"Homegoing"
Mobility, Diaspora, and Ghana's Year of Return

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Abstract

In January 2019, Ghana launched its Year of Return program to mark 400 years since the arrival of the first enslaved Africans in Jamestown, Virginia. The year-long event was described as a spiritual birth right journey for members of the Black diaspora and aimed to boost tourism and migration to the country by posing Ghana as a key destination for the Black diaspora and African Americans in particular. As the Ghanaian state encourages the diaspora to travel and migrate to Ghana to help boost its economy, Ghanaian citizens are looking for opportunities to migrate out of Ghana for better education and employment opportunities. Considering this dichotomy, this thesis explores the differing and often contrasting mobilities apparent in the Black diaspora through the context of the Year of Return program. It is informed by fieldwork conducted via information and communication technologies (ICTs) over the COVID-19 pandemic through participant observation, interviews, and media analysis. This thesis first explores how Ghana's historical relationship with the Black diaspora laid the groundwork for the success of the Year of Return. It then explores how different understandings of Blackness were used by the Ghanaian state to promote connections across the Black diaspora. Finally, it focuses on the differing mobilities characterizing the phenomenon of return to Ghana to inquire into the state of global Black mobility.

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Introduction

In January 2019, Ghana launched its Year of Return program to mark 400 years since the arrival of the first enslaved Africans in Jamestown, Virginia. The year-long event was described as "a major landmark spiritual and birth-right journey" that invited members of the African diaspora to celebrate "the cumulative resilience of all the victims of the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade who were scattered and displaced through the world in North America, South America, the Caribbean, Europe and Asia" (*About Year Of Return, Ghana 2019 – Year Of Return*, n.d.). The goal, as described by the program's official website, was to boost tourism to the country by posing Ghana as a key travel destination for the African diaspora and African Americans in particular. Furthermore, the program reflects Ghana's commitment to the United Nations' International Decade for People of Africa Descent (2015-2024), which aims to promote the contributions of people of African descent across the world and to promote and protect their human rights (*Joint UN Ghana Statement on International Day for People of African Descent – 2022 | United Nations in Ghana*, n.d.). The YoR program has widely been considered to be a success, with over one million tourists visiting the country to participate in various activities that celebrate "the resilience of the African spirit" (Whitaker, 2019). The program is representative of a larger movement within Africa to grow its tourism sector – a legacy of the neoliberal restructuring of many African countries since the 1980s to help stimulate the economy. (Pierre, 2013; J. Williams, 2015). In addition to increasing tourism dollars, the Ghanaian state has encouraged Africans outside of the continent and members of the Black diaspora to return to Ghana and invest in the nation. President Akufo-Addo makes this explicitly clear with the launch of the YoR's successor, the "Beyond the Return – A Decade of African Renaissance" (BtR) which seeks to "engage Africans in the diaspora and all persons of African descent more

positively in areas such as trade and investment co-operation, and skills and knowledge development" (Bureau, 2019). However, this same restructuring that has facilitated travel into Ghana has also, in a different way, facilitated the migration of Ghanaians out of the country. Ghana has produced a "new diaspora" (Van Hear, 2005) due to an increase in international out-migration as a result of the unemployment and other hardships that Ghanaians faced with the withdrawal of subsidies during structural adjustment (Anarfi & Ofusu-Mensah, 2018).

My parents are members of this new Ghanaian diaspora, separately emigrating to Ottawa, Canada in the mid to late 1980s to seek better education and employment opportunities and more stability for their future family. They are part of a generation of Ghanaians for whom the best indicator of success was having children who lived abroad (Akyeampong, 2000; Shipley, 2016). They raised my brothers and me to be both proud of our Canadian citizenship and our Ghanaian heritage and took any opportunity to travel with us to Ghana so we could connect with our homeland. As a result, Ghana has always been within my reach, and as a recent undergraduate preparing for the workforce, I considered the idea of taking my Canadian university credentials to find employment in Ghana. At the same time, however, my cousins who were born and raised in Accra, Ghana were looking for an opportunity to immigrate to Canada or the US for education and employment. Considering this dichotomy between those who chose to return and those who seek to migrate out of Ghana, I seek to understand what this contrasting movement reveals about the mobility of the Black diaspora. This thesis looks at the question of (im)mobility of the Black diaspora by focusing on the differing mobilities apparent during Ghana's YoR and BtR programs. Specifically, it examines the mobility experiences of members of the Black diaspora who have traveled or resettled - or are planning on traveling or resettling – in Ghana and Ghanaians who are thinking, planning, or have already traveled or resettled out of Ghana to gain

insight on conditions that have facilitated and/or constrained the mobilities of the Black diaspora. While these programs have engaged all members from the Black diaspora across the world, this thesis focuses on the experience of Black Americans as they haven been explicitly targeted by the state's promotion of the YoR.

Literature Review

The Black Diaspora

The tourism strategy and heritage narrative around the YoR was not directed to just anyone interested in learning about Ghana – its main goal was "to position Ghana as a key travel destination for African Americans and the African Diaspora" (*About Year Of Return, Ghana 2019 – Year Of Return*, n.d.). During the launch of the YoR campaign, Preside Akuffo-Addo stated: "In the year 2019, we open our arms even wider to welcome home our brothers and sisters in what will become a birthright journey home for the global African family"("Visit Ghana - Year of Return, Ghana 2019," n.d.). Similar expressions of respect and veneration of Africans outside of the continent were conveyed by Ghana's Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture: "Back home in Ghana, as you go through the slave dungeons, you will know that you are the Josephs and Josephines who were sold into slavery and have come back home" ("Visit Ghana - Year of Return, Ghana 2019," n.d.). Expressions of "family" and "home" are consistent with the commonly understood notion of diaspora as a group (or groups) of individuals dispersed from a homeland. Considering this, my study draws on anthropological literature on the diaspora to explore the diasporic consciousness that underlies the return phenomenon to Ghana.

In many cases, the territorial dimensions of a diaspora's "homeland" are clearly defined. Such is the case with the new Ghanaian diaspora, outlined above. However, for the Black

diaspora[1], the idea of the homeland is less apparent due to the traumatic experience of the Transatlantic slave trade (TAST) and colonialism that have produced both a diaspora and diasporic consciousness "in which identity is focused less on common territory and more on memory, or, more accurately, on the social dynamics of remembrance and commemoration"(Gilroy, 1994, p. 207). With this in mind, my study will understand diaspora as a "global mobile category of identification" (Axel, 2004, p. 27) in order to move away from the conceptual understanding of diaspora that centralizes dispersion from the homeland. Literature that decentralizes the homeland within diaspora studies can be seen as a challenge to autochthonous nationalism – claims of an original link to a territory – that underpins ideas of return that often happen at the expense of others (Boyarin & Boyarin, 1993). This idea of diaspora is intrinsically linked to a recognition of a designated homeland in which certain people can claim a right to return (Echeruo, 2010). Instead, anthropologists such as James Clifford (1994) have attempted to theorize diaspora by setting it apart from what it is not – setting it in opposition to formations such as the nation-state and indigeneity, as well as their static conceptualization within disciplinary work. Clifford advocates for an understanding of diaspora as a dispersed network of people who share a common historical struggle of displacement and a move away from approaches to the concept centering on a shared homeland. Furthermore, on his account, diasporas now engage in a political struggle to define their local as one that is not continuously focused on a dream of returning to said homeland. Similarly, Paul Gilroy's theoretical work on the Black diaspora and his concept of the *Black Atlantic* argues that there needs to be a focus on the "sameness within differentiation and the differentiation within

[1] Within both anthropological literature and colloquially, *Black* diaspora and *African* diaspora are often used interchangeably or together to describe the voluntary and involuntary dispersion of Africans and their descendants from the continents. For the purpose of this thesis, Black diaspora will generally be used to prioritize the experience of people who racially identify as Black.

sameness" (1994: 209) in order to draw proper attention to both the scattering process and what has been scattered. In doing so it helps to disturb ideas that the political and cultural identity of those who are scattered are indistinguishable due to their shared history by recognizing the social, economic, and political factors that produce differences. Both Clifford and Gilroy are attempting to situate the idea of the diaspora within the contested spaces between the local and the global, with the aim to de-stabilize and subvert linear notions of national identity by "valorizing an implicit conception of supranational kinship and an explicit discomfiture with nationalism" (Gilroy 1994: 210). The Ghanaian state draws on these productions of Black supranational kinship to promote the YoR and tourism to Ghana based on a shared heritage.

In addition to theoretical understandings of diaspora, scholars such as Carter (2010) and Essien (2014) have taken a more empirical approach to studying diaspora by drawing on metaphors of visibility to discuss how members of the African diaspora live in the realm of the invisible. As members of a diaspora, their contributions towards the countries in which they live are often rendered invisible due to various processes associated with the political economy of migration that often leaves racialized migrants disenfranchised. For members of the Black diaspora, anti-black racism further exacerbates feelings of invisibility and alienation (Akyeampong, 2000). The Ghanaian state drew on these feelings of alienation experienced by the Black diaspora to promote its tourism industry. As the chief executive of Ghana Tourism Agency, Akwasi Agyeman claimed: "We want to remind our kin over there that there is a place you can escape to. This is Africa" (Paquette, 2020, para. 7). The rhetoric of family and kinship that is continuously found in the states messages to the Black diaspora reflect the Ghanaians state's efforts to instill a sense of belonging for members of the diaspora and obscure their actual status as foreigners in the country (Schramm, 2020).

This thesis will also draw on work that inquires into racial identification and diasporic relations within the Ghanaian context. While the purpose of the YoR and BtR programs is to engage Africans in the diaspora and all peoples of African descent, the programs only seem to target those who racially identify as Black, not just African. Jemima Pierre (2013) challenges the idea that Ghanaians and other Africans do not have to attend to racial issues. In fact, she argues that understanding of race and Blackness play a key role in identity formation in urban Ghana. In doing so she draws attention to practices of race that are often ignored but can demonstrate a historical coeval with black communities in the diaspora, such as the Ghanaian state's "conscious affirmation of Blackness" (p. 9) that underlies its promotion of Pan-African unity. Similarly, Holsey (2013) highlights how Ghanaians tend to favour cosmopolitan expressions of Blackness. Consequently, Ghanaians tend to form connections with the Black diaspora by "embracing a positive black identity" that celebrates Pan-African intellectuals and freedom fighters along with Black celebrities (2013, p. 512). This can lead to tension with the older "roots-oriented" (*ibid, p.*508) forms of Blackness that underscore Ghana and the Black diaspora's shared history of the TAST which is generally attributed to Ghana's return movement projects. These texts will heavily inform my exploration of diasporic connections in Ghana on the basis of Blackness.

Mobility

This thesis also engages with literature on mobility in order to explore the mobile experiences of members of the Black diaspora and how they understand their historical mobility. Central to my study is the differential access members of the diaspora have to transnational and social mobility. Through the mobilities paradigm, which prioritizes the movements, global flows, changes, and ideas of placelessness that have come to define our social lives due to advances in technology and globalisation (Hannam et al., 2006), I seek to understand how different

capabilities of movement impacts the realities of Ghanaian citizens and the Black diaspora. In addition, this approach provides an analytical lens for examining the ways these movements are controlled and restricted (Cresswell, 2012). Mobility is not experienced equally, and as the ability to be mobile becomes more accessible, it also becomes increasingly apparent who is being excluded (Dalakoglou & Harvey, 2012).

For the purpose of this thesis, mobility will be understood as a relational concept. This notion, largely developed as an analytical tool by Peter Adey (2006, 2010) characterizes mobility as a result of a relation that either mobilizes – putting something into movement – something that is fixed or renders something into a fixed position. Adey (2010) notes that there are two ways of thinking about this relation. First in terms of how one kind of mobility always works with or involves another or more mobilities, and second, by considering how mobilities mediate our relations with others (beings and objects) and how we make sense of these relations. In other words, to understand something as mobile, something must be immobile. Mobility is therefore positioned with immobility and, depending on which position we occupy, mediates the way we address and engage with the world. This relational aspect of mobility also allows us to account for the fact that mobilities share similar trajectories which, in addition, "inevitably involve moving alongside and synchronizing with one another" (Adey, 2010, p. 27). Mobilities are a 'social activity' (p.23), and people move together, sharing similar paths and rhythms. It is within this context that I aim to examine movements to and from Ghana by the Black diaspora.

Scholars of transnationalism and migration have used the mobilities paradigm to highlight the politics of movement that underlies transnational movement. By prioritising the trans in transnationalism, the mobilities paradigm brings attention to the actual global movement that is occurring in these migrations, unveiling histories of mobilities: "trans denotes both

moving through space or across lines, as well as changing the nature of something" (Ong, 1999, p. 4). The experiences of return and travel explored in this thesis go beyond just an analysis of physical movement to make space how these journeys are understood to be transformative processes. As such, Barak Kalir (2013) argues that it's important to outline the histories of mobility of mobile subjects to better understand the level of significance placed on particular movements and how "processes of deterritorialization [can shape one's] understandings of place in the world" (p.235).

Furthermore, focusing on the trans in transnationalism also allows for conversations on how this movement is managed – what factors facilitate these transnational mobilities and how these mobilities differ. Adey (2010) notes that "mobility is frequently ideological, embedded within the most overt political discourse" (p. 107). In the context of contemporary return mobilities, the dominance of neoliberal politics – which celebrates "uninhibited mobility and circulation and acts to lubricate capital and people flows" (p. 85) has resulted in uneven accessibility to transnational mobility which is managed by institutions such as airports and border security. Airports have traditionally been treated as the moorings that mobilities exist in relation to, however, airports are not only spaces where various trajectories of travel collide, but they also play a key political role in managing mobilities in and out of the country. In the case of Ghana, Brenda Chalfin (2008) argues that notions of state sovereignty become embodied by customs officers as they police transnational Ghanaians (by birth or citizenship) in order to discipline its citizenry. She finds that the Kotoka airport in Accra is a key location for citizenship to be negotiated and reinforced as transnational Ghanaians are placed in opposition to foreign travellers who often pass customs with little trouble. In this case, supranational and transnational

flows are not treated as having the potential to undermine state authority as long as the state is able to control its own citizens.

The differential access to mobility observed at the Kotoka airport also reflects the integral relationship between transnational mobility and social mobility, which is central to my exploration of the mobilities observed in Ghana's return phenomenon. Scholars have noted that people who have better access to certain kinds of mobilities use these mobilities to both reproduce and reinforce unequal social relationships (Massey 1994; Adey 2010). Therefore, some people have more freedom of movement than others, which affords them certain socioeconomic and sociopolitical advantages. A key example is the benefit of having a passport from a rich western country compared to a passport from a country in the global south (Neumayer, 2006). Regardless of one's social or economic status, holding a Canadian or German passport allows a person a higher degree of movement than holding a passport from an African country. Moreover, anthropologist Mette Louisa Berg (2015) argues that "social mobility through schooling often leads to desires for geographic mobility, while geographic mobility is often pursued or desired in order to facilitate social mobility" (p.304). For example, the narrative around going 'abroad' for Africans is often intertwined with going to 'hustle' and secure economic success for oneself and one's family. Therefore, highlighting the ways transnational and social mobilities intersect can illuminate how the potential for movement is cultivated prior to migration. Overall, my thesis will examine the differing mobilities apparent during the YoR and BtR programs.

