that, at the time of the DRC's April 2022 proposal, citizens of villages within the blocks were not aware of drilling plans in their region. Nevertheless, any scale of oil pollution would have instant negative effects on locals' ability to source drinking water as well as damage to fish populations which impacts their food supply. While the mining industry is often targeted by rebel militia, leading to extortion and

human trafficking, it has a more tangible impact on the local economy due to the people employed. In contrast, oil extraction is increasingly automated, thus it will not significantly drive employment, with job prospects mostly involving the construction of infrastructure in the early stages of drilling. Instead, oil extraction would likely accentuate the inequality in wealth distribution within the country; the 2006 constitution attempted to create a central fund that would redistribute wealth earned by wealthy mining provinces. As of March 2023, this is still not operational.

As demonstrated in 2014, these plans could be deterred by a combination of local and international action. Local communities mobilised, with protests around the lack of free, prior, and informed consent towards the people living there and the protected UNESCO state of the Virunga Park. Again, at the time, emphasis was made on the fact that exploration rights on the ground would damage the local economy significantly,

with benefits only being reaped by the corrupt elite. Today's global shift in perspective on the availability of oil due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict and movement away from coal-powered stations nevertheless makes the DRC's determination far firmer.

Ultimately, the discussions surrounding the DRC's sovereignty expose a Western colonialist mentality and highlight the divide between progressive politics and bottom-line business. While countries were swift to make promises during COP26, it is unlikely that the DRC will receive said funds, and the DRC will lose the (small) financial incentives to preserve their environment. President Biden recently commented on the need for increased oil production; however, at COP26 he put pressure on the DRC to join rainforest protection pledges—another attempt to exert influence. Regardless of the DRC's intended move towards sovereignty, they will inevitably be directed by firm foreign agendas.



Courtesy of Axel Fassio.

THE FUTURE IS AFRICAN

Leaders Who
are Shaping
the Direction of
Africa's Future

Livian Stokes



Courtesy of Rolex.

By 2050, a third of all children will be African. The African continent will have become perceived as a place of opportunity. African economies are some of the most dynamic and rapidly changing in the world. Millions of young Africans are eager to join the labour market and interact with the global economy.

To reach this successful future, directing investment to their children's education and health could improve overall well-being. This attention to the youth must come alongside tangible growth that generates the 'backbone' of the future—infrastructure, economic policy, global investment, power grids, and more. Future-oriented economies will recognize that Africa has immense potential that goes far beyond her resources to include

labour and consumer markets full of bright minds and creative potential. There is plenty of growth and benefits to come, but first there are some challenges that must be overcome.

Much literature has explored Africa's resource curse. It is an obstacle that can be overcome with combative corruption measures, strong judicial systems, quality education, and good governance. To meet these challenges, there are those who stand apart from the masses and take on the mantle of leadership, creativity, and courage. Africa is full of people who go above and beyond to better their communities and advocate for a better future. These are the people who fight for and accelerate progress towards Africa's bright future.



Courtesy of Rolex.

Planting Trees for the Future

Wanjira Maathai is wholeheartedly carrying on the legacy of her mother, the late Wangari Mathai, who was the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize. Mathai continues the work of her mother's foundation, the Green Belt Movement (GBM), which seeks to alleviate problems linked to environmental degradation, climate change, conflict, and poverty. The GBM has planted over 51 million trees in Kenya since its inception in 1977, when it was founded out of concern for the "needs of rural Kenyan women who reported that their streams were drying up, their food supply was less secure, and they had to walk further and further to get firewood for fuel and fencing" (GBM 2023). Furthermore, GBM seeks to create climate-resilient communities by providing the means to develop sustainable agricultural practices. Maathai leads this battle, fighting against deforestation, corruption, and resource manipulation.

According to Maathai, "We have to admit the relationship between the North and the South, with respect to natural resources, has been one of exploitation." Her work directly addresses the exploitation of African resources and seeks to push an Africa-first agenda. In her opinion, increasing regional trade and developing industries locally are two paths towards relieving exploitative trade practices and building prosperity within Africa. Maathai argues that shortening supply chains would benefit African countries. She advocates, for example, that producing chocolate in Ghana itself



Courtesy of Wangari Maathai, Kenya, 1991.

rather than exporting the raw products to be refined elsewhere would feed much-needed profits back into the Ghanaian economy. GBM reflects these concerns and is a prominent advocate of political accountability and fair trade in Kenya. Through her work, Maathai seeks to put an end to land grabbing, environmentally damaging policies, and unsustainable agricultural practices.

Capturing the Power of Indigenous Knowledge

Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim, a member of the Mbororo pastoralist tribe in Chad, is a prominent activist fighting climate change. She is the President of the Association for Indigenous Women and Peoples of Chad (AFPAT), and is involved in several committees and organizations, including the United



Nations Sustainable Development Goals Advocate and the Indigenous Peoples of Africa Coordinating Committee (IPACC). Ibrahim's work focuses on supporting indigenous peoples' adaptation to climate change, which includes organizing international workshops that share traditional and scientific knowledge.

Ibrahim is a powerful orator and has brought the concerns of indigenous peoples to the international stage. In 2016, she spoke at the Paris Climate Agreement, saying, "Climate change is adding poverty to poverty every day, forcing many to leave home for a better future." As an indigenous woman herself,

Ibrahim recognizes that indigenous peoples have protected nature for centuries and built a sustainable lifestyle that respects nature. Her utmost goal is to incorporate these practices into international methods of climate change prevention.

The future of Africa is bright. The path to progress will face obstacles, but there are brave, bold, and strong individuals leading the charge. Maathai and Ibrahim are amongst many on the continent who are trailblazing solutions for African problems, reclaiming their agency, and building a better Africa.

The Resource Curse through the Lens of African Photography

By Edamame Bello

Whether in photography, literature, or politics, the story of mid-century optimism, separating colonial oppression from post-independence malaise and misrule, dominates African discourse. Much has been made of Malick Sidibé and Seydou Keita's photographs of Malian youth in the 1960s and 1970s. Since Andre Magnin's series of exhibitions in the 1990s brought their images of Bamakois youth to a global audience, these two giants of photography have been celebrated for having, as critic Allison Moore called it, "glamorised and globalised" the African experience in this period. Commentary generally focuses on their images' evocation of the optimism and vibrance of the decades that followed independence and its young, hip, newly liberated generation. This daring generation, unlike their forebears, looked to the West to reclaim their sovereignty, overturn decades (or centuries) of disenfranchisement, and have fun. You can see this in the virtually 'audible' 1962 photograph *Regardez Moi*

whose immediacy is characteristic of Sidibé's compositional dynamism and visual musicality. The photographer's sensibilities also reflect the idea of change and rebellious youth. In *Regardez Moi*, there are echoes of Sidibé's signature subversion of studio portraiture conventions by, for example, centring on youth in motion.

