

The Akosombo Dam: A 'post-colonial' Imperialist Project

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Intentions and Investment: Ghana and the Volta River Project

My connection to Ghana began with my grandparents, who lived there from 1961 to 1966. My grandparents, and particularly my Pepe's (grandpa's) participation in settler colonialism in Africa; first as a soldier in the Free French Forces, then as a manager of multiple mineral and gold mines in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Congo—has created resulted in a strong generational responsibility. Soon after the birth of my father in 'southern rhodesia' (Zimbabwe), Pepe was contracted to work on 'the first major independent African development project'; the Akosombo dam in Ghana.

During a college history course, my familial connections to Africa dawned on me. From that moment, I was on a hunt for answers. While I have yet to find them, I have gathered some tools which have enabled me to analyze and understand the world and my social location in more critical ways. This searching contributed to my decision to study abroad during fall semester of 2016 at the University of Ghana in Accra. During this time, I began to research the history of the Akosombo dam which led me to the resettlement scheme.

Living as a white US citizen in Ghana is a self-conscious experience. For the first time, I felt myself to be the [elite] minority in many respects, and was given more privileges in Ghanaian society because of this status. It was not uncommon to be treated as quasi-celebrities; snapping photos with random people on the streets and having old women bow to you. My usual response was to bow back, but that could not equalize our relationship, because these performances affirmed the imperial precedent of white Euro-American supremacy. The irony was not lost on me that I am an ancestor of my grandfather- a racist European, who only fifty years ago, worked toward the corporate monopolization of African resources to make money for the Vandenbroucke lineage.

This line of critical inquiry called into question the corporatization of Ghana's resources through the Akosombo Dam, and the effects this project had on the people. I learned that 80,000 people were displaced, that they were offered compensation in the form of new resettlement towns, or cash compensation. In the end, 52 resettlement towns were built, which still stand today as relics of what Ghanaian officials have termed a "failed project" (Hart, 1980). While the government had promised that no person would be made worse off because of the project, this is clearly not the reality. While in Akosombo, I was able to visit the resettlement town of Adjena.

When we arrived in the town with one store/restaurant, and multiple half-finished construction projects (including the roads), the first thing that struck me were the concrete houses. They stood out because the materials used for the houses were uncharacteristic in rural Ghana, and they were not built in a typical set-up. I learned that these houses were the style which the Volta River Authority (VRA) chose for the resettlement program. Each family, regardless of size, received a two-room house with space for two court yards and the possibility for expansion (*ibid.*). In Adjena, the elders welcomed us to share the reason for our visit, so I was able to express that I was there because of my family ties to the Volta River Project and because I wanted to establish a relationship with the community aimed toward realizing their vision for Adjena and the surrounding areas.

Based on our experiences talking with people in multiple resettlement towns, Mershack Kabu Aklie and I created the Volta Revival Foundation, an organization which focuses on working with the peoples impacted by and around the Volta River and lake. The foundation “strives to develop a community centered and powered organization aiming to foster inter-community solidarity, build toward economic independence, and bolster childhood opportunity.” (Volta Revival Foundation, 2017). Mershack is currently working in Adjena, and I am finishing my research on the history and impacts of the Volta dam. We hope to begin the education scholarship and library accessibility programs in the fall of 2017 which are funded by grants and our online store.

Limitations to time, space, and naming in West Africa



(Moll, M. "Negroland and Guinea. with the European Settlements, Explaining what belongs to England, Holland, Denmark & c." Map. In *Urhobo Historical Society*.)

When I refer to Ghana before 1884 the borders between modern day west Africa: Ghana, Togo, Benin, Nigeria, and Cote d'Ivoire; were much more vague and fluid. The lines were often drawn by the land, through rivers and mountains; and through various systems of land tenure, but nothing like the boundaries that we refer to today. From 1729 to 1884, the colonial patriarchs had divided the west coast into four sections including 'gold coast' and 'slave coast'; and 'named' the entire Sub-Saharan Africa 'negroland'. Yet, none of those names where ever the places they were referring to. The true names are not common knowledge in the west, yet known very well to the many indigenous communities of the regions who hold the land in 'sacred trust for our people and generations yet to come' (Natural Rulers of the Lower Volta Region, 1952). What I mean to assert by the quotations around the colonial names is that they are not legitimate, they

are the ‘so called gold coast’ and the ‘so called slave coast’. I do not mean to erase the painful implications of these names, but rather to continuously revoke the right to name a land that never has been or ever will be owned by them (us).

I do not know the many names for the places I am referring to, so I have chosen to use the name Ghana referring to the modern state, because this is the only name I know that was chosen by the people who lived there (however elite and problematic they may be). Additionally, I am not Ghanaian, and am therefore not the highest authority on the subject especially concerning worldview, language, ethnic groups and divisions, and daily experience. However, I have decided to write this paper because I have the resources to do so, and I desire to be more useful to the communities of Ghana especially those harmed by the Volta River Project. I am personally invested in this project because my grandfather worked as a manager for IMPREGILO, the Italian contracted to build the Akosombo dam. It is because of this family history, that I am connected in very painful and generational ways to Africa, and I wish for this project to be the beginning of my partnership and research with the many communities and countries my family has impacted.