Methodology

Formal fieldwork for this study occurred between April 2020 to February 2021, with document and media analysis occurring until December 2022. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic

and global public health restrictions, attending Ghana's BtR events and physically meeting research participants was not possible, therefore my research consisted of a collection of field events that was mediated by information and communication technologies (ICTs). Furthermore, I chose to understand my fieldwork as a series of field events which Ahlin and Li (2019) have conceptualized as "any situation of ethnographic importance that is co-created among ethnographers, their study participants, and ICTs" (p.18). By conceiving of the field in this way, I seek to not only shift away from the notion of a single geographical site but also, acknowledge the significant role ICTs play in our highly mobile world. Through ICTs, I can conceive of my field site as a network connecting my location in Ottawa with my research participants in Accra, Chicago, Ann Arbor, and Tel Aviv. This study seeks to capture the differing mobility experiences of members of the Black diaspora who have traveled or resettled - or are planning on traveling or resettling – in Ghana and Ghanaians who are thinking, planning, or have already traveled or migrated out of Ghana. To gain insight into how contemporary Black travellers have narrated and understood their mobility, I performed archival, media (including social media), document, and other material analyses. This primarily consisted of reviewing written memoirs and accounts on return to Ghana and more recent online narratives from YouTube and blogs, that have been by contemporary migrants and travellers to share their travel experience. These online resources are public, easily accessible, and demonstrate a more recent method for recounting migration stories (Mylonas 2017). The data collected here also included narratives of return to Ghana that preceded the YoR, which was useful in providing an understanding of how return-mobilities have been told in the past and for contextualizing current narratives around the YoR. In addition, I drew on my own travel experience to Ghana in 2005, 2014, 2018, and 2022 to provide additional context to what I was observing on the Facebook groups and from the

experiences of my research participants. During my travels in Ghana, I have had the opportunity to attend some of the YoR events and visit key sites that are often visited by Black diasporans in Ghana. This made it easier for me to connect with what was being shared on the Facebook groups and with my informants despite the differences in our locations.

To connect with both members of the Black diaspora and Ghanaian citizens to explore their experiences of travel and return, I conducted participant observation, and interviews. Due to the transnational nature of this study, my ability to conduct participant observation in person was limited by my geographical location and the COVID-19 public health measures that restricted my mobility. Accordingly, participant observation was conducted primarily in three private Facebook groups where returnees and potential returnees interacted and shared their experiences of traveling and/or moving to Ghana. My status as a researcher was disclosed to the groups' administrators and moderators before I was accepted into the groups. Group members also included Ghanaians who were interested in the objectives of the YoR and BtR programs. These Facebook groups facilitated discussions between individuals living in Ghana and those who were interested in moving or visiting Ghana. This provided an opportunity for me to observe how returnees, potential returnees, and local Ghanaians interacted with each other concerning topics such as moving to Ghana, finding jobs, local events, and current affairs. While the discussions in the groups were highly engaging, the majority of the group members were passive participants which challenged my ability to examine how my key informants interacted with groups in their process of return. Instead, my observation of the groups was critical to learning about the general interests, motivations, and preoccupations of those who were interested in travelling or moving to Ghana. Participant observation was also supplemented with unobtrusive observation

and analysis of public social media posts on Twitter and posts on Instagram accounts concerned with topics related to returning to Ghana or the socio-economic conditions of life in Ghana.

Building on my participant observation, I conducted six semi-structured interviews – three interviews with members of the Black diaspora and three interviews with Ghanaian citizens. Black diaspora informants were recruited through a general interview request posted on the Facebook groups; the Ghanaian informants were recruited through my family members in Accra and through respondent-driven sampling whereby the recruits I knew personally shared my contact information within their own networks to allow for people who have similar attributes to reach me (Bernard, 2011). When recruiting members of the Black diaspora, I sought people who had moved to Ghana or were interested in moving or travelling to Ghana. On the other hand, Ghanaian citizens were recruited based on their interest in travel and migration more generally to gain more insight into their travel experiences and their views of the YoR. All informants were aware that they could remove their consent to participate in this study at any time and to further protect them, I have anonymized all data collected from informants by using pseudonyms and omitting usernames, photos, avatars, and any other identifying information.

In terms of recruits not personally known to me, I began by conducting epistolary interviews through Facebook messenger or WhatsApp. This allowed my informants to get comfortable with speaking with me and also gave them time to think over their answers and gain a better understanding of the research project (Debenham, 2007). When informants felt more comfortable, we then proceeded with a semi-structured interview via audio or video call. Interviews featured a loose framework of open-ended questions on their experiences with travel, their Identity, and their feelings about the YoR and BtR programs. The semi-structured interview style allowed for conversations to flow naturally into related but unpredicted topics while still

allowing for data comparison (Bernard, 2011). This also provided the opportunity for informants to ask me any questions about my own experiences living in Canada and travelling to Ghana to inform their own travels. While the epistolary interview style allowed my informants to feel more comfortable speaking with me, I also found that they did not always treat their conversation with me as a priority. This prolonged the interviews, and it often took additional prompting for them to respond to my questions. Furthermore, I faced challenges with following up with my informants due to changing contact information and my own comfort with initiating discussions post interviews.

While digital ethnographic methods allowed me to connect and reach this community of travellers in a period where travel was limited, I faced challenges with applying traditional ethnography in digital spaces, which limited my ability to collect data. As Nascimento et al. (2022) note, the sheer quantity of material circulating online at accelerated speeds can make it difficult to sufficiently interact with the material presented. Not only are members on these Facebook groups not interacting with posts or topics in a chronological order, but they are also participating in several conversations happening at the same time. Furthermore, the content produced in these groups are ephemeral (*ibid*). It is very common for posts or comments that I had bookmarked for further analysis or engagement to be deleted by its author. In fact, two of the Facebook groups I had joined have since changed their names. Things on social media are highly mobile and dynamic, which can significantly impact how online researchers employing traditional ethnographic methods are able to observe and collect data.

Additionally, I found it difficult to grapple with my position as a researcher while participating in these groups. The Facebook groups I joined were private, and I indicated my researcher status to the groups' administrators before I was accepted as a member. However,

most members of these groups did not know I was a researcher unless they saw my post requesting research participants. I also did not share that I was a researcher in the posts I was engaging with to prevent potentially derailing any conversations happening on the groups' posts. In a group where the membership was predominantly Black, I was keenly aware of the histories of surveillance that we face, so I understood that sharing that I was a researcher could make members uncomfortable or prevent them from interacting with me. However, by not continuously sharing that I was a researcher during my project, I couldn't help but feel like I was contributing to those experiences of surveillance. As a result, I found I was hesitant to participate in conversation that were controversial and/or produced a lot of conflicting feedback in the groups.

Thesis Outline

In Chapter One, I outline Ghana's relationship with the Black diaspora since the Independence era to demonstrate how the diaspora has become a key piece in the state's efforts to develop its tourist industry. Members of the Black diaspora played an integral role in Ghana's struggle for independence which laid the foundations for the state's continuing relationship with the diaspora. By highlighting the influence of Pan-Africanism and Kwame Nkrumah on Ghana's political development and the emergence of Ghana's slavery heritage, I argue that the nation's shifting relationship with the diaspora reflects the broader trajectory of Ghana as a nation and its position in the global political system. As a result, certain aspects of Ghana's history are prioritized in order to bolster its heritage tourism industry. Focusing on this process of historical selection, this chapter draws attention to the differing experiences of the YoR and BtR programs from the diaspora and local Ghanaian citizens.

In Chapter Two, I explore the role of Blackness in the development of the transnational connections underlying the YoR and BtR programs. Drawing on scholarly work on Afropessimism and transnational Blackness, I analyze different expressions of Blackness apparent in return narratives to Ghana and how Blackness acts as a pull factor for return. Despite differences in geopolitical contexts, being "Black" has been used to construct forms of supranational political collectivity as a means of building unity across the Atlantic and challenging experiences of anti-Black oppression occurring across the globe. However, different forms of Black cultural citizenship centering folk blackness and modern blackness have led to conflicting ideals between returnees and Ghanaian citizens. I argue that in recognition of this tension, the Ghanaian state was able to successfully appeal to both modern and folk Blackness to ensure the success of the YoR and BtR programs.

Lastly, Chapter Three shifts away from examining the conditions that have resulted in the success of the YoR and BtR to explore the mobilities underlying the return phenomenon to Ghana. Using a *roots* and *routes* approach, I analyze the motivations and processes of both return to Ghana and migration out of Ghana to learn more about the state of global Black mobility. Research informants in the process of returning to Ghana express a need to lay down roots, contrasting the experiences of Ghanaian citizens who are in search of better educational and work opportunities outside of Ghana. Consequently, these conflicting ideas of movement have resulted in feelings of unease and resentment between returnees and local Ghanaian communities. By highlighting this tension between roots and routes, I argue that the differing mobilities apparent in the phenomenon of return to Ghana reflect the (im)mobility of the broader Black diaspora.

Chapter 1 – Year of Return

"Ghana has always enjoyed a certain unique position because of our history, independence, Nkrumah, and the assertion of the black in Africa's liberation struggle as well as with blacks in general. "The Year of Return, Ghana 2019' is simply a rebranding." Former President Jerry John Rawlings quoted in Engmann (2021)

In September 2018, Ghana's President Nana Akufo-Addo formally introduced the "Year of Return, Ghana 2019" (YoR) program to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the first enslaved African in Jamestown, Virginia. During his announcement of the program at an event in Washington, D.C. he proclaimed: "Together on both sides of the Atlantic, we'll work to make sure that never again will we allow a handful of people with superior technology to walk into Africa, seize their people and sell them into slavery. That must be our resolution, that never again, never again!" (Tetteh, 2018, para. 16). The purpose of this initiative was to encourage members of the African diaspora to travel to not only connect and learn more about Ghana's slave heritage and cultural products but to also encourage them to settle and invest in the nation. The goal, as described by the program's official website, was to boost tourism to the country by posing Ghana as a key travel destination for the African diaspora and African Americans in particular. Throughout the year, the Ghana Tourism Authority (GTA), in collaboration with the Office of Diaspora Affairs, the PANAFEST Foundation, and the US-based Adinkra Group both organized and promoted events that highlighted the Black diaspora and its continued relationship with Ghana. These events included a wide range of themes from cultural festivals and homecoming tours to business and investment summits. The program ended with "December in GH", which included a series of both informative and leisure events that brought members of the diaspora and celebrities such as Naomi Campbell, Idris Elba, and Cardi B to attend luxurious parties in the nation's capital, Accra.

The program was considered a success, with 1.3 million tourists coming to the country in 2019 and, according to the Ghana Tourism Authority, an estimated injection of 3.3 billion dollars into the Ghanaian economy ("African Diaspora," 2020). It was considered so successful, that the Ghanaian government launched the "Beyond the Return" program to build on the momentum of the YoR and continue developing diaspora-focused tourist events for the next decade. The first year of BtR faced challenges due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, which caused many of the planned events to be postponed or occur virtually. Despite the impacts of the pandemic and limitations on international travel imposed by its government, Ghana still received over 300,000 international tourists in 2020, and over 600,000 in 2021("International Tourist Arrivals Grow by 75.59% in 2021 after Dipping Significantly in 2020," 2022).

This is not Ghana's first successful venture in generating tourism to the country by drawing on its connection to the diaspora. For example, the Ministry of Tourism hosted the 'The Joseph Project' in 2007, which was a series of events commemorating Ghana's 50th Independence anniversary and to "re-establish the African Nation as a nation of all its peoples" (Finley, 2006, p. 24). The events which comprised the Joseph Project were designed to encourage return travel to Ghana from the diaspora in the form of both tourists and investors by focusing on cultural education. The YoR was the Joseph Project rebranded, catering more towards leisure events such as music festivals and parties. The program appealed to a younger crowd of returnees and members of the African diaspora, with travellers aged 18 to 29 being the largest volume of tourists that arrived in Ghana in 2020 (Dokua Sasu 2022). As a result, the success of the YoR has had a lasting impact in establishing Accra as a party spot.

This chapter seeks to explore post-Independence Ghana's historical relationship with the Black diaspora to highlight the conditions that contributed to the success of programs like the

YoR. In doing so, this chapter draws attention to how the diaspora has been constructed as a viable source of economic growth in the country and how Ghana's relationship with the diaspora reflects its broader trajectory as a nation. First, I outline the influence of Pan-Africanism in Ghana's development as a nation-state and how it helped establish a special relationship between Ghana and the Black diaspora. Next, I explore how the post-Nkrumah state used this relationship in order to drive economic growth through heritagization projects that prioritized the memorialization of slavery. Finally, I focus more specifically on the program by presenting different perspectives from research participants, Ghana's return migrants, and Ghanaians to learn more about its impact and success.

Nkrumah's Pan-African Legacy

The concept of Pan-Africanism is difficult to narrow down to one definition and attempts to do so have either been incomplete or misleading (Esedebe, 1994, p. 110). A quick online search of the concept would likely yield results referring to the political unity of African nations or African inhabitants, which inadequately captures the many elements that comprise the concept. Pan-Africanism is multifaceted and has served as not only a socio-political movement, but also as a form of intellectual thought, and an ideology. It defies definition due to its transnational development and the lack of a single founder or political tenet (Ackah, 1999). W.E.B. Dubois viewed Pan-Africanism as a movement aimed at an "intellectual understanding and cooperation among all groups of African descent in order to bring about the industrial and spiritual emancipation of the Negro people" (Provenzo et al., 2019, p. 168). The term was coined in 1900 by Henry Sylvester Williams, but many have suggested that the concept and the ideas tied to it existed centuries before that. According to Walter Rodney, the essence of Pan-Africanism was born in the 15th century through the "common experience of exploitation and

oppression and the unity which the slaves forged, a commonality which could be operative when they moved against European exploitation and oppression" (Eze, 2013, p. 663). George Shepperson (1962) would say that this would be considered *pan-Africanism,* which refers to the group of movements and ideologies that center on the global experience of being Black. Such a conceptualization would then mean that historical slave rebellions and movements such as the Harlem Renaissance and Negritude could be understood through a Pan-African lens.

Considering Pan-Africanism's vast concept space, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to present a full and holistic description of it as both an ideology and a movement. Therefore, this section will focus on why the movement was attractive to Ghanaian elites and its lasting impact on the nation's political economy. More specifically, I will look at how the movement was understood by Ghana's independence leader Kwame Nkrumah, and how it laid the foundation for Ghana's relationship with the diaspora.

Kwame Nkrumah and his socialist Convention People's Party (CPP) came to power first in a shared government with the British in 1951 and then as an independent government in 1957. Founded in 1949, the CPP mobilized trade unionists, farmers, youth, and ex-servicemen "to fight relentlessly in all constitutional means for the achievement of full 'Self-Government Now' for the chiefs and people of the Gold Coast" (Padmore, 1953, p. 72). Significantly, Nkrumah's call for self-government was an extension of the demands made at the 1945 Pan-African Congress – where Nkrumah was a coordinating secretary – which called for the independence of colonial Africa. For Nkrumah, the independence of the Gold Coast was meaningless if other African countries were still under colonial rule (Thompson, 1969). His fight for freedom and unity had only just begun with the independence of the Gold Coast.

Nkrumah's Pan-African movement was essentially *decolonial* – going beyond simply replacing direct colonial administrators with the local elite. Decoloniality requires the dismantling of asymmetrical relations of power in order to build a society free from the racial, gender, and geo-political hierarchization instilled during colonization (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). Nkrumah's decolonial philosophies were grounded in ideologies of African unity, anti-imperialism, and scientific socialism (Ahlman, 2017). His ideas of African unity were realized in the establishment of the Organisation of African Unity in 1963.[2] At the founding of the OAU, Nkrumah famously declared that "we must unite now or perish" in order to end the colonialist and neocolonialist domination of Africa (*"We Must Unite Now or Perish" - President Kwame Nkrumah*, 2013). In order for Africa to be independent and free, it needed to be free of all Western dependencies.[3] As a result, Nkrumah's Ghana not only gave support to those fighting against colonial rule in Africa but also to any groups or political parties that opposed pro-Western or reactionary governments.