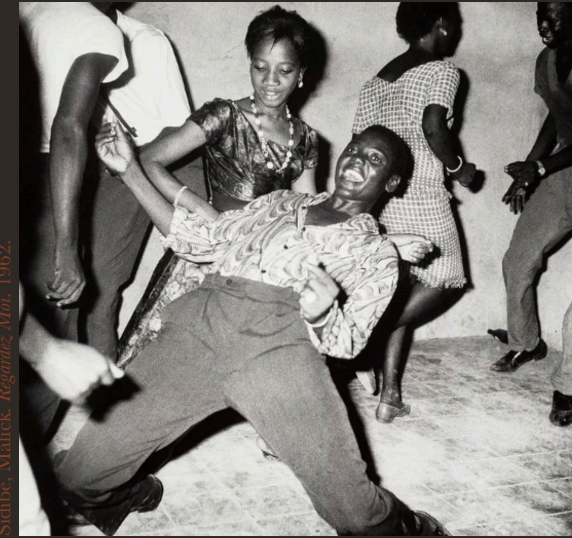
There have, however, been some attempts to consider continuity. For instance, Amadou Toure's 2001 book included Sidibé's images from the 1950s before independence and drew parallels to his more famous later works. Allison Moore linked Touré and Sidibé's photography to pre-colonial West African portraiture traditions. Further, while many have made vague allusions to the West African tradition of griot storytelling, Moore situated them within a Mande aesthetic framework. In highlighting continuity without denying the distinctness of the era, Touré and Moore are in the

minority. It is to newness, to the idea of a young continent, that critics often return, praising Sidibé and Keita's arresting ability to capture it. Though by no means inaccurate, this emphasis is often made to foreshadow the harsh realities of the latter part of the century and its dashed postcolonial hopes. It often also serves to perpetuate the idea of a young continent, as if African history began with colonialism. What is often left out in this characterisation is the newness of art photography in general as a genre of art and the rich tradition of portraiture that already existed in other forms in Africa: in painting, sculpture, and praise-singing.

Similarly, Africa's resource curse only becomes apparent if people take a selective approach to chronology. The resource curse refers to the paradox of plenty in which nations are naturally blessed with raw materials and are still yet plagued by economic underdevelopment. Western Nations, however, like oil-rich Norway and Canada have eluded the curse. Studies about the resource curse also only seem to begin in the late modern era at the apogee of the West and Global South's economic and technological gap. However, if the period under consideration is lengthened to include the early modern and mediaeval eras, the concept of the resource curse, as Toby Jones does in *A Fistful of Shells*, fades. Instead, a different story of the relationship between Western Europe and Africa emerges: a more equal trading relationship, mutual levels of respect, of distrust, and emissaries rather than colonists and subjects. The resource curse comes into view as a myth—a story told to explain the enduring exploitative relation between the West and the Global South.



Sidibé, Malick. *Je veux être vu(e)*, 1979.



Sidibé, Malick. *Regardez-Moi*, 1962.



Ousmane Sembène. *La Noire De*, 1966.

The resource curse is the West's answer to the problem of Africa's exploitation. The West has long failed to consider chronological facts of African history and has repackaged an actively exploitative relationship so that the issue of Africa's underdevelopment appears endemic and chronic — the price Africa pays for its natural wealth. Instead of a set of systems with a discernible history, Africa's underdevelopment takes on an inescapable quality. By presenting this resource curse as an impersonal affliction, it turns attention away from centuries of looting, exploitation, and infrastructural destruction. Instead, the blame is shifted onto a non-actor — a 'curse'.

A similarly exploitative story can be told of the arts in Africa, such as the colonial-era looting of Benin Bronzes or Ife Heads. But, as with politics and economics, the exploitative relationship survived Africa's Independence era. The African art world continues to be strongly influenced by colonialism, which is evident in the way local artists and curators consistently seek approval, recognition, and financial backing from the West. This is glaring in the culture of large, international biennial art exhibitions that are largely funded by, catered to, and curated by European governments and organizations, even when held on the African continent. The first locally based curator of Rencontres de Bamako, the continent's leading photography biennial, Bisi Silva, famously pointed out its tacit colonialism and the irony that such a major biennial is held in Bamako, among the poorest cities in the region, if not the world.

This enduring exploitation is why the simple story of African art as young, fresh, and 'on the rise' persists. Even those

who consider themselves 'friends' or who are ostensibly against Western arrogance and ethnographic approaches very rarely discuss African art without slipping into language that betrays assumptions of its inferiority or naivety. Andre Magnin, 'defender' of African contemporary art, was the assistant curator for *Le Magiciens de la Terre*, a progressive response to the ethnographic colonialist approach of the famous MoMa Primitivism in the Twentieth Century exhibition. But *Magiciens* too had its problems, as many have noted. Magnin's exhibitions after *Magiciens* have made Sidibé and Keita global superstars but, while they profited from this exchange, the sitters and the original 70s clients who commissioned them (the co-creators, if you will) have been left nameless, without credit. Further, though Sidibé and Keita's wealth and fame may have grown, this is not comparable to the profits reaped by Magnin or other Western gallerists like Jack Shainman.

Despite good intentions and concerted efforts to understand the local context, gallerists like Magnin can only do so much. He too often engages with African art with the (archaeological) language of discovery of untapped treasures. In an interview about another African photographer his gallery represents, the Nigerian photographer J.D. 'Okhai Ojeikere, Magnin failed to grapple with his client's aesthetic value, presenting his works as an "anthropological, ethnographic, and documentary national treasure" (Magnin 2021). Remembering our discussion on the Resource Curse helps to conceptualise this complex situation—one where the ally can also be the perpetrator, profitting while simultaneously steering away the blame.

Sembene, a contemporary of Sidibé's, foresaw these complexities. Two of his early feature films, *Mandabi* (1968) and *La Noire De* (1966), are loaded with pessimism and distrust in the West's ability to fully relinquish their grip on their former colonies. *Mandabi*'s Ibrahima deals with the invisible but highly alienating and disabling effect of Western bureaucracy on what should be the simple task of cashing in a money order. *La Noire* of *La Noire De* falls prey to the seductive appeal of Europe, but their dreams are quickly cut short by the realities of racism and the inescapable hurdles of second-class citizenship. This helps to explain why the film was rejected for funding by the French Ministry of Cooperation's Cinema Bureau, leading Sembene to coin the term *mégotage* (cigarette-butt cinema), highlighting African filmmakers' reliance on foreign funding or their own wits to scrape by. It's another colonial remnant that serves as a cinematic equivalent of the Biennial culture in the photography world.