The Pan-African ideal of unity also demonstrates a significant move outside of a European and white supremacist structure. In a context in which colonial strategies of divide and rule triumphed, promotions of African unity contradicted the divisions created by Africa's colonial powers. Pan-Africanist notions of historical unity of the African experience and collective Black identity helped to ground Black people's struggle for freedom and self-determination (Eze, 2013). What made Nkrumah such a prominent Pan-African figure and independence leader is that his ideals of unity extended beyond the continent to include the

[2] Nkrumah was originally calling for a United States of Africa at the assembly, however he failed to garner enough support. The OAU was a much looser and weaker intergovernmental organization.
[3] Interestingly, this did not mean that Nkrumah was against cooperating and collaborating with Western nations. For him, the nature of the global system would not allow for that. However, he was vehemently against Western nations wielding their economic power to encroach on African political sovereignty by having newly independent African states be dependent on the West for economic resources (Ahlman, 2017).

Black diaspora. In fact, scholars argue that Nkrumah's earlier international travels and education had a significant impact on his actions as President (Afari-Gyan, 2018; Emiljanowicz, 2019).

While studying in the United States in the 1930s, Nkrumah became exposed to – and deeply inspired by – the ideas of Marcus Garvey, the co-founder[4] of the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League (UNIA-ACL) of which Nkrumah was a member (Afari-Gyan, 2018; Getachew, 2019). Garvey founded the UNIA-ACL in 1914[5] as a response to what he viewed as "the universal disunity existing among the people of the Negro or African race" (Garvey qt. in Esedebe, 1994, p. 56) a disunity he deemed dangerous to the future welfare of Black people globally. Garveyism, his philosophy, rested on the idea that "only through the international, intraracial, and monolithic cooperation could African people improve their political and economic existence" (Johnson, 1998, p. 125). Compared to the prevailing ideologies of assimilation and *accommodationism* of Booker T. Washington, Garveyism gained its followers due to its appeal to racial pride and its self-help nature: "Garvey exalted everything black and exhorted Negroes to be proud of their distinctive feature. African characteristics were not marks of shame and inferiority to be camouflaged" (p.125). Understandably, this notion of racial pride appealed to Nkrumah, who had felt racial domination both through his experience of colonialism and his movement as a Black traveller. In addition, Garvey's "African Zionism" called for a strong African nation where "Negroes everywhere would automatically gain the power and respect enjoyed by those protected by nation-state status" (p. 127) demonstrating a path to improving the political and material conditions of both Africans on the continent and in the diaspora. As controversial as it was at the time, Garveyism

[4] Along with Amy Ashwood Garvey, his first wife, who's role in the development of the UNIA-ACL is often overlooked.
[5] First established in Jamaica. The New York chapter was established in Harlem in 1917.

allowed Nkrumah to begin to articulate a demand for national independence in Ghana that was based on black nationalism (Getachew, 2019). He was inspired by the UNIA-ACL to develop the C.P.P. as a mass party that can be used as an instrument of African liberation and he featured a Black star on Ghana's new flag as a tribute to Garvey (Ture, 1998).

Garvey was Nkrumah's biggest inspiration, but it was George Padmore and W.E.B. Dubois who arguably had the most direct influence on the development of his Pan-African policies. Nkrumah met Padmore in London in 1945, where he was studying law, and spent two years working closely with him searching for solutions to Africa's problems through a socialist and anti-colonial lens (Afari-Gyan, 2018). Padmore had turned towards Pan-Africanism around 1934 when he became disillusioned with the Communist Party of the US for not being interested in the problems facing Black people and the specific forms of imperialism occurring in Africa. His experience in these largely non-Black communist spaces led him to the conclusion that "colonial problems could be settled only by colonial peoples" (p. 89). As a result, Padmore devoted his efforts to the Pan-African cause, partnering with Nkrumah[6] to organize the 1945 Pan-African Congress in Manchester. With them at the helm, the Congress embodied a radical Black internationalism and demanded: "Black African autonomy and independence, so far and no further that it is possible in this 'One World' for groups and people to rule themselves subject to inevitable world unity and federation" (Getachew, 2019, p. 73). Once Nkrumah returned to Ghana, Padmore became a propagandist of Nkrumah's Gold Coast revolution and an advisor to the CPP.

[6] Along with Peter Milliard, Jomo Kenyatta, and Peter Abrahams

Nkrumah initially met W.E.B. Du Bois during his studies in the US, but it wasn't until the Manchester Congress that he became drawn to him and his activism (James, 2022). Du Bois' interest in the Pan-African ideology can be considered a response to what he called "double consciousness" experienced by American Black folk – conflicting feelings of being both Black and American and having to measure "one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (Du Bois, 1996, n.p.). Therefore, Du Bois turned toward the shared ethno-racial identity between Africans and the African diaspora. He found that there was a growing brotherhood among Black people throughout the world, united in the understanding that "most men in this world are coloured" (Du Bois, 2014, p. 242) and therefore they should have a say in its future. Du Bois played a key role in the first four Pan African congresses, which he hoped would "bring the Negroes of the world into a great international pressure group" (Johnson, 1998, p. 94). For him, Pan-Africanism was not just a means of expressing an ethnopolitical consciousness, but also a means of establishing the Black diaspora as a global actor.

Nkrumah's relationship with Padmore and Du Bois played a significant role in his return to Ghana in December 1947 (Afari-Gyan, 2018) and his relationship with them and the larger Black diaspora was integral to his political practices. Likewise, Ghana under Kwame Nkrumah's leadership also occupied significant space amongst the Black diaspora. When Ghana gained independence from Britain in 1957, many African Americans, Caribbeans, and Europeans attended the celebrations. In addition to George Padmore and Shirley Graham Du Bois – who represented both herself and her husband whose passport had been revoked – countless Black leaders, including Martin Luther King Jr., were present. Furthermore, members of the diaspora held positions in the C.P.P. including Padmore who served as Nkrumah's Special advisor on African Affairs where he carried out policies for the emancipation of African countries still

under colonial rule. His role required him to work with nationalist movements and political parties across the continent which would have been seen as an inappropriate and politically incorrect activity for African civil servants to engage in at the time (Ahlman, 2017).

Ghana's state development carried a transnational character based on the Pan-African ideologies that emerged from Kwame Nkrumah's transnational travels. As Pierre (2013) notes, Ghana's postcolonial institutions "were produced through recognition of the need to maintain the links between African politics, emerging nation-states, and the Black diaspora" (p. 46). Nkrumah and those who influenced him all found unity in their similar experiences of racial domination. In fact, Pan-Africanism's tenets and supporters often exceeded racial unity by pointing to the connection between slavery in the New World and African colonialism. Du Bois argued that "international racial hierarchy facilitated the domination of black and colored colonial subjects through alien rule. And this system of domination, according to Dubois, ought to be understood as a form of enslavement. The colonial subject could "justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery" for the benefit of the "white people of the world" (Getachew, 2019, p. 80). Similarly, Nkrumah argued that the "myth of color inferiority" was born as a consequence of the slave trade, which then was used to facilitate the "despoliation and continued exploitation [of the African continent] under advanced forms of colonialism and imperialism" (Nkrumah, 1970, p. 1). Therefore, when Nkrumah was calling for a United Africa as a response to Western imperial domination, it has always been clear that this included the Black diaspora.

The Commodification of Pan-Africanism under Rawlings

Despite Nkrumah leaving a lasting legacy on both Ghana and the Pan-African movement, the 1966 coup that ousted him also had an impact on Ghana's relationship with the diaspora and Pan-Africanism. The National Liberation Council, which led the coup with support from the

CIA, opposed Nkrumah's declarations of one-party rule and radical socialist ideologies, which it felt hampered the country's relations with Western liberal democracies (Gebe, 2008). Since Nkrumah closely tied his Pan-Africanism to socialism, by rejecting socialism the new political elite were also rejecting Pan-Africanism. Consequently, Ghana no longer occupied a position as an advocate for the Black diaspora. While the diaspora continued to visit Ghana in the 1960s and 1970s, the diaspora community within Ghana was significantly weakened (Pierre & Shipley, 2003).

It wasn't until Jerry John Rawlings took power in 1981 that Ghana returned to Nkrumah's ideologies "to advocate for a renewed form of Pan-Africanism." (Pierre, 2013, p. 164). This expression of Pan-Africanism was most significantly used to stimulate the economy through tourism, reflecting Ghana's shift towards a more western inspired form of economic development. Instead of focusing on improving the political and material realities of members of the Black diaspora, there was now a focus on fostering symbols of unity across the Atlantic. This section will explore this shift by taking a look at how the Ghana Tourism Board (now the Ghana Tourism Authority) worked to cultivate a relationship with the diaspora through tourism. Here we will see how Pan-Africanism materialized in a form very different from Nkrumah's imagination of it.

The post-Nkrumah independence era was riddled with political and economic instability. Both the second and third Republics were short-lived, and the country was under military rule for the majority of the time between 1966 to 1993. Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings led a revolutionary coup on June 4, 1979, to depose the Supreme Military Council, accusing the regime of corruption and neocolonial economic dependency. Rawlings acted as Head of State for only 112 days before he allowed for already scheduled elections to move forward and Dr. Hilla

Limann of the People's National Party (PNP) was elected. However, despite Limann and the PNP's Nkrumahist values, the government's policies were considered economically moderate and thus too weak to resolve years of corruption and neocolonial dependency. According to Rawlings, the level of corruption – what Ghanaians referred to as *kalabule* – and impoverishment "had created a sense of wretchedness and despair amongst our people" (Engmann, 2021, p. 724). The worsening economic crisis led to Rawlings taking power again in 1981 as the Chairman of the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC).

When Rawlings took power, Ghana was approaching bankruptcy due to a multitude of reasons. First, like many developing nations in the 1970s, Ghana heavily borrowed money to fund state expenditures, but rising interest rates resulting from the 1979 oil crisis left them defaulting on their loans. This was further exacerbated by Cold War tensions that led many non-aligned nations, such as Ghana, with few options to seek aid without consequences. Rawlings claimed that due to the neocolonialist presence in Ghana that further developed under Limann's rule, it could not seek economic assistance from the Eastern Bloc nor Libya as a result of Limann's boycott of the Gadaffi led state (Engmann, 2021). Initially, the PNDC introduced economic reforms to rectify the nation's deficit spending, however, they were largely undesirable to the general public. These reforms increased state control over the economy, including enforcing price controls, and state control over export-import trade. These reforms were not sufficient to improve the economy – in fact, many would argue that the policies worsened the economy – and left Ghana desperately needing to obtain foreign aid. Despite attempts to rid the nation of its neocolonial dependency, Rawlings claims that the PNDC's only option was to turn to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund's (IMF) Economic Recovery Program' and – most notably – the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) (Engmann, 2021). The introduction

of SAPs required the state to go against the PNDC's socialist-leaning policies in order to privatise national projects, implement austerity measures, and reduce barriers to foreign investment. For the IMF and the world powers, this process would allow nations such as Ghana to stimulate their economy through rapid industrialization.

Ghana's Heritagization Projects

As part of the PNDC's effort to stimulate the economy, Rawlings initiated the development of the heritage tourism industry based on the transatlantic slave trade and Ghana's Pan-Africanist ideals (Engmann, 2019). In doing so, he was able to reconcile the international agencies' demands for financial liberalization with the PDNC's own Pan-African ideologies as it pursued economic and social development. Many scholars have investigated processes of heritagization to understand how and why heritage narratives are built and what purpose they serve. In particular, they have focused on the social and cultural construction of heritage and its embodiment in the present (J.-K. Park et al., 2018). Scholars such as Bessier (1998) have noted how the concept of collective or social memory is central to both the social and physical construction of heritage. There is a certain amount of memory work that is needed to build a common legacy which can be used to "[preserve] the cultural and social identities of a given community, through more or less ritualized circumstances" (p. 26). Before heritage can be built, decisions, whether conscious or unconscious, need to be made on what deserves to be preserved based on the narrative purpose of heritagizations.

In the case of Ghana, the formation of a social memory for its colonial castles and forts served the purpose of privileging the diaspora's ties to Ghana, using the country's history to develop a large-scale museum exhibit. This exhibit is centered around the slave castles in the neighbouring towns of Elmina and Cape Coast. The Elmina Castle was built by the Portuguese in

1482-1486, making it the oldest European structure on the coast of West Africa (Jordan, 2007). Initially a church and administrative post, the Castle was expanded by the Dutch in the 1600s to become a slave trading point until the second half of the 1800s. On the other hand, the Cape Coast Castle was initially a Portuguese trading post in 1555 before it changed hands multiple times between the Dutch, the local Fetu people, and the British as they battled for its key trade location (Jordan, 2007). It finally came under British rule in 1664 where it served many roles, including the West African headquarters for the Royal Africa Company, the British Governor's office, and most importantly, a "key departure point from which the British slave trade branched out to the Caribbean, England, and the United States" (Jordan, 2007, p. 53).

The Elmina and Cape Coast Castles were preserved as historic landmarks to generate more tourism to the country. Approximately $90 million was invested to implement the Natural Resource Conservation and Historic Preservation Project in the early 1990s to help depict what local tour guides call Ghana's "slave story" (Reed, 2015, p. 40). After Ghana's independence and before preservation, both Castles held many roles: the Elmina Castle housed a secondary school, offices of the Ghana Education Service and District Assembly, and a police-training academy, while the Cape Coast Castle first served as a local prison before housing governmental offices such as the Ghana Museums and Monuments Board (Jordan, 2007).

In refashioning Ghana's forts and castles as sites of sacrality and pilgrimage, Ghana's government and other actors were drawing on their potential to elicit strong memories and emotions amongst a particular group. Initially, the conservation of the castles and forts was intended to preserve the architectural style of European trading posts in Africa (Reed, 2015), however, building on the slavery narrative was what was needed to drive the tourism industry. The other historical uses for the castles were not deemed "sacred" and therefore not included in

each castle's narrative. This process highlights Schwartz's (1982) argument that the way we preserve memory is unequal. While with certain events of the past "we remain morally indifferent; other events are commemorated, i.e., invested with an extraordinary significance and assigned a qualitatively distinct place in our conception of the past" (p. 377). Certain aspects of the slave trade and Ghana's castles and forts along its coast are deemed unimportant or are overlooked in favour of other events considered sacred to the heritage sites' audience. For example, during my tour of the Elmina castle in 2014, the tour guide would share the history of each room, but only as it related to European trade or the torture the Black Africans suffered within its walls, mentioning nothing of the Ghanaian society it was a part of at the time. As a tourist, one would leave with an understanding of how the Europeans and colonial officers used the castles juxtaposed with the horrific experience of those enslaved. Excluded from this narrative was any information related to the Ghanaian society that surrounded the Castle. One does not learn of the Fetu people who lived outside its walls and their relationship to the castles and the people in them, nor about how the castles were used before it was abolished. Essentially, one does not learn what these Castles mean to the Ghanaian people. In crafting this narrative, our guide had effectively separated the history of the Castle from its local environment outside of its use during the transatlantic slave trade, almost as if it existed in a bubble. Constructing the narrative in such a way was a deliberate choice that reflected who was funding the castle's restoration projects and the dominant discourses surrounding them. "For Americans, the story of the slave trade carried much more meaning as a point of identification than any other uses the castles had seen, and so they were defined as slavery heritage sites." (Reed, 2015, p. 40).