Sidibé's photographs are fun. They are hopeful and daring and do reflect the vibrance of a rebellious, optimistic generation open to the West. But with Sembene in mind, perhaps we can see his portrayal of optimism, vibrance, and Western influence as not necessarily endorsements. Certainly, we must not approach their photographs as the product of a naive or simplistic artistic tradition.

Sidibé's curious image above, *Je veux être seule*, is a wonder—it brings to mind all of these intricacies. The image depicts a beautiful woman stood next to a white male figure obscured in post-production.

Teju Cole ended his obituary of Malick Sidibé by recalling the picture's evocative qualities, ranking them among the great pictures of African modernity. He compared *Je veux être seule* with *Regardez Moi*: the latter, a clamour for fame and celebration and the former for solitude and independence. *Je veux être seule* alone contains these two desires and accentuates the various complexities of African art in a global context. This image employs a radical layout yet adheres to traditional forms, deceptively simple and yet emotionally-wrought. It rejects the imposition of order: it was made both by Sidibé and *La Seule* (his nameless sitter), both in 1979 and again when it was resigned in 2009, for a domestic then gallery audience. It is a commodity and a memento as well as a treasure, a vision to be sold, cherished and gazed at.

To escape exploitation, it is essential to remember that Africa's issues are not chronic and only appear this way because they are being viewed through a narrow lens. African art has flourished for centuries and though there are incessant hurdles, it will continue to flourish for the centuries to come. The present issues, as large as they seem, can be solved. African artists will continue to emulate *La Seule*, face the problem head-on, assert their will, and rewrite the story.



Futures of

GHANA

GHANA

An Overview

Guendalina Spigarelli

Ghana, once known as the Gold Coast, is a West African nation on the Gulf of Guinea. The name “Ghana” was adopted for the nation upon its independence in 1957; it is derived from the Soninke language and means “warrior king”. The name harkens back to the Ghanaian Empire that ruled West Africa from the sixth to the thirteenth centuries. As a result, “Ghana” honours the nation’s rich cultural and historical heritage.

Colonisation and Independence

Portuguese marines arrived in Ghana in 1471 to establish maritime trade between Ghana and Europe. The empire’s wealth, particularly gold, initially caught European interest, and the Asante traded gold for European exports such as textiles, hardware, metals, weaponry and ammunition. When word of the Gold Coast’s raw materials spread through Europe, the Portuguese built fortifications on the coast to maintain a trade monopoly. However, this monopoly began to collapse in the 17th century, and traders from the Netherlands, England, Denmark, Sweden and Prussia began to

dominate. In addition to the country’s resources, they were also interested in using the economic ties established to export enslaved people, a drastically expanding market given the rising proliferation of American plantations.

In the eighteenth century, about forty forts owned by Dutch, British or Danish traders dominated the coastal landscape. During this period, under the direction of the first Asantehene, Osei Tutu, the union of the Asante states was founded. The Asante Union encroached on surrounding nations, fueling political unrest that “impeded the development of new trades meant to replace the slave trade”. Britain established its monopoly in 1850, and the Gold Coast was designated as a British colony in 1874, with the Asante living outside colonial boundaries. After that, farmers began cultivating cocoa in the forests, which helped the Gold Coast’s economy develop and prosper. The nation continued to export gold while providing more than half of the world’s cocoa needs. With the wealth generated by this rise in trade, it was feasible to build modern transportation and social infrastructure, including ports, railroads, highways and social services such as higher education.

Political and social developments lagged behind the economy’s growth. World War II widened this gap, and beginning in 1948, larger towns proved more susceptible to riots among workers and veterans. During the twentieth century, the new generation of African nationalists criticised African political figures who favoured colonialism’s reform rather than its abolition. Thus, they would organise large-scale campaigns against colonialism. Ghanaian leader Kwame



Courtesy of Shutterstock/Yaayi, 2022.

Nkrumah supported the demonstrations of former soldiers who had fought for Britain in the War. When British soldiers opened fire on these protesters in February 1948, rioting spread throughout the region. The two-month imprisonment of Nkrumah and other nationalist leaders sparked further student and teacher protests. In June 1949, Nkrumah established his own Convention People's Party (CPP), which used the slogan "Self-Government Now!" to mobilise the public to support independence. The British attempted to isolate Nkrumah, but he ran for office inside his prison cell, and the CPP triumphed. On February 9, 1951, British Governor Charles Arden-Clarke released Nkrumah from prison.

He immediately took over as the head of the government. Nkrumah and Governor Arden-Clarke collaborated intensively over the following six years to prepare the Gold Coast for its independence as Ghana, which came about on March 6, 1957.

Economy and International Relations

After Ghana's independence, its foreign policy was dedicated to Kwame Nkrumah's ideas of non-alignment and Pan-Africanism. Non-alignment meant abstaining from all East-West alliances and policies. In contrast, Pan-Africanism meant following an African policy that envisioned the liberation of African peoples from Western colonialism and the eventual economic and political unity of the African continent. Ghana's foreign policy is focused on cooperating with all countries that seek such a relationship, regardless of ideological considerations, and refraining from interfering in others' internal affairs. The country also promotes the freedom and unification of Africa and thus works closely with neighbours who share aspects of Ghana's cultural history, family links and economic interests. Ghanaian efforts have resulted in numerous bilateral trades, economic agreements and permanent joint commissions, which have substantially contributed to subregional cooperation, development and tension reduction. In 1975, Ghana was one of the founders of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). This organisation was formed to promote interregional economic and political cooperation and has been, since then, a channel for Ghanaian exports to regional



Courtesy of ECOWAS Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023.

markets and relations with neighbouring West African nations. ECOWAS has been involved in a peacekeeping mission in Liberia since 1990, with Ghana contributing a significant number of troops. Ghana has supported other international peacekeeping initiatives, contributing troops to UN operations in Cambodia in 1992-93 and Rwanda in 1993-94.

Aside from relationships with other countries, Ghana has established solid political ties with intergovernmental groups such as the European Union (EU). Ghana is a member of the European Union External Service (EEAS), which maintains 142 diplomatic missions worldwide. The EU Delegation, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Malta, the Netherlands and Spain each have a resident Ambassador in Ghana. With

Ghana's position on the UN Security Council and ECOWAS Chairmanship, the EU currently joins forces with Ghana to "assert their shared values and positive agenda at the global level" (Delegation of Ghana). The continuous EU-African Union (AU) conversation demonstrates a strong connection between Africa and Europe, fostering sustainable development and strengthening economic collaboration. Both advocate for and defend "peace, security, democracy, prosperity, solidarity, and human dignity" (Delegation of Ghana). Furthermore, Ghana is increasingly involved in international trade, its economy growing exponentially in the last 20 years. Whereas the country's total value of exports and imports was USD 4.9 billion in 2002, it reached USD 32.4 billion by 2022. Similarly, while Ghana's trade was dominated by imports from 1990 to 2010, recent years have seen



Kwame Nkrumah.

a trade surplus owing to an increase in crude oil, gold, and cocoa bean exports.

Geography

Due to the erosion of the nation's Precambrian rock system, a low physical relief characterises the geographical landscape of Ghana. Mount Afadjato, Ghana's highest point, is only 880 metres above sea level. While the morphology of the land suggests a high population

density because it is mostly fertile and accessible, Ghana's population is instead confined to a few restricted areas, leaving vast stretches uninhabited. For instance, the number of people in the North is lower than the territory can realistically support.

Lack of water is a frequent cause for concern given the uneven population distribution. Many locations that have had ample water supply throughout the last century are now deserted, whereas

supply can be spread thin in larger cities. One of the main reasons for population decline is the spread of illnesses such as animal and human trypanosomiasis and onchocerciasis, diseases transferred through animals that breed by the vegetation of watercourses. The spread of diseases is worse in population-dense areas. These areas also pose a challenge to the government because traditional farming practices and yearly grass burning have caused soil fatigue and erosion.

Various streams, rivers and coastal lagoons characterise Ghana's inland. Such water sources dwindle or flow less throughout the dry seasons of the year and flood during the rainy ones. These water sources have evolved over time and now serve several purposes. Until 1964, the Volta River's primary use was navigation and fishing. Afterwards, the Akosombo Dam was built, and Lake Volta was created, establishing a 768,000-kilowatt hydropower project that supplies Ghana, Togo, and Benin. Additionally, the lake provides an exceptional source of irrigation, as evidenced by the agricultural mechanisation deal for the irrigation of the Afram Plains in the 1980s.

Conclusion

This overview of Ghana has highlighted the country's rich historical, geographic, and socio-political tapestry. Since its beginnings as the Ghanaian Empire, Ghana has evolved into a sovereign state. Ghana's identity has been altered by the historical legacy of colonialism and the following war for independence. Rather than continuing to serve as a commercial hub for European powers, Ghana now strives for self-government and self-determination. Ghana's political evolution has been distinguished by its commitment to Pan-Africanism and non-alignment, encouraging unification and collaboration among African nations and beyond. Visionary leaders like Kwame Nkrumah have sparked this progress. Additionally, the nation's foreign policy has promoted diplomatic ties with countries and intergovernmental organisations, strengthening its position as a significant player globally. Ghana is developing, with a history firmly established in the past and a path aimed at building solid ties with the world community.

Courtesy of Eigene Aufnahme, 2018.



Courtesy of The Africa Image Library/ Alami.



A SPIRIT FORGED IN GOLD

Matthew Candau

In the heart of West Africa resides a people steeped in history. A testament to their indomitable spirit, the saga of the Asante is one of resilience and unwavering determination. Under the sacred auspices of the Golden Stool, the Asante have sculpted an enduring global impact through their exhibition and elevation of heritage, tenacity and unity amidst tribulation.

The Kingdom of Asante traces its roots to the Akan forestlands in what is now central Ghana. The transition from nomadic hunter-gatherer societies to sedentary agrarian communities heralded an era of societal, organizational and artistic development under the Akan states. Expansive plantations of yams and plantains dominated the landscape whilst abundant gold deposits transformed mining into an economic keystone. Flourishing urban centers, including Kumasi, the historic capital of Asante, burgeoned nearby.

The sixteenth century ushered in a pivotal era, where European traders catalyzed the West African peoples' economic prosperity through lucrative gold and agricultural trade. This economic upsurge laid the foundation for the rise of new kingdoms, including the Asante. These states, primarily the Amantuo, were organized as confederacies; kinship ties between city-state chiefs created a cooperative nexus of culturally-alike peoples and promoted extensive trade networks.

Efforts for official unification began under Osei Tutu in the years preceding 1700. While the impetus of this movement was likely for political, militaristic and economic reasons, the Asante tell a different story.

At the heart of Asante culture lies the Golden Stool. According to legend, the stool was conjured from the heavens by a chief priest, Komfo Anokye and descended in its rightful place on Osei Tutu's lap. Through divine revelation, it was declared his duty to unify the Asante people, with the Golden Stool being a physical manifestation of their spirit and prosperity, or sunsum. Even today, the legacy of this tale remains an indelible mark on the Asante people as the epitome of their unity and resolve.

And so the Asante confederacy burgeoned into an empire, with Osei Tutu as their first Asantehene, or king.

Across the following 150 years, the Asante Empire's power and influence surged. Advanced military stratagem, centralized bureaucracy, diplomatic finesse and a unified image under the Golden Stool were developmental hallmarks throughout this epoch. As technological and armament innovations unfurled in Europe, Asante's relative profits from the gold trade skyrocketed. This allowed for significant territorial expansion, culminating in a Greater Asante that mirrored the territorial expanse of present-day Ghana. The process of bureaucratization included the appointment of officials based on meritocracy and vested the Asantehene with the ability to remove them from office, ensuring a legacy of checks and balances that remains today.

Amidst this Asante golden age, the arts flourished. Textiles and sculptures interwove the people's elaborate oral history to the physical, channeling tales and proverbs into visual opuses that celebrated and perpetuated cultural heritage. Among the most renowned was the kente cloth, a finely woven textile of intertwined silk, cotton and wool associated with wealth and spirituality.

Asante Expansionism in the early nineteenth century kindled extensive diplomatic efforts with European powers. However, the Asante Empire's dominion over West Africa was impermanent. The British Empire initiated both defensive and offensive military maneuvers against the Asante, leading to a sequence of four formal Anglo-Asante Wars spanning seven decades. The Asante held their ground and ended many battles in stalemate to the surprise and laudation of British generals. The conflicts climaxed during the War of the Golden Stool in 1900. An address by British Governor of

“And so the Asante confederacy burgeoned into an empire, with Osei Tutu as their first Asantehene, or king.”



Asante Kente, 1985.