Furthermore, many Ghanaians prefer not to speak about slavery publicly, not only because within the nationalist imaginary, the country's own historical role in the slave trade

reflects badly on the contemporary nation, but because many Ghanaian families have histories of domestic slavery that they feel ashamed of. According to Holsey (2008), by sequestering slavery within public discourse as a phenomenon that happened to people in the region and not a phenomenon that they actively participated in well beyond the abolishment of the trade, Ghanaians attempt to guard their personal histories against stigmatization and creating "respectable histories and thereby make an argument for their inclusion in the global order on better terms" (p.4). For many Ghanaians, slavery is not something that should be recognized or seen as "sacred," which therefore leads to tension between local communities around these heritage sites and the people who come to visit them. However, this disinclination towards centering Ghana's slave history in the public discourse might also help to explain why the state chose to develop its slavery heritage with a focus on the forts – not because these sites are 'sacred' but because it saw the economic advantage in driving the tourism industry by developing these 'blackspots' (Rojek, 1993) in national history. At the time, there were already existing slavery narratives that were dominant among Black Americans thanks to the success of Alex Haley's book (1976) and television series *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* which is a fictional account of an enslaved Gambian and his descendants in America based on Alex Haley's exploration of his family history. These dominant narratives of drawing a connection to an ancestral homeland contribute to what Reed conceptualizes as *memoryscapes* – "the ideas, images, and embodiment associated with the past that are selective in nature and subject to the dialectics of remembering and forgetting over time and space" (2015, p. 13). These memoryscapes are not only significant to the descendants of Africans enslaved in the TAST, but also second-generation Ghanaian immigrants like myself, who have encountered these narrative during our western education. Interestingly, while I had been to Elmina multiple times with my

family, I was only able to convince my mother to take me to the Castle when I visited Ghana in 2018. She had done all her schooling in Elmina but had always been wary of the castle as she was told it was haunted. Considering this, the Ghanaian state was perhaps astute in developing the country's slave heritage in a way that draws on these memoryscapes in order to drive tourism to the country and help develop the economy. As a result of these heritage projects, the tourism sector became Ghana's third highest foreign exchange earner behind cocoa and gold and the total number of visitors to the castles rose from 7 900 in 1990 to 172 000 in 2011 (Adu-Ampong, 2019; Reed, 2015).

Divergent Experiences of the Year of Return

Both Ghanaian and non-Ghanaian participants expressed mixed feelings about the YoR program during their interviews. I connected with Ekua, from the private Facebook Group titled "African Americans in Ghana," who had moved to Ghana in October 2020 from the United States to open an American soul food restaurant. Her migration to Ghana during the YoR was just a coincidence, as she had began planning her move prior to the announcement of the YoR. She did not attend any YoR events nor does she plan to attend the BtR events as she felt that "the people who run those places are only in it for the money." Instead, she found it more meaningful to assimilate and immerse herself in the local communities outside of heritage spaces. Contrastingly, Ama,who also connected with me via the same Facebook group, shared that she felt more positively about the YoR because it portrayed Ghana as a welcoming country: "It's a comfortable feeling to know that I am not alone with my ideas. So many are

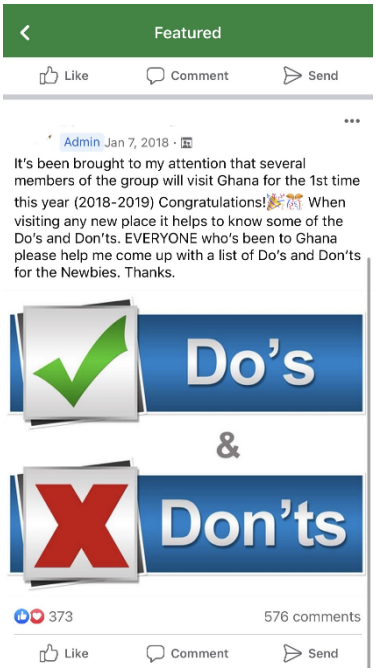

Figure 1: *Screenshot captured by author of featured post in a private year of return Facebook group.*

returning, and it is exciting." Similar to Ekua, Ama's move coinciding with the YoR was a coincidence, as she was in the process of moving from the United States to be with her fiancé in Ghana. Despite having different views on the program, both participants interacted with various Facebook groups to connect with other Black people who were trying to participate in Ghana's YoR and BtR programs and shared the same views of Africa as a homeland. Through the groups, they are able to discuss their plans to move or travel to Ghana, ask for advice and recommendation, and to learn more about what they expect when they get to Ghana (See Fig. 1). A common discussion topic was why members felt travelling or moving to Ghana was the right choice for them, and members often compared their experience in Ghana – both good and bad – to their experience in their place of origin, Participation in these groups suggest that non-Ghanaian participants who were interested in visiting or moving to Ghana viewed their return as being more significant than the program, yet they still found themselves contributing to the success of the program in their return process whether they intended to or not.

Ghana's YoR and BtR programs have been successful in exploiting a return movement within the Black Diaspora that was developed outside of the country. In addition to memoryscapes of return existing for decades, many Black leaders and celebrities such as Barack Obama, Steve Harvey, and Kendrick Lamar have documented their experience during return visits to Ghana and visits to Cape Coast or Elmina Castle. Even the increased depictions of slave-era US or Jim Crow US, such as *12 Years of Slave* (2013) and *Mudbound* (2017), indicate that descendants of the enslaved Africans are still preoccupied with the atrocities their ancestors experienced in the Americas, which pushes them to connect with their forgotten heritage. Ghana's slave monuments and Pan-African events and programs made use of these memoryscapes in order to establish the country as a destination for them to connect with their

heritage. Some consider these programs to be opportunistic as people who are interested in engaging in Ghana and learning more about the regions their ancestors were forcefully removed from can not do so without interacting with the programs' mandate. So, while some do not trust the Ghanaian government or do not want to see the elite profit from their experience, they still hold Ghana in a special space in their personal journeys that exceeds the programs themselves. In this regard, the YoR and Ghana's efforts to attract diasporans to the country just helped facilitate a process already believed to be necessary. As one traveller interviewed by Ghanaian Youtuber Wode Maya mentions, participating allowed him to experience the culture and the community in Ghana. When asked by Wode Maya what message he would send to Americans not interested in travelling back to Africa, he said that they have an obligation to their ancestors to come back to Ghana and go to the place they were never meant to return to – the Point of No Return – and prove their captors wrong (WODE MAYA, 2019).

Interestingly, while one of the purposes of the programs was to bring the diaspora and Ghanaians together, the programs have led to divisions between tourists, returnees, and Ghanaians both in the country and abroad. While my Ghanaian interlocutors expressed that they believed the programs were a good thing because they allowed the Black diaspora to connect with their heritage, they seemed indifferent about participating in the events themselves. In addition to not wanting to spend money on the programs' leisure events, they also expressed not feeling connected enough to the programs to see the purpose of attending the free educational events. As a result, they missed out on opportunities to connect with returnees in meaningful ways.

Furthermore, many local citizens and Ghanaians abroad have critiqued the impact that the programs have had on the community. First, tourism development and foreign investment resulting from the YoR and the BtR have largely been focused on areas in the south, primarily along the coast but only as far north as the central region, because it had the most potential for a quick return on investment. The increased concentration of economic development in the southern private sector has resulted in increased socioeconomic disparities between the North and South (Adu-Ampong, 2019). Even within the southern cities, the influx of tourists from the YoR has contributed to an increase in the cost of living for local citizens, with local Ghanaians expressing frustration on how they are being priced out of living in Accra (See Fig.2).

Figure 2: *Screenshot capture by author of twitter thread expressing frustration on rising prices in Accra.*

The BtR program seeks to create opportunities for people of African descent to connect with the motherland and contribute towards Ghana's vision of building a new Africa. They include seven pillars that outline how they plan to meet this objective, and all are centered on driving tourism and investment to Ghana by showcasing its commercial value ("About Us," n.d.). However, the fifth pillar which seeks to "foster greater community spirit to promote a new National Consciousness" conflicts with the central idea of the others, as the community they seek to foster appears to be more symbolic than the Pan-Africanist sentiments of Nkrumah's era. The methods in which the diaspora has been engaged in these programs have not been geared toward improving the political and material conditions of Black people everywhere. Instead, the commercial aspects have been emphasized to increase the number of foreign dollars in the

Ghanaian economy. As mentioned above, Nkrumah was always vocal that the Black diaspora should invest in Ghana, but the investment resulting from the YoR and BtR program seems to be too superficial to make the impact it needs to build this "New Africa."

Conclusion

By highlighting Ghana's continued interactions with the Black diaspora, this chapter has outlined the conditions ensured that the YoR's broadly successful uptake among the diaspora it targeted. First, in his quest for independence, Nkrumah successfully drew a connection between Ghana and the diaspora in a way no other African country has been able to do. His political vision of an independent Ghana extended beyond its borders in the way it afforded space for the Black diaspora and other Africans. Consequently, the diaspora left a lasting impression on Ghana's independence narrative. Second, with global bipolarity firmly entrenched due to the Cold War, Rawlings was able to successfully utilize this relationship with the Black diaspora to generate tourism to the country and stimulate Ghana's struggling economy. By launching heritage projects to preserve Ghana's colonial castles and forts, Rawlings and the Ghana Tourism Board were able to make use of existing memoryscapes of the homeland within Black consciousness to successfully generate tourism based on the slave trade. While other West African countries, such as Senegal and Nigeria have colonial castles and forts that played a role in the Transatlantic slave trade, none have been as successful as Ghana in preserving this history as a means of generating tourism, emphasizing Nkrumah's important groundwork during the Independence era.

Finally, by once again leveraging memoryscapes of Africa as a homeland, the YoR and BtR programs brought the process of return within reach for many members of the Black diaspora. It helped them envision their journey and connect them to like-minded diasporans who

sought to make the journey as well. However, despite the success of the programs in increasing tourism, their commercial-focused mandates have harmed local communities, challenging their stated aim of fostering community spirit.

Chapter 2 – Blackness and the Year of Return

"Ghana is, in a lot of ways, the center for global Blackness and has, over the years, become just this destination for Black folks, not just in the US., but in the islands and in the U.K. to spend time and to create relationships" Chance the Rapper quoted in The Hollywood Reporter (2022)

As discussed in the previous chapter, Ghana was able to successfully draw on its historical connection with the Black diaspora in its YoR and BtR programs. However, further attention needs to be given to the case of Black diasporan returnees and what sets them apart from other diasporan communities. Unlike cases of return mobilities, such as those involving members of the Irish diaspora returning to Ireland (Basu, 2004), or members of the Chinese diaspora returning to China (Lew & Wong, 2005), Black diasporan returnees to Ghana do not largely return to Ghana because of an identified genealogical connection to it. This is because the disruptive diaspora-making phenomenon of the TAST made it virtually impossible for many descendants of enslaved Africans to learn the history of their ancestors. Instead, the Black diaspora metaphorically traces its genealogy to the Door of No Return – the last point of contact with Africa and the marking point of the *Black* diaspora. In this chapter, I am interested in interrogating the role of *Blackness* in driving the return movement to Ghana. How is Blackness understood by Black populations across the Atlantic in a way that allows them to form connections in Africa? How has Ghana come to be understood as "a centre for global Blackness" and how do we account for differences in the way Blackness is understood and performed? By seeking to understand the forms of Blackness at work in the return movement to Ghana, I hope to elucidate the ties between race and mobility and how Blackness can be seen as a uniting force in these return journeys.

First, this chapter will look at how Blackness has been conceptualized by Black scholars and writers in an effort to understand ourselves and our place in society. Second, I will explore

the concept of citizenship and its impact on understandings of Blackness across national borders. I will then move on to examine how different expressions of Blackness conflict in the Ghanaian context. The chapter concludes by foregrounding how the Ghanaian state has been able to draw on different expressions of Blackness to ensure the success of the YoR and BtR programs.

Conceptualizing Blackness

"Black" is defined by Merriam-Webster as "of or relating to various population groups of especially African ancestry often considered as having dark pigmentation of the skin but in fact, have a wide range of skin colours" and "of or relating to Black people and often especially to African American people or their culture" (*Definition of BLACK*, n.d.). Within social sciences, the Black race is generally understood to be a socially constructed category for people of African descent. Regardless of its social construction, the creation of the "Black" race has had significant consequences on those considered to be Black and has structured their position within multiracial societies.

Many Black scholars and writers have sought to provide an ontological understanding of Blackness and what it means to *be* Black. Arguably, the theorist with the most significant impact on the conceptualization of Blackness is the anticolonial Martiniquan political philosopher, Franz Fanon. In *Black Skin, White Masks* (2008), Fanon conducts an analysis of the Black psyche and the conditions that have led to the oppressed identity of Black people existing in a white world. According to Fanon Blackness is produced as ontologically inferior to whiteness, as the entire existence of the idea of being Black, African, or descended from Africans is "the constructions of Whiteness with its creation of the anti-Black world and, as a result, to construct Blackness not only as the other but also as the very basis of lack and deficit of Whiteness" (Sithole, 2016, p. 36). In other words, the construction of self for Black folks is inherently tied to their position as a

subject within white society. For Fanon, this racial hatred has pushed Black people into an ontological lack – a zone of non-being. This zone does not just represent a feeling of inferiority, but rather a feeling of non-existence since ontology "does not permit us to understand the being of the Black man" (Fanon, 2008, p. 82). These powerful falsehoods and constructions of race have structured the reality of black people across the globe – pushing them to the ontological margins: "For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man" (Fanon 2008: 90). Their access to full humanity – to a full sense of self – is restricted by society's white parameters, putting them in the position of justifying their existence. Furthermore, the notions of freedom, justice, and equality that black people so desperately sought in these contexts "apply only to Whiteness as a category of being, and being propagated as mere extensions of Black subjects, who are nevertheless excluded" (Sithole, 2016, p. 16). This argument is in line with Du Bois concept of double consciousness that was highlighted in the last chapter. To be Black, especially in the West, means that you occupy the space of the "other." Your sense of being is developed in the context of what you lack compared to those who hold power. Therefore, as a Black person you not only face oppression, but your identity is born from said oppression.

Sociologist Orlando Patterson's analysis of slavery and social death is another key ontological analysis of Black subjectivity. According to Patterson, to be a descendant of enslaved Africans means to experience certain degrees of "social death":

> Not only was the slave denied all claims on, and obligations to, his [sic] parents and living blood relations but, by extension, all such claims and obligations on his more remote ancestors and on his descendants. He was truly a genealogical isolate. Formally

> isolated in his social relations with those who lived, he was also culturally isolated from the social heritage of his ancestors. (1982, p. 5)

This isolation left the enslaved socially worthless and powerless, effectively a nonentity in society. Any social bonds were only deemed legitimate if validated by their masters. Furthermore, once slaves were afforded legal rights, there was nothing prohibiting slave masters and their kin from continuing to hold the same space in their imaginations. Therefore, while legally free, within social imagination the formerly enslaved were still property (Holland, 2000). Not only does this highlight how white society regards former slaves and their descendants, but this also has profound physical and psychological impacts on how descendants of the enslaved view themselves.

Despite not considering himself an Afropessimist, Patterson's idea of social death is a key point of departure for Afropessimist thought on Black (non)being. For instance, Frank Wilderson's theories on Black being build on Patterson's conceptualization and the idea that to *be* is not to be a slave (L. Park, 2020, p. 36). For Wilderson, if the Black position was developed from the position of a slave, there is no distinction between *Blackness* and *Slaveness* as the Black position "is predicated on modalities of accumulation and fungibility, not exploitation and alienation" (2010, pp. 58–59). Here he draws on Saidiya Hartman (1997) to argue that Blackness cannot be seen as a transformative position when those occupying the position are commodities that can be owned and traded – that is not a distinction that can be escaped. The oppressor and the oppressed do not occupy different sides of a coin given that the oppressed in this situation are not even seen to be human. Both Wilderson and Hartman attempt to demonstrate how the unique form of domination experienced by survivors of the TAST and their descendants still structures the position of Black people in Western societies today. For instance, Hartman (1997) argues that

emancipation and the slave's legal transition from object to subject did not "liberate the former slave from his or her bonds but rather sought to replace the whip with the compulsory contract and the collar with a guilty conscience" (p. 6). Despite equality under the law, the idea of Black inferiority still persisted in the minds of the public and therefore the recognition of their humanity licensed other forms of involuntary servitude to control the free black population that resulted in the "persistent production of blackness as abject, threatening, servile, dangerous, dependent, irrational, and infectious" (1997, p. 6).