The Kente Cloth stands as a preeminent emblem of Asante culture, distinguishable by its unique visual identity. Each cloth is given a name thoughtfully chosen by either the weaver or local elders. This nomenclatural tradition extends to each motif and pattern on the textile's surface. Hence, the textiles are traditionally valued as much for their social appeal as their aesthetic allure. In this piece, the warp patterns (in blue) represent the familial leader grappling with a challenge of some sort, while the weft patterns intricately illustrate a series of tribulations linked to this endeavor, such as a fractured pot and an empty gunpowder keg

the Gold Coast Sir Fredrick Hodgson included an emphasis on seizing the Golden Stool – a promise the Asante people took as a direct attack on their “sunsum”, or their divine right to rule. Though the Asante people staged a rebellion, British forces quelled it swiftly. A deal brokered in 1902 resulted in territorial concession by the Asante in exchange for keeping the Golden Stool. This pact is remembered as a victory by the Asante due to the preservation of their sunsum.

Colonial rule unfurled a period wherein British motivations were molded by profit incentives associated with the vast gold reserves and agricultural prospects in the region. Accordingly, the Asante people were subjugated to grueling forced labor, sapping their autonomy and cultural identity for decades. Yet, with unyielding resolve and extensive diplomacy, the election of the first Asantehene since 1900 breathed new life into their narrative in 1935. The Golden Stool was returned to its venerated position beside the Asantehene's throne, where it has remained ever since.

In the present day, the Asante maintain an eponymous political subdivision with over five million residents anchored by the bustling capital, Kumasi and its neighboring gold fields. The Asantehene remains an influential political figure and cultural icon who significantly impacts local affairs. Furthermore, the Asante persist in their embrace and promotion of their rich history and sunsum under the Golden Stool.

The Asante Empire's legacy, marked by military advancement, bureaucratic development and artistic flourishing, continues to induce admiration and appreciation. Reflecting on the history of the Asante, one can find inspiration in their ability to endure and flourish, cherishing the invaluable lessons they have imparted on the indomitable human spirit and the timeless significance of cultural pride.

Gold, an emblem of opulence and power, intricately interweaves itself within the historical narrative of Ghana. Its allure extends beyond its material brilliance and profoundly shaped the Asante Kingdom's formidable economic influence. However, beneath this glittering facade lie considerable challenges and potential pitfalls of overreliance on a finite natural resource for economic growth, trade and development.

Gilded Legacy

The Kumasi Gold Trade

Gokul Ramapriyan

The Significance of Gold in Ghanaian History

Ghana's boundless gold reserves have captivated civilisations since antiquity. As early as the fifth and sixth Centuries B.C., Phoenicians and Carthaginians embarked on arduous journeys to Ghana's shores, driven by the allure of this precious metal. Later, in the eighth and ninth Century A.D., they were accompanied by Arab and Sub-Saharan merchants, ushering in an era of economic interdependence in the region now known as Ghana, or "The Land of Gold". This extraregional pursuit marked the dawn of an era characterised by unprecedented economic interdependence. Gold-adorned rulers symbolised sovereignty and economic might within the heart of the Ashanti Kingdom.

Kumasi as a Gold Trading Hub

Fueled by the resplendent attraction of gold, Kumasi pulsated as the epicentre of a vibrant gold trade network, extending far beyond the borders of the Ashanti Kingdom. The city's stature as the capital was matched only by its prominence as a beacon of economic dynamism. Gold, flowing ceaselessly through the veins of this bustling hub, fostered connections that transcended regions and cultures, as best exemplified through gold dust being a circulating currency in the empire under the first Chief of the Ashanti, King Osei Tutu.

Economic and Cultural Influence

Kumasi's golden legacy, a repository of wealth and power, held the potency to transcend continents. By the fifteenth century, the splendour of Ashanti gold graced the shores of Europe, notably through trade with the Portuguese and other European powers. This exchange catalysed not only economic transactions but also facilitated the flow of ideas, art and cultural practices and inspired diplomatic dialogues between nations. These intercultural connections extended far beyond mere economic transactions; they fundamentally shaped societal norms, beliefs, and artistic expressions.

Legacies and Challenges

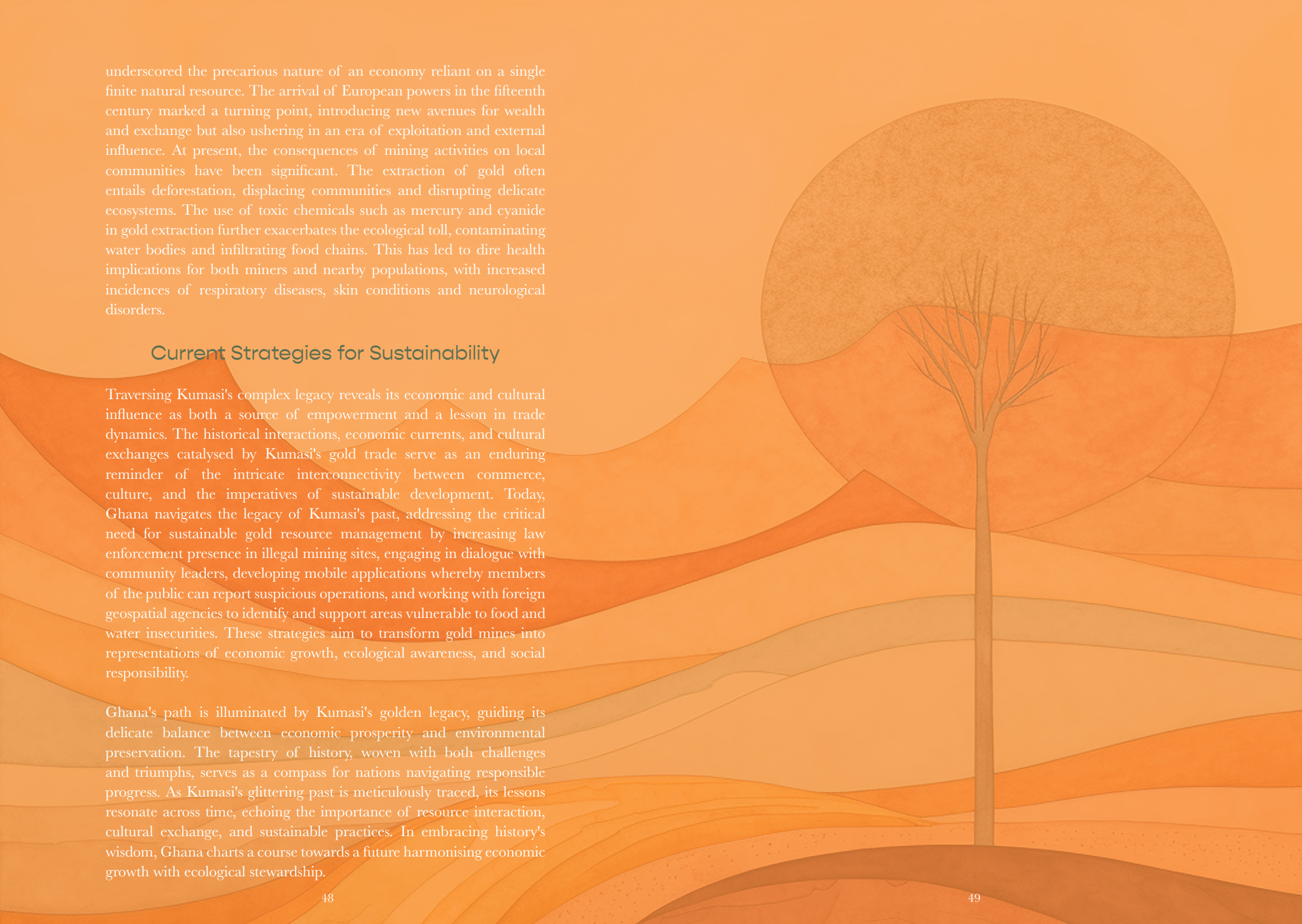
Beneath the glittering surface of prosperity lay inherent challenges. While the gold trade facilitated cultural exchanges and economic dynamism, it also exposed the region to vulnerabilities. The fluctuations of global markets and the potential for exploitation by external forces