Wilderson and Hartman's theoretical work draws inspiration from Hortense Spillers' "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" (1987) in which she analyses this ontological lack through a Black feminist lens. Spillers argues that the journey from Africa to the Americas that enslaved peoples were subjected to was "a process of ungendering where Black bodies are erased of past gender-social identities and made into flesh" (Pinto, 2017, p. 27). In contrast to the "body" which exists in the social world to a normal (white) person who has access to their genealogy, "flesh is the sentient object manifest as the slave—she who can be a literal belonging of a person proper and thus never can belong to her-self, much less to a genealogy or to the body poli-tic" (Shange, 2019, p. 8). The "theft of the body" that occurred during the middle passage reduced both the female and male body to flesh that was made available to all forms of violence and domination that were not gender-related or gender-specific. The enslaved African female was not just the target of rape, but also forms of violence that were traditionally "the peculiar province of male brutality and torture inflicted by other males" (Spillers, 1987, pp. 67–68). Like Wilderson and Hartman, Spillers highlights the enduring conditions of captivity in the flesh despite formal liberation. However, she specifically draws attention to the impact of captivity on the Black female subject to argue that the Black female cannot inhabit the traditional

(white) position of the female gender. She argues that women's value was historically based on their ability to reproduce and provide descendants, and while enslaved women were able to reproduce other enslaved persons, their children became the property of their master, therefore denying the mother of both her female blood-rite of motherhood and her parental right. This has profound impacts in the post-emancipation context, where "legal enslavement" has removed the Black male from the family and has *misnamed* the Black family structure as matriarchal – imbuing a power to the Black female that she does not have (Spillers, 1987, p. 80).

Author Christina Sharpe (2016) also expands on ideas of Black social death by using her concepts of *wake* and *wake work* to theorize the sense of consciousness that Black people live with once they are aware of their position in "the wake of the unfinished project of emancipation" (p. 5). Here she is referring to *wake* in all its definitions – a trail of disturbed water or air left by the passage of a ship or aircraft; emerging from a state of sleep; a watch or vigil held beside the body of someone – as a metaphor to demonstrate how Black people are living in the afterlife of slavery and its ongoing ruptures, where one's past is not the past: "To be *in* the wake is to occupy and to be occupied by the continuous and changing present of slavery's as yet unresolved unfolding" (p. 14). Shifting from the total focus on Black abjection from humanity, and the Black trauma produced in the wake of slavery, *wake work* also demonstrates all the ways Black people everywhere insist on existing through and despite their circumstances. Even as we recognize and live in subjection, we do not *only* live in this subjection. We find ways of resisting and disrupting our *immanent* and imminent death (Sharpe, 2016). Living in the wake is to process and mourn the dead, but also to be aware and to exist in the tracks of their movement. This awareness/consciousness while living in predominantly white nation-states is also a matter of survival (Obinna, 2022). This is evident in the proliferation of sayings such as

"Stay Woke" which has been used by members of the Black diaspora – and Black Americans in particular – to express a need to be aware of the dangers of being Black in western societies, especially in regards to the operation of the criminal justice system (Romano, 2020). The idea is that Black people should keep their eyes open and pay attention to potential racially motivated threats and deceptions that can be used to take away their "freedoms". Black non-being, social death, wake and wake work provides us with modes of understanding how *Blackness* structures Black people's positions in white societies and how Black people live through this subjection through everyday resistance.

While Afropessimists' theorizations and analyses have provided useful ways for thinking through Black subject formation and the impacts of racial domination, they – intentionally or not – promote an idea of a single experience of Blackness that is not only characterized by despair but is also constrained by a Black-white binary. Black scholars, such as Stuart Hall (1996), Paul Gilroy (1993), Naomi Pabst (2006, 2008), George J. Sefa Dei (2017), and David Scott (1999), have interrogated this approach by highlighting the mobility and hybridity of Blackness and the Black diaspora. These scholars don't discount these theories but rather build on them with additional analysis of how mobility has bred differences within the formation of Black subjecthood. These differences are not absolute, but rather are relational aspects that fit within a larger conjunctural whole (Stephens, 2015). This allows us to think about Blackness as a "geohistorical formation" (p. 93), which acknowledges how histories of movement and geopolitical contexts have shaped "the diversity of subjective positions, social experiences, and cultural identities which compose the category 'black'" (Hall, 1996, p. 444). This supports David Scott's (1999) argument that Blackness should be considered a discursive tradition historically constituted through a common possession of 'Africa' and 'Slavery', and their deployment in the

ideological production of effects identity/difference, of community. With this understanding, certain cultural practices, ideas, and values that are produced across the Black diaspora can hold different meanings and resonances depending on how "Africa" and "Slavery" are mobilized within one's geohistorical context. These anti-essentialist approaches to Blackness provide the foundation for my own inquiry into how Blackness is utilized by both diasporic returnees and local Ghanaians. Similar to Naomi Pabst (2006, 2008), I seek to understand blackness as a transnational concept in which "diversely motivated and varying forms of transnational border crossing shape the cultural, political, and ideological parameters of blackness" (2006, p. 129). In recognizing the hybridity of Blackness, we are able to "conceive of a blackness that crosscuts, overlaps, and blends with other categories, racial and otherwise" (2006, p. 113). No articulation or experience of Blackness is inauthentic as every Black person has their own Black experience. Through this framework, we may understand how the Blackness exhibited by Black people in the Americas necessarily differs from how Blackness is expressed and understood by Ghanaians in Ghana. We can also grasp how these differences impact the connections and relationships Black people make with each other across the diaspora. This must be considered when looking at how the YoR and BtR have fostered these connections.

Black Citizenship

If I am approaching blackness as a transnational concept, citizenship plays a key role in how Black people across borders are able to relate to one another. I base my understanding of citizenship on Isin and Nyers' (2014) conceptualization of citizenship "as an 'institution' mediating rights between the subjects of politics and the polity to which these subjects belong" (p. 1). Their concept extends beyond the traditional understanding of citizenship as holding membership to a nation-state to not only include international polities such as the UN, and other

agreements and charters that govern and legislate rights but also recognize that citizenship is a dynamic relationship between the polity and political subjects – not just those with legal status. It is also important that we understand that citizens not only exist in relation to the state but also to each other (Cooper, 2018). Considering the case of descendants of enslaved Africans, emancipation and their resulting legal status did not guarantee the protection of their civil, political, and social rights from the state since they were still considered non-citizens in the imaginations of core national groups (Dei, 2017). The perceived inferiority of Black people was used as justification to deny legal protections to Black citizens leading to a constant struggle for citizenship rights and full inclusion into Western societies (Obinna, 2022). This constant struggle for inclusion can also help to explain the attraction of Pan-Africanism as a means of political collectivity.

On the other hand, African nations had the complicated tasks of constructing their citizenship after gaining independence and determining who should be certified as citizens of the nation and which political, economic, and cultural rights should be granted to these citizens over non-citizens (Aminzade, 2013). In some cases, this citizenship was conceived with a more supranational context. For example, van den Boogaard (2017) demonstrates how Nkrumah conceived of Pan-Africanist nationhood with citizens extending beyond national borders, unconstrained by race or ethnicity. The citizenship Nkrumah envisioned was based on cultural unity through the "African Personality"[7], which he describes as "a sense of one-ness in that we are *Africans"* (Nkrumah qt. in van den Boogaard, 2017, p. 53). This cultural unity based on the collective struggle of African people everywhere was essential to Nkrumah's understanding of

[7] A term popularized by Marcus Garvey who was inspired by the thinking of Edward Blyden (van den Boogaard, 2017).

Pan-Africanism and his vision of an African union for African citizens. Nkrumah's call for Africa to unite was a key part of his efforts to challenge the social and territorial fragmentation resulting from colonial borders, which he believed would forever condemn the continent to an inferior and peripheral position in the global political economy (Khisa, 2022). Nkrumah viewed all peoples of African descent as belonging to the African nation, and therefore the liberation of Africa from colonial rule and neo-colonial influence as the responsibility of all Africans. In doing so, he was rejecting the "false consciousness" of newly independent African states in favor of an African national consciousness based on the African personality that treated Africa as indivisible (van den Boogaard, 2017).

Similarly, the "one-ness" that Nkrumah expressed was also central to the idea of Black "cultural citizenship". The term cultural citizenship refers to the relationship between one's identity "and the nonlegal aspects of one's citizenship (access to resources, involvement in the labor force, participation in public discourse, relationship to the environment, education)," (Flint, 2006, p. 585). For the global Black community, the collective memory of slavery is most commonly invoked when drawing on linkages between different Black Atlantic populations, largely because the TAST is the key contributor to the Black diaspora (Holsey, 2013). This establishes a shared history in which Africa is the origin that fosters the Black cultural community. However, Holsey notes that the slave trade is not the only means for forming a community, and for youth in particular, cultural styles and products from Black America and the Caribbean are just as significant. Therefore, the linkage is not based on a shared history, but on cultural referents that developed in the diaspora that was spread in an ever-globalizing world. Despite differences in the root of these linkages, transnational conceptualizations of citizenship like Nkrumah's African personality and Black cultural citizenship help explain how Black

people form communities across national boundaries despite differing experiences of Blackness and how these communities can be politicized.

Blackness in Conflict

"At least by my late teens, I came to the conclusion that I did not want to live in America. I never identified as American, I identified as an African, and I always viewed myself as a descendent of kidnapped Africans," said Maame, who was in the process of moving her family from Israel to Ghana. She became a member of the "African Americans in Ghana" Facebook group to prepare for her move and to help find a community once she was in Ghana. She claims her upbringing in a predominantly white neighbourhood where she felt like she didn't belong and her mother exposing her to Pan-Africanism at an early age played a significant role in her decision to move to Ghana. Experiences of "othering" and anti-blackness were common themes among project participants' motivations for their return. These sentiments have also been echoed in Western media headlines (See Fig. 3), such as "Moving to Ghana to escape racism"(Nunoo, 2019) as returnees document their decision to migrate to Ghana in order to be free of the racial oppression they face in the West.

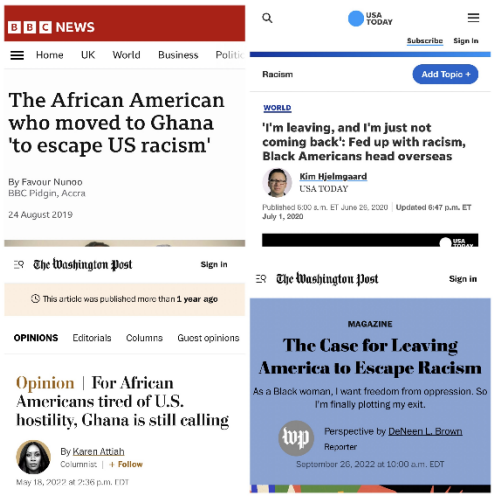

Figure 3: *Compilation of media headlines referring to return to escape anti-Black racism. Screenshots captured by author.*

The Ghanaian government has profited from such narratives, especially after the murder of George Floyd, when the Minister of Tourism proclaimed "We have our arms wide open, ready to welcome you home. Please take advantage. Come home, build a life in Ghana. You have a choice and Africa is waiting for you," (*After George Floyd, Ghana's Simple Message to African*

Americans, 2020). As Holsey(2013) notes, the state here recognizes the "flexible citizenship"(Ong, 1999) of Black Americans, specifically those with good financial standing who can afford to spend their American dollars in Ghana, with the aim of:

> Direct[ing] their travel and resources toward Ghana by elaborating their own conceptualization of a black cultural citizenship that recognizes a shared history…. The state not only encourages African Americans to consider Ghana to be their ancestral homeland and to contribute to the nation financially, but it also encourages Ghanaians to welcome African Americans as their 'brethren' (p. 505).

These efforts have even been codified, with the Right to Abode law that grants a person of African descent in the Diaspora the right to stay in Ghana indefinitely, enter without a visa, and work without a work permit as long as they have lived in Ghana for a total period of seven years ("Right of Abode," n.d.).

However, if after Scott(1999), Blackness is to be understood as a discursive tradition, then the shared history of the slave trade and racial domination does not necessarily mean that Black folks across the Atlantic will hold similar notions of how Blackness should be performed. Rather ideas of Blackness are informed by how this shared history has been mobilized within each location. For my project participants, and other descendants of enslaved Africans, Pan-Africanism, the idea of the "African personality," and similar Afro-centric narratives were not only useful for challenging anti-Black oppression in the West but also formed the context through which they came to understand Africa and Africans. As a result, I observed that some returnees have preconceived notions about how Africans are supposed to act and have taken issue with the reality after arriving in Ghana. As Dr. Obadele Kambon Nana Kwame, who has been profiled multiple times about his decision to move to Ghana in 2008, has stated:

> That's a shock because you're like, okay, I'm coming to Africa. You come here and you find that people are trying to be whiter than anybody on the face of the planet earth. You'll find people who have white first names and last names, who have never had an African name a day in their life. Meanwhile, I was born with my name. The major thing is that you'll come to Africa, and you're thinking okay Africa is home. That this will be some sort of a refuge from the wicked. But then when you actually come here, you'll find some of the most sellout, anti-Black, House negroes. If you want to meet Africans in Africa, generally speaking, you may have to create them. Because what has been manufactured here over the past few decades, if not a few centuries, is anti-Africans. People who have been manufactured to hate everything about who they are as African people. (Diakite, 2020, paras. 9–13)

Before he even came to live in Ghana, he began to create this idea of both *Africa* and *Africans* and he held the Ghanaians in his community up to those standards. Similarly, members on the Facebook groups also shared their discontent with how some Ghanaians operate, especially in regard to interactions with the police and being forced to pay bribes at checkpoints, Based on their perspective, the way Africans have been manufactured so far is *wrong,* and therefore they need to be created into something better, something more authentically African. This understanding of *Africanness* is rooted in ideas of Pan-Africanism and the African personality, within which being African is a revolutionary and liberating identity. As Khisa (2022) notes, Pan-Africanism and its proponents like Nkrumah "sought to shape African's place and standing in the direction of liberation and restoration of Black dignity that had been stripped away by the evil trade in Africans- slavery" (p. 2). The end goal of the struggle for economic emancipation and political liberation, both in Africa and for Black people living in the West, was not to be

accepted and accommodated by Western states, but to be able to claim their place in the global political economy and be able to stand up against Western hegemony. Therefore, the position of the African personality is grounded in an idea of resistance to hegemonic influence and the preservation of African traditions. However, the Ghana Dr. Obadele Kambon encountered is not the Ghana Nkrumah envisioned. Nkrumah's quest for a United States of Africa did not have enough support from other African leaders and he also could not overcome the entrenched concept of the nation-state in order to recognize members of the diaspora within African nationhood. Furthermore, his Pan-Africanist vision struggled against the effects of neocolonialism and the rise of ethnic conflicts and irredentism across the continent (van den Boogaard, 2017). In other words, Ghana and its citizens were not saved from the effects of modernization, whether considered good or bad, which put their reality in conflict with that of the African personality.

Dr. Obadele Kambon's views can also be understood as a result of the conflict between "folk blackness" and "modern blackness" identified by Deborah A. Thomas (2004) in her analysis of Jamaican identity in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century. In this context, folk blackness emphasizes the shared history of the TAST, African heritage, and the vision of a Pan-African utopia that will liberate Black people everywhere. According to Thomas, folk blackness is historically and territorially grounded and distinctive, meaning it attempts to emphasize the particularities of blackness. For example, Maame prefers to identify as an "African born in captivity" over Black or African American in order to signal that she is a descendant of enslaved Africans. Because her ancestors were forcibly brought to the U.S., she views the country as a "place of captivity."

On the other hand, modern blackness "is unapologetically presentist and decidedly mobile," (2004, p. 13). It prioritizes the transmission of cultural elements from Black people across the Atlantic and the transnational experiences of Ghanaians as a result of globalization that is not limited to physical travel, but also access to the internet and connections with their family that has emigrated from Ghana to the West. Furthermore, it has characteristics, such as a focus on consumerism, that are more associated with neoliberal capitalism than Nkrumah's Pan-African socialism. From the perspective of folk blackness, expressions of Blackness that are "modern" can be seen as anti-African and therefore, inauthentic. I frequently observed these sentiments in one of the Facebook groups I joined which was then titled "African American Diaspora Community in Ghana." Members of this group were more likely to discuss systemic anti-Black racism in the West and why Black people should prioritize their ancestral connection to Africa. As such, they were also much more critical of Ghanaian and African politics especially in regard to the repatriation of the descendants of enslaved Africans. For example, in her critique of Ghana's immigration policies and European-influenced education system, one of the members expressed that the state was being weakened by "Black neocolonialism" and "Negropeans". Folk Blackness' emphasis on authenticity and Western non-conformity should be considered as part of larger efforts among the Black diaspora and academia to understand Africa, Africans, and our culture and traditions outside the effects of the white gaze (L. Park, 2020). For example, consider the Afrocentric narratives of the late 20th century that claim Africans are descendants of kings and queens whose kingdoms and cultures were disrupted by the TAST and Western imperialism and its influences. These ideas were not only used to challenge notions of Black inferiority by claiming ties to royalty – but also call for Black populations to return to those traditions. As Youtuber GoBlack2Africa puts it, democracy is not good for African countries

"because we come from kingdoms" (GoBlack2Africa, 2020). On the other hand, many Ghanaians take issue with building cultural citizenship based on a shared history of the TAST. As highlighted in the previous chapter, the topic of slavery is problematic and unpopular for many Ghanaians, therefore it is difficult for them to build connections in a racial context with a focus on the trade. Despite the shame associated with slavery, Holsey notes that Ghanaians were still able to accept this collective identity by replacing the image of slaves with more "positive" images of intellectuals, freedom fighters, and celebrities. In other words, they have focused on a connection based on an idea of "Black Excellence," that does not necessarily espouse African attributes but recognizes Black success despite global adversity. This shift is representative of the rise of Afropolitianism across the continent and amongst the African diaspora. For Ghana in particular, this rise can be attributed to the state's embrace of neoliberalism under Rawlings' regime and I argue that the same processes that resulted in the commodification of Pan-Africanism to increase the flow of foreign capital into the Ghanaian economy outlined in the previous chapter have also fostered an internalization of capitalist principles that place an "emphasis on the acquisition of wealth, and an intentional forgetting or ignorance of the realities facing an economic majority unable to live the imagined life" (Eaton, 2019, pp. 6–7). As a result, Black politicians, celebrities, and other Black folks who are financially successful are celebrated as a means of linking Pan-Africanist visions of liberation with individualist aspirations of upward social mobility (Shipley, 2013). By drawing on Pan-Africanism's celebration of African unity in the face of adversity, Ghanaians look to build connection off of the respect and recognition of *being* African to show to the world that being African or of African descent is not an inferior position.

Both Shipley and Pierre (2003) have highlighted the various ways Ghanaians have been able to identify with the Black and African diaspora through cosmopolitan visions that don't invoke memories of slavery. For example, in her ethnography of racial formation in postcolonial Ghana, Pierre (2013) writes of her experience at First Fridays Accra, an after-work networking and socializing affair, where she encounters diverse groups of Black people – Black professionals more specifically, from across the continent *and* the Atlantic who have converged to dialogue and socialize on both personal and business matters. In her account of the different migrant experiences of the events' organizers, which includes a second-generation Ghanaian American and a second-generation Haitian-American who both chose to move to Ghana, it becomes clear that their desire to live and work in Ghana is not focused on "a slavery-induced longing for identity" (p. 182). Instead, what we see here is a desire to form connections based on mutual personal and business-related interests in a context where being Black doesn't make one *different.* The connections formed here recognize the parallel processes of racialization and identity formation amongst Ghanaians and members of the Black diaspora that allow for an affinity to each other that goes beyond a shared heritage or nostalgia for the motherland.

Blackness and the Year of Return

Interestingly, with the YoR and the BtR, Ghana has been able to successfully draw on black cultural citizenship that is based on both folk blackness and modern blackness. The state has consistently made use of the shared history of the TAST between Ghanaians and the Black diaspora, with highly publicized visits to Ghana's slave castles by famous Black politicians and celebrities like the Obamas, and events such as the bi-annual Pan-African Historical Theatre Festival (PANAFEST) and Ghana's annual Emancipation Day celebrations to commemorate the abolishment of slavery in former British Colonies. However, due to the success of the YoR and

BtR in generating tourism, the Ghanaian government officially launched "December in GH" in 2022 as a "unique package of events and programs to make Ghana the preferred tourism destination for Christmas and New Year…. Not only for the Ghanaian diaspora, but for the global diaspora family" ("Visit Ghana - December In GH 2022," n.d.). December in GH draws on the traditional travel of Ghanaian citizens living or schooling abroad who return home to visit family and friends for Christmas break, which characterizes my own experience travelling to Ghana for the first time in December 1999. Visiting Ghana in December is well known amongst Ghanaians across the diaspora as the best time to return to Ghana and celebrate with family and friends.

With the Year of Return came leisure events on a much larger scale, including music festivals such as AfroFuture (previously AfroChella) and AfroNation that feature Africa's biggest musical stars, and the newly launched Black Star Line festival founded by Ghanaian American rapper Vic Mensa and Black American rapper Chance the Rapper, which is described as "a cultural experience rooted in intercontinental collaboration" (Brown, 2022, para. 5). In addition to the music festivals, December in GH also cements Ghana as an international party destination for the Black diaspora, with nightlife such as Polo Beach, a luxury pop-up Beach club at Accra's famous Labadi Beach giving the opportunity to both celebrities and members of the Black diaspora to literally party until the sun comes up. As Cardi B proclaimed when asked about her first impression of Ghana, "They don't know it's lit. They don't know it's beautiful. They don't know the food is delicious" (Paquette, 2019, para. 27).

Despite being leisure events, all these events and parties maintain a transnational character while trying to promote Ghana as a destination for Black people everywhere. For example, the founder of AfroChella, Abdul Karim Abdullah, cites his experience living between

Accra and the Bronx, NY as his inspiration for launching AfroChella as a way to celebrate global black culture: “Ghana is the literal [geographic] centre of the world. It’s beautiful, vibrant and warm year-round. It’s peaceful and our people are extremely welcoming and ready for opportunities to grow and develop” (Holder, 2022, para. 10). On a more historical note, the Black Star Line Festival takes its name from Marcus Garvey’s shipping company, invoking his spirit and message of promoting Black unity across the Atlantic. For Vic Mensa, who is half Ghanaian and feels privileged to have been able to keep a connection to his ancestry and culture, it is his responsibility “to mend the broken bond between the diaspora,” by exposing their cultural history in a way that goes beyond slavery (Taylor, 2022a, para. 12). While promoting tourism to Ghana is the purpose of the December in GH events, it is evident that promoting connections across the diaspora is central to the conception of the planned events. When I attended AfroChella in 2022, I was struck by how easy it was to connect with the other festival attendees. We were all young Black adults, but we also all had different stories and journeys that brought us to Accra from across the globe at that specific time and place. As an attendee at a December in GH event, one really feels like you are at the center of the world.

Conclusion

By exploring how Blackness is understood and performed differently across the Black Atlantic, this chapter has demonstrated how the Ghanaian state has been able to draw on different expressions of Blackness to ensure the success of the YoR and BtR programs. First, by adopting a transnational approach to Blackness, I indicate how histories of movement and geopolitical contexts have shaped different formations of Blackness. Second, in consideration of these differences, I detail non-traditional forms of citizenship, such as the African personality and Black cultural citizenship in order to understand how Black people identify and connect with

each other across the Atlantic. In the Ghanaian context, Black cultural citizenship formed around folk Blackness has previously been prioritized in state narratives around return, leading to conflicts with those who align with a more modern blackness. Finally, this chapter demonstrates how the YoR and BtR have been able to move beyond heritage-based return movements by including leisure events, such as AfroFuture and the Black Star Line Festival, to not only promote connections among the Black diaspora without invoking the TAST but also establish Ghana as a tourist destination for Black cosmopolitans across the diaspora.

Chapter 3 – The (Im)mobility of the Black Diaspora

"To travel without a map, to travel without a way. They did, long ago. That misdirection became the way. After the Door of No Return, a map was only a set of impossibilities, a set of changing locations." – Dionne Brand, A Map to the Door of No Return (2011)

In my analysis of the YoR and the BtR programs, I have highlighted the transnational and transcultural characteristics that have contributed to their success. The journey to Ghana described by participants of these programs is broader than just tourism as it is connected to a much wider genealogical level of travel. Considering the highly mobile character of the programs and their participants, what can the programs and the recent return mobilities to Africa more generally reveal about Black mobility? How can we understand the various and often contradictory, movements taking place? In my analysis of this phenomenon, this chapter aims to reveal the (im)mobility of the Black diaspora by highlighting how Black people have historically been forcibly rooted/routed. I use the term (im)mobility as a reflection on how the ability (or inability) to move or travel by the Black diaspora globally often happens in contexts in which they have little control. This isn't necessarily to say that Black mobility is characterized by displacement – though that is a significant aspect. Nor do I contend that the Black diaspora has been largely immobile. Rather, I use (im)mobile to draw attention to the ways contemporary mobilities for Africans and the Back Diaspora have been influenced by larger global forces out of their control that has resulted in an uneven production of mobility and immobility within the Black Diaspora (Salazar & Smart, 2011).

First, I investigate these questions through a roots/routes analysis of return mobilities to Ghana to gain a better understanding of how movement/stasis and travel/place contribute to – and are motivated by – understandings of the self. Second, I draw attention to the realities on the ground in Ghana to highlight the tensions and contradictions in the experiences of mobilities

being analyzed. Finally, I will argue how these tensions reflect the (im)mobile condition of Africa and the Black diaspora.

Roots and Routes

My inquiry into the motivations and end goals of both return travellers and migrants out of Ghana is informed by conceptual work in *roots/routes*. The notion of *roots* within tourist and migrations studies is used to describe a form of genealogical travel in which travellers are in search of their history. As Basu (2004) notes, "to search for 'roots' is, after all, already to engage in a (root) metaphorical process, in which characteristics of the arboreal subsidiary subject (stasis, longevity, being anchored in time and space, receiving nourishment from the land, etc.) are imputed to the 'destination' of the genealogical journey (the principal subject), which has itself no such qualities" (p. 159). The idea of roots also connotates a territorial connection to identity, according to Malkki (1992), with metaphors of kinship and home such as motherland/homeland that denote a natural tie between historical identity and place (p. 27). In this sense, travellers who are removed from their supposed homeland can be considered as being uprooted – creating a sense of displacement that is often characteristic of many contemporary diasporas. Uprootedness as a metaphor for movement is distinct from processes of transplantation, which Malkki claims is a privileged position in which expatriates have the ability to pick up their roots and plant them undamaged in a foreign soil where they may flourish. Uprooting as a process, on the other hand, results in "broken and dangling roots" (p. 32) that not only disrupts their loyalties to their homeland but also their new foreign environment. Therefore, this journey in search of roots is not only a search for history but can be considered more materially as a means of re-rooting oneself – repairing what has been damaged by anchoring oneself to a time and place –to become whole again.

Similarly, Susan Wessendorf (2016) employs the term "roots migration" over return migration in her analysis of second-generation Italians who have resettled in South Italy. She notes that her interlocutors rarely characterized their migration as a 'return' because "they cannot 'go back' to a place where they had never lived" (p.111). Similar to Basu's (2004) case, these migrants are searching for a sense of a homeland based on feelings of nostalgia that have been cultivated during childhood due to their parent's transnational involvements. Even though a sense of place and belonging has been constructed in their host countries, they cannot sever themselves from their roots – their family histories and migration will always exist (Wessendorf, 2016). For the Black diaspora, historical disenfranchisement and marginalisation often complicate the cultivation of any sense of belonging in their 'home' and prompt them to look back at their history in their search for belonging. Since the release of *Roots* by Alex Haley (1976), roots tourism has been commonly used to describe the phenomenon of African-Americans who have journeyed to West Africa based on a "strong identification with collective memories and an emotional or spiritual connection with the place of the ancestors, a symbolic homeland, rather than specific, historically traceable places of origins" (Marschall, 2015, p. 879). Roots travellers often do not have personal or secondary memories of their ancestral home, despite the strong symbolic connection they may hold with the place (Marschall). In the case of descendants of enslaved Africans, specifics of their family tree and their ancestors' homeland are rarely known. According to Basu (2004), this lack of knowledge is a main driver for roots travel – it is an effort to uncover the unknown of their past and re-root themselves in a soil that nourishes them rather than slowly causing them to wither. The desire to be rooted, therefore, is also a desire to consolidate their cultural identity and a sense of belonging.

Roots emphasizes the natural and emotional bond between places – spatial entities of any territorial scale – and their current and former residents (Gustafson, 2001). This attachment to place goes beyond the physical environment, but also the local community and culture attached to it. From this perspective, mobility and movement away from place threaten a person or group's bond to the place and its culture, which can imply that identity is territorially bounded and nationally fixed. Scholars have argued that this ignores the "multiplicity of attachments that people form to places through living in, remembering, and imagining them," (Malkki, 1992, p. 38). Therefore, in discussions of roots tourism and travel, attention also needs to be paid to *routes* – the movement and travel that permeates our histories. In his book, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, Clifford (1997) challenges the idea that roots precede routes and that we were stationary before we began our travel by claiming that "everyone is dwelling-in-travel" (p.2). If we are going to understand our world as highly mobile, then we must also contend that our histories have many roots that expand beyond territorial boundaries. Consequently, travel should be treated as an inherent feature of life, not simply an interruption to our stationary lifestyle, which blurs the idea of homeland and origin that are tied to a physical place. As Donaldson (2012) notes, "Origins and stasis are made and remade by movement, transition, and change" (p. 8). When we use words such as "homecoming," "pilgrimage," and "return", we are not just speaking of our origins, but the movement to and from and what exists outside of them.

Routes analysis treats mobility as a basic human condition, which relocates ideas of home from their territorially fixed positions on a map to points in a dynamic network. Africa is not simply a place that exists "out there" but also a location that exists in the West through cultural flows and the transculturation of African immigrants (Clifford, 1997, p. 202). Travel and

displacement are not just a method of movement from one place to another, but "a complex and pervasive spectrum of human experiences [where] displacement might emerge as constitutive of cultural meanings" (Clifford, 1997, p. 3). The experience of travel injects new cultural meanings into its subjects and their location, complicating ideas of identity and culture whose performance often relies on articulations of a cultural homeland. Clifford argues that these homelands are tactically asserted as "cultural action, the making and remaking of identities, tak[ing] place in the contact zones, along the policed and transgressive intercultural frontiers of nations, peoples, locales" (p.7).