underscored the precarious nature of an economy reliant on a single finite natural resource. The arrival of European powers in the fifteenth century marked a turning point, introducing new avenues for wealth and exchange but also ushering in an era of exploitation and external influence. At present, the consequences of mining activities on local communities have been significant. The extraction of gold often entails deforestation, displacing communities and disrupting delicate ecosystems. The use of toxic chemicals such as mercury and cyanide in gold extraction further exacerbates the ecological toll, contaminating water bodies and infiltrating food chains. This has led to dire health implications for both miners and nearby populations, with increased incidences of respiratory diseases, skin conditions and neurological disorders.

Current Strategies for Sustainability

Traversing Kumasi's complex legacy reveals its economic and cultural influence as both a source of empowerment and a lesson in trade dynamics. The historical interactions, economic currents, and cultural exchanges catalysed by Kumasi's gold trade serve as an enduring reminder of the intricate interconnectivity between commerce, culture, and the imperatives of sustainable development. Today, Ghana navigates the legacy of Kumasi's past, addressing the critical need for sustainable gold resource management by increasing law enforcement presence in illegal mining sites, engaging in dialogue with community leaders, developing mobile applications whereby members of the public can report suspicious operations, and working with foreign geospatial agencies to identify and support areas vulnerable to food and water insecurities. These strategies aim to transform gold mines into representations of economic growth, ecological awareness, and social responsibility.

Ghana's path is illuminated by Kumasi's golden legacy, guiding its delicate balance between economic prosperity and environmental preservation. The tapestry of history, woven with both challenges and triumphs, serves as a compass for nations navigating responsible progress. As Kumasi's glittering past is meticulously traced, its lessons resonate across time, echoing the importance of resource interaction, cultural exchange, and sustainable practices. In embracing history's wisdom, Ghana charts a course towards a future harmonising economic growth with ecological stewardship.



Transcending Eurocentrism: Pre-Colonial Ashante Statebuilding and Matriarchy

Emmanuella Ellia

The image created of Africa is one distorted by the misinterpretation and misunderstanding of various African cultures. Africa is not a monolith; however, its popular representation stems from a warped reality created by racist ideas. It derived from a failure to grasp the history of 'exotic' societies, and what was not understood was misconstrued. Africans were viewed as savages or barbarians. Since Aristotle stated Greeks had the right to rule over barbarians because of the latter's supposed servility, this belief persisted. It was perpetuated and used to justify domination and colonisation, creating a binary between continents. European countries were viewed as 'civilised', while African countries were viewed as 'barbaric'.

The reluctance to recognise African societies as historical and political entities, conjoined with the continental subjugation by the West, highlights the conscious erasure of African historical institutions, and thus, the inconsistencies in Western knowledge. Sir Harry H. Johnston, a theorist of British imperialism, doubted whether Africans had a history before the coming of the Asian and Europeans invaders. Africa was described as the "country of infancy, beyond the daylight of conscious history, wrapped in the blackness of night", a depiction which could not be further from the truth.

The Asante empire, for example, had a total population of around 346,000 in 1901. The kingdom possessed two railways which connected Kumasi, the capital and leading commercial centre, with the ports of Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi, as well as a network of first and second-class roads. Furthermore, its many agrarian economies expedited the concept of land ownership, such that all land had an owner and land rights were jealously guarded. Land laws which highlighted a sense of political organization, innately democratic, were established. The land tenure system was designed against artificial scarcity by ensuring that land did not accumulate in the hands of a few and that every member of society had a right to participate in its use. A country whose governmental institution defended property rights and whose public goods were categorised as technologically advanced should have been considered 'civilised'. At least according to the scale which utilises progress as a measure of civilisation.

*“ Obaa na owoo obarima,
Obaa na owoo ohene ”
(It is a woman who gave birth to a man,
It is a woman who gave birth to a king)*

Moreover, looking at Christianity as another qualifier of 'civilisation', but equating it to religion in the broader sense, African societies which showcased any form of religious spirituality should have been considered 'civilised'. Spirituality pervaded Asante thought and action, and it influenced norms and laws in a similar way to Christianity in the West. Religion represented a distinct activity among them that revolved around beliefs and practices. In the Asante universe, Onyame (the Supreme Being) had created a universe impregnated with his power. Power was thus rooted in the Asante cosmology, and individuals and groups that successfully tapped into it translated this power into access to authority controlling social institutions. This practice was similar to the Divine right in Christianity, the notion that royalty is given divine sanction to rule.

Additionally, in the Kingdom, royal and aristocratic women were in possession of considerable political authority, social status, and substantial power within the family structure. African queenmothers were a fundamental part of Asante culture. They were titleholders placed in the highest levels of the political order, a common feature of ancient and later precolonial African political systems who showcase that, throughout time, women played a fundamental role in socio-economic and political development alongside their male counterparts in African societies.

Queenmothers represented the matriarchal archetype. They were the genetically significant link between successive generations. They transmitted their “mogya,” (blood), to their children, which determined their citizenship as well as their rights of succession to office and inheritance to property. And, although Asante queenmothers were very often eclipsed and overwhelmed by the numerically superior male actors in the political arena, the Asante people never tired of pointing out in proverbs: " Obaa na owoo obarima , " " Obaa na owoo ohene " (It's a woman who gave birth to a man: It's a woman who gave birth to a king).

Nana Yaa Asantewaa was the queenmother of the Ejisu district, a heroine, and a role model. Not only did she become the regent of her district after her grandson, the previous ruler, was arrested and exiled by the British, but she led a war against the British to protect her people's honour. In 1900, Sir Frederick Hodgson, the then governor of the Gold Coast, demanded to sit on the Golden Stool, an innate sign of disrespect and sacrilege. The Golden Stool was a cosmological, folkloric, traditional, spiritual, and political symbol of the Asante; it represented their links to the deities and to their communal organization. Hence why, according to Albert Adu Boahen, a Ghanaian academic and historian, Queenmother Nana Yaa Asantewaa



Nana Yaa Asantewaa.

directly confronted and insulted the British governor general, demanded a release of the deported royals, and boldly told the British that the Golden Stool would never be surrendered.

The Asante empire perfectly encapsulates an example of African ‘civilisation’ according to Eurocentric standards. But it also showcases an egalitarian society which allows both the archetypes of patriarch and matriarch to coexist together, complementing each other. For this reason, the Kingdom is also an example of a civilisation which did not follow European patriarchal archetypes. In transcending them, it allowed its people to be freed of patriarchal gender roles. Even taken from a defect Eurocentric lens, the Ashanti empire was a prosperous, socially advanced empire, and should have been regarded as such throughout its rich history.



Asante Traditional Medicine

“Witchcraft” of the Past or Hope of the Present?

Daria-Gabriela Gușă

The Asante empire has a long history of traditional religion. Ailments and illnesses have been seen as a result of the divine and were traditionally treated by local priests. Today, the curing power of the herbs and rituals of traditional Asante religious practice has been institutionalised, with bodies regulating these practices. Even though only 5% of the Asante people follow traditional religions today, their belief in their ancestors’ knowledge and procedures coupled with the low density of physicians has led to almost 90% of Asante people regularly seeking herbology cures and over 50% using spiritual healing.

While traditional African religious beliefs varied from place to place, there were ample shared beliefs. Generally, the African religions believed in a single god from whom all things came,

accompanied by a host of lesser gods, who each represent a force of nature. The people of Asante paid heed to both good and evil spirits in addition to gods and ancestors. Historically, many owned and utilised protective charms to fend off certain evil spirits, or ‘disease demons’, bringing sickness to the home. In Asante traditional medicine there is no difference between psychological and physical pain, and there are five main illnesses: spiritual sickness, caused by witchcraft and destructive powers; curse from the gods, caused by an enemy consulting a deity to bring ill health upon someone who has offended him; “homesickness”, caused by bad feelings arising within a family; diseases of the body, conceptualised as originating and emanating from the belly; and sickness of the blood. There are spiritually-based traditional medicine practitioners, such as spiritualists, traditional priests, and faith healers, and non-spiritually based ones, such as herbalists, bonesetters and midwives.

Even though the “witchcraft” of traditional medicine was considered backward by Europeans in the colonial era, traditional medicine has proven effective, with most of the plants used biologically proven to be effective and Europeans marvelling at their healing power from as early as the seventeenth century. Many people in Asante use medicinal plants for treatment and as home remedies, especially in rural communities. Plants used in malaria account for 6% of the medicinal plants of the Ghanaian domestic market, as 8.4 million Ghanaians are suspected cases. This high usage, although contributing to the World Health Organization’s goal of promoting universal health coverage through accessible medication, is prone

to lead to unsustainable exploitation and the extinction of more medicinal plants.

There are also traditional beliefs that fully rely on spiritual power, such as the Akua'ba, Asante fertility dolls carved from wood and recommended by a herbalist or priest. As dolls are thought to represent an ideal of feminine beauty in the matrilineal Asante society, the likelihood of having a beautiful female child is believed to increase in those who carry the doll. Accordingly, the dolls are also carried by pregnant women, but more often by infertile women, increasing their chance of having children in the region with one of the lowest fertility rates in Africa.

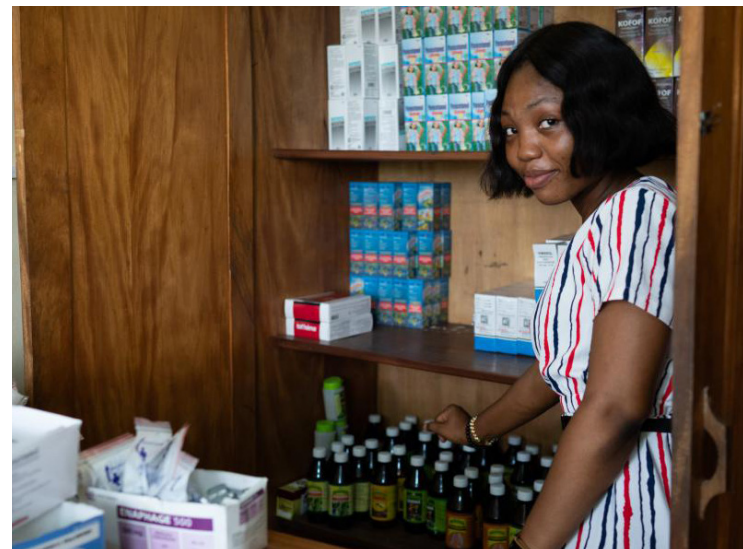
In Ghana, colonial policies regarding traditional medicine banned and later licensed it, in an attempt to modernise aspects of traditional medical practices. The encounter with Europeans also introduced many new infectious diseases such as smallpox and syphilis, thus orthodox medicine became a constituent of the healthcare system. Today, there are still many issues with the integration of traditional and orthodox medical practice, as collaboration between the two is difficult. However difficult, this collaboration is necessary, as the ratio of traditional medicine practitioners to clients is 1:400 and the orthodox health practitioner to clients ratio is 1:12000.

However, the unregulated use of traditional medicine among women of childbearing age in Ghana has led to reproductive health complications such as abortions, ectopic pregnancies and pelvic inflammation diseases among others. A great number of spiritual therapy clients are people living with HIV.

Due to the high levels of stigmatisation of HIV-positive individuals, spiritual therapy and prayer camps offer a refuge from the social blaming they face daily, exhibiting positive psychosomatic results and helping them find meaning in their predicament. Physically, however, these usually harm their condition due to the very poor housing, sanitary and dieting conditions, in some cases the patients even being lashed with canes so the 'disease demons' can leave their bodies. Traditional medicine is still sought out by most people in Asante despite these practices, mainly due to personal health beliefs rather than dissatisfaction with orthodox medical practices.