The phenomenon of contemporary diasporas presents poignant cases of this tension between a roots-based identity and the reality of routes. For the Black diaspora specifically, Paul Gilroy (1993) argues that the legacy of Europe-American modernity has caused a:

> continuing aspiration to acquire a supposedly authentic, natural, and stable "rooted" identity. This invariant identity is in turn the premise of a thinking "racial" self that is both socialised and unified by its connection with other kindred souls encountered usually, though not always, within the fortified frontiers of those discrete ethnic cultures which also happen to coincide with the contours of a sovereign nation state that guarantees their continuity. (p.30)

This ultimately leads to tensions amongst the Black diaspora, where cultural products become essentialized and/or exceptionalized to claim their distinctiveness and authenticity. As a response to how modern black political culture has focused on categorizing identities based on roots and rootedness, Gilroy conceptualizes the Black Atlantic to demonstrate how Black identity can be understood as a process of movement that is an "outcome of practical activity: language, gesture, bodily significations, desires" (p. 102). These activities are influenced by enduring traditions of

diasporic African people and culture, and also their participants' location and their relevant political relationships. The Black Atlantic allows us to understand the multitude of diaspora identities and cultures that have been molded and changed by time, displacement, relocation, and dissemination through networks across the Atlantic by bending together roots and routes to ensure that neither fragmentation nor fixity is prioritized over the other (Clifford, 1997). It is a recognition of how "new conceptions of modernity" (Gilroy, 1993, p. 101) and identity do not spring from older performances of culture and identity, but are part of a larger socio-political process that is influenced by movement as much as place.

Gilroy's conceptualization of the Black Atlantic challenges the idea that the stationary and pure homeland espoused by *roots* is dialectically opposed to the historical forces of movement and travel that are emphasized by *routes*. An understanding of both is necessary for discussions of return mobilities as it will help capture "the fluid nature of identity through an acknowledgement of the origin, formation, and expectation" (Osagie, 2004, p. 394). By focusing on how returnees are searching for their roots or seeking to be rooted, we lose sight of how their historical mobility has impacted their relationship to the root. Outside of highlighting the multiple place attachments people can have, routes bring attention to how different points on a network provide the context in which collective identity is performed, maintained, and renegotiated, and therefore impact how one sees, understands, and interacts with the root. Thus, including an analysis of both roots and routes is necessary for the analysis of return mobilities and motivations for return because it draws attention to both the geographical and ancestral aspects of a person's identity in order to understand not only where a traveller comes from, but also where they've been. Using a roots/routes approach to understand the interesting

phenomenon of return migration to Ghana allows me to prioritise both the journey and the destination that has characterized travel to and from Ghana.

Return mobilities to Ghana

For my informants, despite differing motivations for travel, their migration to Ghana was an opportunity to connect to their roots and expose themselves to their cultural history. As Ama claimed in her interview, "Families were broken apart and split up in some kind of way due to slavery, and [connecting with our ancestry] helps us find each other again." Unlike the roots mobilities described by Basu (2004) and Wessendorf (2016), it is not simply a history of migration that has separated many members of the Black diaspora from knowledge of their African culture and history. Instead, their culture was violently stolen from them through the TAST, which arguably complicates and intensifies their return mobilities in many ways. The mobilities in this case are often described within anthropological literature as a form of pilgrimage. This terminology differentiates diasporic homecomings from ordinary tourism by signifying the attitude of reverence that often underpins this journey. However, these travellers are not motivated by a belief in God. Instead, they are seeking a selfhood that is linked to a spiritual connection to the past and the presence of their ancestors (Schramm, 2016). While there are certainly some merits to describing homecoming in this way, roots tourists may be more accurately described using Erik Cohen's (1979) classification of existential tourism. That is: "[a] traveller who is fully committed to an 'elective' spiritual centre, i.e., one external to the mainstream of his native society and culture" (p. 190). Cohen describes the commitment to this centre as similar to a religious conversion, with the difference that these travelers cannot permanently relocate to their elective centre for reasons of practicality. This results in existential tourists having feelings of living in a psychological exile since the site where they feel as if they

"belong" is external to the location where they perform their everyday lives. Unlike how pilgrimage sites, such as Mecca, unite and orient their followers across the world, the elective spiritual center for existential tourists is a constant reminder that they do not belong in their "home."

Regardless of whether Africa as a centre is understood to be a uniting or disrupting force for returnees, I find the ontological dimensions of travel indicated by these typologies to be significant to understanding travel mobilities to Africa by members of the Black Diaspora. In both cases, Africa and the idea of homeland act as a focal point for a Black person's sense of being, and the distance from that root has an impact on the mind and body. Black lives are still devalued in the afterlife of the TAST and the process of being violently uprooted has left many in the Black diaspora with a profound sense of unbelonging. As Brand (2017) recites in her poem "Verso 55":

> Our gods were in the holding cells. We awakened our gods and we left them there, because we never needed gods again. We did not have wicked gods so they understood. They lay in their corners, on their disintegrated floors, they lay on their wall of skin dust. They stood when we entered, happy to see us. (p. 43)

When the enslaved were forced on the ship to the new world, they left a part of themselves at the coast, at the point of no return. Those parts, the frayed damaged roots – their *gods* – are waiting for them to return and be reclaimed and once they've reclaimed their gods, they will be whole. In a YouTube video titled "Why African Americans are moving to Africa GH" Lakeisha Ford, a repatriate to Ghana from the US, explains why this reclamation is necessary:

> There's almost this like undefined closure that happens you didn't even know you needed this, you didn't even know you needed closure in a certain light, but coming here you get it and there's almost an alignment that happens. (Ohh Yes Africa, 2020)

Many Black scholars and writers have also been preoccupied with recovering their full selves narratively. For example, in her novel *Homegoing* (2017), Yaa Gyasi traces the fictional lineage of two half-sisters, Effia and Esi, whose lives converged at Cape Coast Castle in very different ways: one forced to marry an English colonial man working at the castle, and one kidnapped by the slave trade and transported to the new world. Effia and Esi's stories converge again in the modern day with their descendants – Marjorie Agyekum, a Ghanaian immigrant to the United States, and Marcus Clifton, an African-American – who meet as grad students with no knowledge of their shared history. In Marcus' narrative, he is struggling to complete his research on the United States' convict leasing system and its impact on his family history as it forces him to confront the ontological crisis of being a Black man living in America:

> How could he explain to Marjorie that he wasn't supposed to be here? Alive. Free. That the fact that he had been born, that he wasn't in a jail cell somewhere, was not by dint of his pulling himself up by the bootstraps, not by hard work or belief in the American Dream, but by mere chance. (253)

As a reader, I found Marcus's anger and struggle to complete his research, especially moving, as Gyasi builds his crisis as a natural progression from his ancestors' trials of living through the TAST and in its wake. His struggle plainly depicts the level of alienation experienced by descendants of enslaved Africans. *Homegoing* ends with Marcus having the opportunity to travel to Ghana with Marjorie, and it is on the beach of Cape Coast Castle where Marcus feels welcomed home and the corresponding feelings of love and protection that come

with being *found*. The loss of being that is expressed in Gyasi's narrative isn't confined to Marcus' story, but rather begins with Esi and is inherited by her descendants. As Motahane et al. (2021) note in their analysis of *Homegoing,* the enslaved had attached aspects of their homeland in Africa to their understanding of their soul and sense of self. Consequently, the journey through the Middle Passage separated the enslaved from the portion of their soul that is connected with the homeland. In its place developed a "splitness" that produced and sustained "a sense of unbelonging, vulnerability and a constant feeling of lack that mark their sense of identity as enslaved people"(p.19). The metaphor of being uprooted is valuable to help understand the ontological position of Black diasporans looking to return to Africa. For they are, in a sense, broken due to the severing of their ancestral roots. While the process of return does not completely mend these roots, it can provide a sense of belonging that helps subjects feel more complete.

Unlike Marcus, my interlocuters and many descendants of enslaved Africans are not fortunate enough to be able to directly connect with their ancestral origins. While some of my interlocutors have taken ancestral DNA tests to learn more, precise ancestral breakdowns cannot provide specifics of one's heritage. Therefore, for many of these returnees coming to Ghana, the *root* they are in search of is symbolic which, in most cases, is represented by the Door of No Return. I am choosing to treat the Door as a symbol, rather than a specific physical location because there are many doors along the West African coast that are considered the "Door of No Return." While I focus on the Doors at the Cape Coast and Elmina Castles, the Doors at the *Maison des Esclaves* on Gorée Island off the coast of Senegal and in Ouidah, Benin are also key heritage sites for descendants of those who were taken during the TAST. Despite its multiple locations, the Door of No Return acts as a focal point for descendants of enslaved Africans and

their connection to their cultural heritage. According to Brand (2001) "[The Door of No Return] exists without prompting. It exists despite all efforts to obscure it or change it or reinterpret it by its carpenters or its passengers. The Door of No Return is ocular. It is propitious. From it one may reflect, grasp" (p. 72). While Black identity is under constant construction, The Door of No Return will always be an aspect that does not need to be negotiated. Descendants of enslaved Africans may have been severed from their roots, but the Door of No Return identifies Africa as "home" and acts as an enduring reminder of their roots. It is something that exists without argument.

However, the Door of No Return as a symbol and a focal point for return can unveil complications in the return process as it also acts as a reminder of returnees' separation from the root (Hartman, 2008). The experience of returning to Africa can be a disappointing and potentially alienating experience, largely because of the impact of routes on understandings of the homeland for Black diasporans. In her memoir, *Lose Your Mother,* Hartman (2008) contends with this disappointment during her return experience to Ghana. She states that she originally envisaged her journey to Ghana as a mission to "bring the past closer" (p. 17) so she could recover what her ancestors had lost. However, her experience does not meet her expectations of return and she finds herself to be a stranger in search of strangers. This is an experience shared by many descendants of enslaved Africans looking to connect with their African culture, who as they arrive in Africa come to the realization that they are no longer African and that they live a very different reality from Africans on the continent (Pinho, 2018). They anticipate a community and culture that has not changed since their ancestors were taken, and that will be ready to accept them with open arms. Instead, they encounter an Africa that is very different from the Africa their ancestors were taken from – an Africa that has been equally impacted by forces of

modernity and globalization. In other words, like the descendants of enslaved Africans, these communities did not remain static and are a part of a larger transnational landscape where they are still grappling with consequences of the slave trade and colonialism. The physical alienation experienced by the descendants of enslaved Africans has thus resulted in a diasporic imagination of Africa that is based on various global cultural flows centered around the Door of No Return as a doorway to the past. Considering this, diasporic subjects face difficulty in recovering or reclaiming their lost heritage since what they seek is firmly rooted in history. So, while the opportunity to go to Ghana and return to the Door of No Return can be considered cathartic, for many the return process is like "being lost and found at the same time" (Hartman, 2008, p. 90).

Mobility in Conflict

Routes analysis does not only provide a fuller picture of return to Ghana but also provides a framework for analysing the tension between those who return and the communities they encounter. Not unlike Dr. Kambon's account earlier in Chapter Two, many memoirs and ethnographies that depict return mobilities to Ghana often include accounts of returnees being shocked – and sometimes offended – by the behaviour of some local Ghanaians (Eshun, 2006; Hartman, 2008; Pierre, 2013; Raboteau, 2013). The most common encounter depicted is Ghanaians expressing to returnees that they were the lucky ones because they were not subject to the "poverty and hopelessness" that come with living in Africa (Pierre, 2013, p. 155). I argue that these sentiments indicate the impacts of routes on Ghana and its relationship with the Black Diaspora. Situating them both within a larger transnational network can help explain the causes behind these tensions. Many returnees, in their reverence, see Ghana and the Door of No Return as the "Promised Land" (Schramm, 2016, p. 140), which can mask the ways Ghana and the African continent as a whole have also been impacted by the effects of colonialism, the slave

trade, and anti-Blackness. As Sharpe notes, living in the wake also exists at a global level, and we must take into account that the forces devaluing Black life in the West are devaluing Black life everywhere. The emergence of Pan-Africanism was a reflection of this, as the transnational development of the movement responded to the precarity of the Black condition and the sense of inferiority imposed by the West on Black communities worldwide (Oloruntoba, 2015).

However, both diasporan returnees to Ghana and local Ghanaians interpret the other based on their own geopolitical location. For the Black diaspora, the focus on roots and the invocation of tradition and history should be considered in the context of the "destabilising flux of the post-contemporary world" (Gilroy, 1993, p. 101). Consequently, in their efforts to reconnect with their history and culture in Ghana, they are forced to face the effects of Western hegemony and neocolonial domination, despite never embodying this privilege due to their own experiences of systemic anti-Black racism. As explained in the previous chapters, returnees are met with a local population that wants to leave the slave trade in the past because there are more pressing problems in Ghana. This produces tensions between local communities and members of the Black diaspora, especially Black Americans. As Hartman (2008) writes:

> I had fled to their world and the boys yearned to escape to mine, they wanted to break out of this dusty four-cornered town and never see the castle again or the sign barring their entrance; they wanted never to please for small change from an obruni or repeat the words 'slave trade' and 'one Africa.' … Looking at me, the boys imagined the wealth and riches they would possess if they lived in the States. After all, who else but a rich American could afford to travel so far to cry about her past? Looking at me, the boys wished their ancestors had been slaves. If so, they would be big men. (p. 89)

Hartman's observation reflects the differences in meaning Ghanaians and diasporans have attributed to movement. For Ghanaians, the Black American's freedom of transnational travel and their ability to be a tourist denotes the success of U.S. capitalism, regardless of the actual economic situations of Black Americans (Holsey, 2013; B. C. Williams, 2018). They have achieved the American dream, and the misconception of the realities of being Black in the West reflects the relatively privileged position that the Black diaspora holds compared to Ghanaians due to their citizenship. For Ghanaians, opportunities for transnational movement are normally reserved for the upper class, so they see the ability to travel and benefit from flows of capital and goods as a representation of socio-economic status. Therefore, the majority of Ghanaians are not looking to challenge the perceived privileges of returnees. Rather, they seek the same opportunities to travel as a means of achieving upward mobility (Holsey, 2013).

Interestingly, my Ghanaian informants do no aspire to lay down roots in another country in the same way returnees seek to be rooted in Ghana. Brittany – a friend of my family in Ghana who helps my grandmother with her everyday tasks – explains that she prefers to live in Ghana over any other country and she would only travel to visit other countries and come back home. Brittany was my only Ghanaian informant who had no intention of moving away from Ghana and only desired to travel outside of the country "for fun". While Brittany works as a civil servant in Ghana's federal government, her role in helping my grandmother also means she can rely on funds from my mother and her brother in Europe. Consequently, she feels more comfortable with her employment opportunities compared to my other Ghanaian informants. Contrastingly, Kevin – a Ghanaian citizen who moved to the US in September 2020 for his medical residency – described his decision to migrate to the US as based on the shared feeling among young people in Ghana that opportunities would be better elsewhere, and "given the way

things are back home, [I needed] a more stable environment with more potential to set [myself] up for life." Based on the way Kevin discussed his moving experience, it became evident that he continued to think of Ghana as "home" and his current residence as "a place he lives". His feeling align with a shared Ghanaian diasporic dream of working hard in one's new country of residence so that one can earn enough money to build a house in Ghana for retirement (Berger, 2002). This is even something I have witnessed within my own Ghanaian community in Canada, and achieving this dream is often met with celebrations. From my experience, no matter where they are in the world, many Ghanaians will always think of Ghana as a place to come home to, but not a place to make money and live (See Fig. 4).

Figure 4: *Screenshot captured by author of tweet posted on an Instagram account popular amongst young Ghanaians expressing the desire to live*

While Black Americans may inhabit their American citizenship in complicated and conflicting ways, their citizenship often determines their interactions with the average Ghanaian citizen in the country. The false perception of wealth that Ghanaian citizens have of Black Americans often results in them being used to generate revenue, either through the commodification of the slave trade by the local governments or by the general hustle of the local population (Hartman, 2008). A rising concern among returnees is exploitation in the rental sector by landlords looking for foreign currencies. Maame claimed that she was warned by a Ghanaian friend she met through Facebook to not approach the rental sector without the assistance of a Ghanaian resident because landlords are marking up the prices. Even so, she still does not plan

on living in Accra because of the videos shared on YouTube where landlords are asking upwards of USD 2000 per month.

Despite the actions of some Ghanaian citizens looking to profit from returnees, the local population does not treat the Black diaspora with any particular regard. When questioned on their opinion of members of the diaspora who chose to move to Ghana, my Ghanaian informants did not necessarily view those who chose to move to Ghana negatively. However, my informant Kevin struggled to understand why people would choose to leave the US and come back to Ghana. Furthermore, the average Ghanaian may feel resentment towards the Black diaspora, not just because of their presumed wealth, but because the ability to visit or relocate to Ghana comes with the ability to *leave.* Hartman was confronted with this predicament when she was asked by her research colleagues whether she would ever stay in Ghana: "If I had decided to be a visitor, then why should they treat me as anything other than a stranger?" (*ibid,* p.215).

The (Im)mobility of the Black Diaspora

The YoR, the Btr, and the tensions outlined above reveal the (im)mobility that underscores the experiences of movement for Africans and the Black Diaspora. While mobility is inherent to the conditions of the global Black diaspora, this mobility has been controlled by tools of white supremacy and the global political system leading to its unequal distribution across spaces and populations (Shipley, 2016). In other words, processes of globalization that have produced movement, such as travel, trading, and migration can reinforce inequality and promote immobility depending on one's relation to the global political system (Salazar & Smart, 2011). I argue that for the Black diaspora, their experience of movement can be classified as a fluctuation between being forcibly rooted and routed. In the case of the YoR and BtR, Ghanaian citizens and Black diaspora returnees occupy opposite sides of the same coin, and this provides an interesting

case in which the two experiences clash with each other, causing the tension highlighted above. Ghanaians seek access to transnational routes which they conceive as an answer to their precarious condition resulting from the country's position at the periphery of the neoliberal world system. Achieving transnational movement is closely tied to achieving economic and social advancement since travel overseas will grant them the stability of the core and the potential to make money, even if they find themselves at a socio-political disadvantage. Returnees, on the other hand, look to reconnect with their roots as they aspire to cease living a life characterized by routes (Wessendorf, 2016). As a result of the systematic oppression of Black people in the West, they do not *feel* the full benefits of living in the core, and instead feel unsettled. Both sides are engaged in reverse processes of transatlantic dreaming that converge on the sites of their shared history of colonial domination (Holsey, 2008).

Ghanaians in search of routes are limited by the relatively weak power of Ghana's citizenship and a Ghanaian passport within the global political system. Chris – a young Ghanaian citizen looking to emigrate to Canada – had been previously denied a tourist visa to visit family in Canada on the grounds that he did not have enough travel experience despite having already travelled to Dubai and Romania. He explained that he learned from his employer that the real issue was that "there was nothing tying me back to Ghana." Many African citizens, especially young and/or unemployed Africans, looking to obtain temporary resident visas to countries in the West, such as the US or Canada often have to meet extensive – and expensive – visa application requirements, including providing proof of income, evidence of previous travel, family information, a letter of invitation, paying an application fee, and an interview. Moreover, successful completion of these requirements does not guarantee visa approval. Despite these limitations, Ghanaians are eager for international travel to the West, since for many, it remains

the viable means of a better education, a better income, and upward social mobility (Daswani, 2009). Many Ghanaians seek to travel to the West and work hard to support their families back home in anticipation of returning to Ghana with an improved socio-economic status (Shipley, 2016). Their efforts to be routed reflects the dual (im)mobility they are experiencing: first, lack of economic opportunities to support upward mobility in the country; and second limited transnational opportunities to find economic advancement elsewhere.

Contrastingly, my interlocutors seeking to return to Ghana did not express any difficulty acquiring their visas, even with the travel restriction in place during the Covid-19 pandemic. In their cases, their American citizenship and passport – which is considered one of the strongest in the world – and easy access to Ghanaian embassies near their locations facilitated a trouble-free travel process. However, the transnational privilege of having a strong passport is often insufficient for returnees who feel that they are excluded from the rights nominally guaranteed by their citizenship of Western countries. A key theme among my informants from the USA was the fact that they frequently felt uncomfortable in their hometowns, whether it be due to racism or violence. For example, Ama expressed that her upbringing in a predominantly White neighbourhood in Chicago taught her to learn about race very quickly so she could be cautious of who and where she was at all times. Ekua had a slightly different upbringing in Chicago, where she noted that the Black community had a "poverty" mindset and was facing challenges due to segregation and persistent gun violence. For my informants, movement within the United States was necessary in order to search for a place to settle down with more fiscal opportunity and less racial oppression. These mobilities are part of a long history of movement for many Black families in the West looking for a better life following the TAST. A turn to roots for them can be

attributed to the aspiration to acquire a more stable and authentic life in which their existence does not need to be justified. As Hartman (2008) writes:

> Yet for those bound to a hostile land by shackles, owners, and the threat of death, an imagined place might be better than no home at all, an imagined place might afford you a vision of freedom, an imagined place might provide an alternative to your defeat, an imagined place might save your life. (p.97)

Even though Ghana may not meet expectations of diasporic imaginings, it is considered better than the alternative of living with a deep sense of unbelonging in the West.

The uneven distribution of (im)mobility outlined here shows that Africans and Black diasporans are in constant negotiation between movement and stasis. Mobility and immobility are interdependent systems, each producing and/or facilitating the other (Hannam et al., 2006). However, the complexities of the mobilizations that characterize the YoR phenomenon in Ghana demonstrate that the Black diaspora has been produced with both differing rights to travel and differing rights to stasis which seemingly sit in opposition to the other. Yet, I argue that the enhanced movement of the Black diaspora highlighted throughout this thesis cannot be attributed to the immobility of the average Ghanaian citizen. Instead, they must both be understood within systems of white supremacy and the unequal power relations permeating the global political system, where Black life is considered expendable regardless of location (Hartman, 2008). This system simultaneously shifts blame to the descendants of enslaved Africans who seek to benefit from their Western citizenship and stronger buying power to settle in Ghana as well as to Ghanaian citizens who resent their access to core nations. Contextualizing the conflict highlighted in the section above within this (im)mobility paradigm reveals that the conflict between Ghanaian citizens and returnees will always be a lose-lose situation.

Conclusion

By exploring the drivers of the mobilities characterizing the phenomenon of return to Ghana, this chapter draws attention to the (im)mobility of Africa and the Black diaspora. First, using a roots/routes analysis of the motivations and processes of return to Ghana, I highlighted how returnees were looking to cease living a life of routes and settle down in a place where they felt as if they belonged. Second, I drew attention to how Ghana's position in a larger network of routes can produce disappointment in returnees to Ghana and tension with local Ghanaians who desire transnational mobility outside of the country for socio-economic advancement. This tension highlights the uneven production of (im)mobility that characterizes Africa and the Black diaspora, leaving both sides negotiating their mobility within a neoliberal context. This paradox at the center of the YoR and BtR phenomenon further delegitimizes its objective of building unity across the Black diaspora because the forms of cultural citizenship that are being relied upon are not enough to overcome the marginal position of African states and the Black diaspora in the current neoliberal world system.

Conclusion

Thanks to the success of the YoR and the subsequent BtR programs, December in Ghana is now considered a bucket list experience for the Black diaspora (Taylor, 2022b). Dr. Alexander Oladele, founder of JetBlack Travel Group, suggests that it is a trip that all members of the Black diaspora should take to reconnect with their ancestral land:

> Ghana is a place that gives us the opportunity to recharge and realign ourselves before heading back into the new year. I've been fortunate to have traveled to Ghana four time and each time I visit, I always come back with a deeper sense of connection with members of the local community and the Black diaspora at large. (Taylor, 2022b, para.4)

However, the sentiments of peace, reconnection, and growth expressed by Dr. Oladele and my informants stand in sharp contrast to the rising economic instability on the ground. Many social media users on Twitter and Instagram have challenged narratives of return to Ghana by highlighting the struggles experienced by local people (See Figures 5 and 6).

Figure 5: *Screenshot captured by author of tweet from Black diaspora member calling for an improved healthcare system to attract returnees to Ghana.*

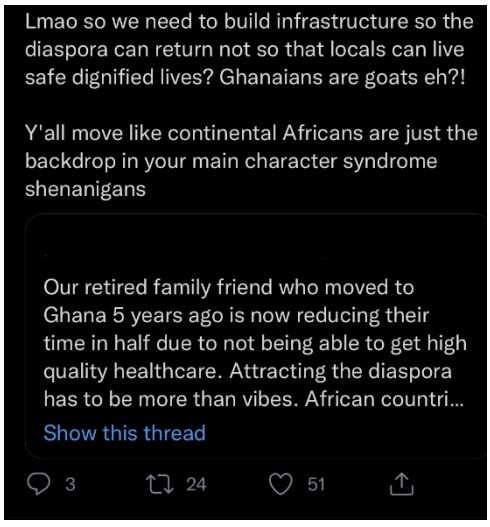

Figure 6: *Screenshot captured by author of reaction to the tweets in Figure 5 from a Ghanaian citizen.*

The Ghanaian state has put measures in place to improve Black diasporans' access to land and opportunities as they see the diaspora as a key contributor the development of Ghana's economy. However, Mensah (2023) argues that this often comes at the expense of the local population in the Greater Accra region, with the influx of foreign currencies leading to rising prices for goods and shelter, putting undue pressure on locals and pushing them out of their communities.

Consequently, Ghanaians mobilized on September 21, 2023, against the Ghanaian government through the Occupy Julorbi House movement. The movement took its name from *Julor Bi,* a Ga word for "child of a thief" and the 'Jubilee House," Ghana's presidential palace. Protests began on September 21, 2023, on Kwame Nkrumah's birthday "to echo the spirit of fighting for liberty" (*Occupy Julorbi House*, n.d.). Over three days, Ghanaians protested nation-wide (and across the globe) against the Ghanaian government's mismanagement of the economy, political corruption, a crumbling health and education system, anti-LGBTQ legislation, high youth unemployment and the exorbitant cost of living. As part of these protests, many Ghanaians called on the Black diaspora to not visit the country for December in GH, as they felt that the government has prioritized the wants and needs of foreigners and the Ghanaian elite (See Figure 7). As such, the organizers behind the movement have planned demonstration all throughout December 2023 until Akufo-Addo addresses their demands.

Figure 7: *Screenshot captured by author of tweet under the #OccupyJulorbiHouse movement.*

Despite the recent protests, the Ghanaian state has not slowed its efforts to attract foreign visitors. In fact, it has announced a 46-day visa on arrival scheme for visitors arriving between

December 1, 2023 to January 15, 2024, to encourage Africans and people of African descent to visit this December. The Black diaspora is still a key target for the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture as they aim to accomplish their target of two million international tourists a year by 2026 (Ampofo, 2023). Furthermore, many Ghanaians do not expect the upcoming national election to bring change as well. Both members of the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the opposing National Democratic Congress (NDC) have appealed to the movements concerns in their election campaigns but developing the tourism sector through the Black diaspora still seems to be a priority. For example, John Dramani Mahama's, leader of the NDC and former President of Ghana, participation at the 2023 Universities Studying Slavery Conference in Halifax, Canada and his efforts to learn and engage with historic Black communities in Canada demonstrates that he is still committed to fostering connections with the Black diaspora as a means of stoking support for his bid for the Presidency.

The lasting legacies of the YoR program have highlighted the Black diaspora's differing capabilities of both transnational and social mobility. The different experiences of mobility between returnees to Ghana and Ghanaian residents who seek travel out of Ghana reflect an existential loop of movement that has characterized the Black Diaspora: Black people in the West experiencing alienation and unbelonging will seek the homeland to lay their roots, and continental Africans will seek travel to the global core to gain social mobility while dreaming of life in the homeland. In the first chapter, I examined Ghana's changing relationship with the Black diaspora since its independence and how it foregrounded the success of the YoR. Due to transnational travel and Pan-African activism, Kwame Nkrumah was able to successfully draw on his connection with the Black diaspora during his quest for independence. His Pan-African proclamation of African unity and his inclusion of members of the diaspora in the C.P.P. show

that his political visions of an independent Ghana have always extended beyond its borders to include the collective struggles of the Black diaspora both on the African continent and abroad. However, the fall of the C.P.P. and Ghana's economic crisis in the 1980s resulted in a changed relationship with the Diaspora based on symbolic unity rather than collective socio-political struggle. Consequently, Rawlings was able to successfully utilize the state's previous relationship with the Black diaspora to generate tourism to the country through the establishment of heritage projects based on the slave trade. This set the stage for the YoR and BtR programs to make the process of return more accessible for members of the Black diaspora. However, informants expressed mixed feelings about the programs due to their commercial-focused mandates.

The second chapter explored how the Ghanaian state has been able to draw on different expressions of Blackness to ensure the success of the YoR and BtR programs. First, I reviewed literature on Afropessimism to gain insight into how understandings of Blackness factor into the phenomenon of return. By prioritizing a transnational approach to Blackness, I was able to recognize how the mobile nature of the Black diaspora and its multiple geopolitical contexts have shaped different formations of Blackness. In consideration of these differences, I argued that returnees tend to form transnational connections based on folk blackness, which conflicts with the ideas of modern blackness that are prevalent in Ghana today. While ideas of folk blackness were prioritized by the Ghanaian state in past initiatives that engaged the Black diaspora, the YoR, and BtR have been able to move beyond heritage-based return movements by establishing Ghana as a tourist destination for Black cosmopolitans who are looking to establish connections with the Black diaspora without invoking the TAST.

In the final chapter, I shifted focus to the differing mobilities characterizing the phenomenon of return to Ghana. Using the concepts of *roots* and *routes,* I argued that returnees seek to be rooted in Ghana in order to end their cycle of mobility and experience belonging. Contrastingly, Ghanaian citizens desire transnational mobility outside of the country to attain socio-economic advancement. While the mobility of returnees is facilitated by the Ghanaian state, Ghanaian citizens have their transnational mobility limited by Ghana's marginal position in the global political system. I argue that this tension between these differing mobilities reflects the broader (im)mobility of Africans and the Black diaspora, leaving many travellers and potential travellers unfulfilled by their experiences of mobility.

It is within this predicament outlined in this thesis that I have tried to grapple with my own understandings of return and my personal history of mobility. Amongst significantly more relaxed Covid-19 restrictions, I took the opportunity to travel to Ghana in December 2022 to attend an event celebrating the birthdays of an Aunt and Uncle, who were turning 70 and 60 respectively. At the time, I was experiencing a lot of difficulty with stress and alienation as a result of having to work and complete my research during the pandemic. I felt that travelling home to Ghana would be an opportunity to relax. I had heard from my family that the economic situation was especially dire, but I was still shocked when confronted with significantly higher prices for goods compared to my last visit in 2018. However, with my middle-class Canadian income, these prices were well within my reach. From my position, I can understand both sides of this conflict at the center of the YoR and BtR program, and I can see that there is no benefit in placing blame on continental Africans or members of the Black diaspora for each others' feelings of displeasure surrounding their historical (im)mobility. As long as the Ghanaian state continues

to foster unity amongst the Black diaspora within the confines of neoliberal capitalism, it will always be a lose-lose situation.

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