The Ghana Psychic and Traditional Healers Association (GPTHA) was established in 1961 to regulate the practice of traditional medicine in Ghana. Regulation is difficult, however, as the traditional health system receives less support from policymakers, and strategies do not succeed due to the weak interprofessional collaboration between traditional and orthodox health practitioners. In the twenty-first century, one of the foremost efforts to integrate traditional medicine into the formal health system was the establishment of the Department of Herbal Medicine at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, a four-year program that trains students in basic pharmaceutical, medicinal and social sciences and which is aimed at producing medical herbalists in the country.

However foreign the concept of traditional medicine may seem to Westerners, it proves effective in many cases and continues to be the most trusted and accessible way for the Asante people



Courtesy of the WHO/Ernest Ankomah, 2019.

to cure their illnesses, necessitating improved regulation. Traditions are important in all regions, in this case even saving lives and relieving the social pressure put on the diseased.



Courtesy of the WHO/Ernest Ankomah, 2019.

The Refusal to Retribute:

The British Museum and The Reticence of Progress

Coco Allen-McDonnell



Courtesy of the British Museum.

In May 2023, the King of the Asante, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II met with the director of the British Museum, Dr Hartwig Fischer to discuss the return of the Asante collections, the majority of which was plundered by the British following the defeat during The Third Anglo-Asanti War at the end of the nineteenth century. Despite official calls for restitution beginning in 1974 when Asantehene Opoku Ware II first made a formal request for the return of regalia and other items of spiritual significance, there has been little progress made.

Shrouded in imperial elitism, the historic reticence of the British Museum to discuss restitution is rooted in its legacy as an institution born and funded by empire. This meeting is the first time the British Museum has met with an Asante leader, but the potential for progress remains limited. The British Museum is restricted by the 1963 Museum Act, a law which stipulates ‘objects vested in the Trustees shall not be disposed of’ thereby ensuring looted treasures cannot be returned to their rightful owners. It does however allow for temporary loans to external exhibitors if assurances are made to protect objects from damage, a clause which seems ironic considering the damage caused by the disassembling of Asante regalia by British soldiers to consolidate booty for transport at the time of acquisition.

The special advisor to Ghana’s cultural minister, Oforiatta Ayim, is optimistic about the possibility of a loaned exhibition returning to the Asante Palace (now the Manhyia Palace museum), stating that ‘loans can be the first step in opening the dialogue within institutions that are slow to change’. However, there remains little institutional pressure to overrule the Museum Act and similar legislation such as the 1983 National Heritage Act, which entraps Asante gold within the permanent collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum, and the Museums and Galleries Act of 1992, which secures the impressive collection of sacred Asante gold within the Wallace Collection. The British Museum is currently considering lending items back to the Manhyia Palace museum to mark the 150th anniversary of the end of the third Anglo-Asante War, an uncanny concession considering the items will be removed and returned

to England, arguably reinforcing imperial sentiments through the dissolution of Asante culture and tradition.

There are examples from other leading English museums of progress being made and restitution being achieved. The London-based Horniman Museum returned 72 objects from its collection to Nigeria with director Nick Merriman publicly campaigning for museums to ‘acknowledge their colonial history’. Furthermore, Tristram Hunt, director of the V&A, travelled to Ghana in 2022 to begin conversations about a renewable cultural partnership centred around the collection of Asante court regalia which has been in their collections since 1874. The delay in discussions between the British Museum and the Asante leaders therefore appears more surprising considering these developments. When inquired further, it becomes clear that there remains a further discrepancy in the handling of restitution cases by the British Museum, primarily concerning the admittance or even acknowledgement of their dubious means of acquisition. The V&A is deliberate and direct in recording the provenances of their collections. Written as an introduction to their Asante collection it is stated, “the Asante were threatened by British traders and colonial officers who wished to end Asante control...”. The British ransacked the palace of the Asantehene, Kofi Karikari, and imposed an indemnity of 50,000 ounces of gold. Thus, the British Museum makes no concessions to the forceful nature of acquisition and instead chooses either to disguise provenance with indifference and ambiguity or brazenly refer to previous owners as ‘colonial officers’ without any further description. An Asante ceremonial helmet within its

collection whose sacrality is revealed in its description as having ‘possibly being worn by the Asantehene himself’ has no distinguishable provenance except for it being labelled as, ‘Excavated/Findspot: Royal Palace Kumase’, as if it were dug up within the ruins. Language becomes a useful mediator once again as it is described as, “donated by the Gold Coast Government date 1900”, the governor at this time being Sir Matthew Nathan, a British soldier.

What is most striking about the resistance to the restitution of Asante gold is the continued disregard for the spiritual significance of gold to the Asante. Gold was the medium by which status, wealth and power were displayed as it was considered an earthy counterpart to the sun and the physical manifestation of the soul. The unifying emblem for the Asante was the Golden Stool, considered to behold the spiritual power of its predecessors as power originated in the spiritual realm and not in political authority. British colonial forces equated the political conquest with ownership of this stool, and the disregard for Asante spiritual tradition was made clear when Governor Arnold Hodgson demanded to sit upon it by right of conquest in 1900 following the Asante defeat, thereby performing a shocking act of sacrilege. The return of golden emblems to the Asante now is more than an admittance of colonial wrongs, but the restoration of a corrupted spiritual order and a reclaiming of culture and a cultural tradition so brutally exploited by British forces for capital gain. The British Museum has on its website, 2,943 objects related to the Asante including stamps, jewellery, bells, funerary equipment and ceremonial regalia mostly seized between

1874 and 1900. While issues of colonial restitution are not new, especially to the British Museum, the cases concerning Asante treasures and stolen items from other colonial territories have not generated the same sensational scale as European treasures within its collection. This is because the narrative of restitution maintains a Eurocentricity, where colonial narratives remain fixed within the dismissal of items as the spoils of war or the legitimate property of English colonial leaders through indemnities paid to them, seen directly in the provenances of the Asante collections within the British Museum.

In this way, England maintains a tie to their imperial history, a reminder of their once golden empire. While territories may no longer be under English control, the imperial notion of ownership is maintained over a cultural and spiritual legacy and over the ideological foundation and traditions of those they colonised. Until the legislation is reworked, British colonialism will live on within and outside museum halls.

A vast, green savanna landscape with rolling hills in the background and two people walking in the foreground. The scene is captured in a soft, painterly style with a muted green color palette. The text 'CLOSING REMARKS' is overlaid in a large, white, serif font, centered horizontally and spanning across the middle of the image.

CLOSING REMARKS

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Daria-Gabriela Gusa, *Ashante Traditional Medicine*

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