Research Approach and Framework

The Volta Dam, a topic so studied as to merit being called “the most studied project in the modern history” (Akyeampong, 2001) has caused irreversible damage at the expense of at least 80,000 people, 52 host towns, and the unknowable masses downstream whose livelihoods and lands have been drained of life before their eyes.

Yet, with all this formal scholarship surrounding the dam, the land, the resettlement; very little has been done for those bearing the costs of the project. Even with the many theses and publications documenting, and making case studies out of the negative impacts the dam has had on Ghanaian communities, there has been no change or advocacy on a large scale. This is because, much like the Volta River Project (VRP) itself, western research has not been used to benefit the people it studies or effects, but rather it is to document the conditions and bring acclaim and credibility to the researcher and the academy. This means that the people have been doubly offended by both the project itself, and by their constant objectification in (predominantly western) research. Linda Tuhiwai Smith speaks to this in the context of indigenous struggles for

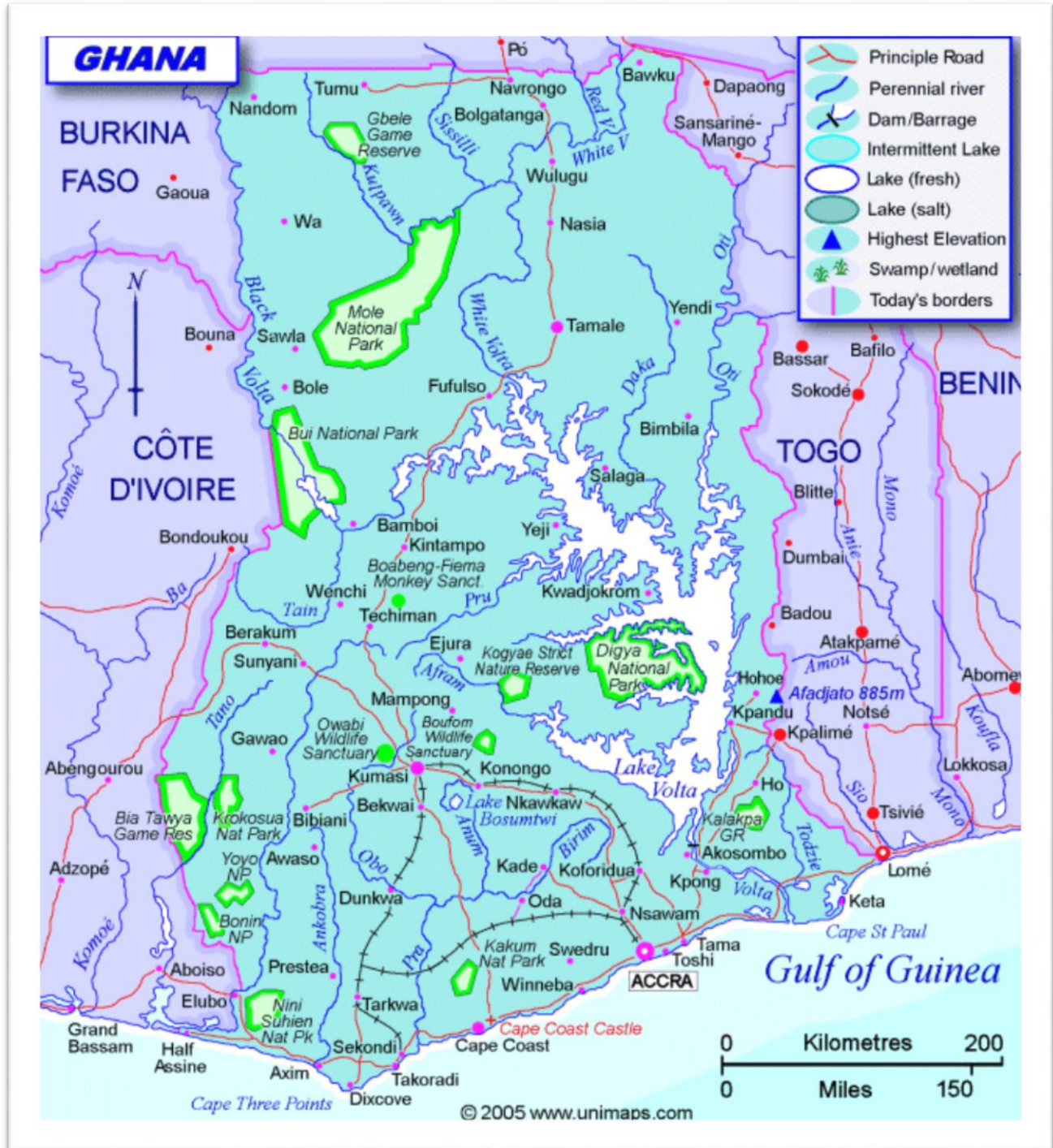
autonomy saying that, “research ‘through imperial eyes’ describes an approach which assumes that Western ideas about the most fundamental things are the only ideas possible to hold, certainly the only rational ideas possible to hold, and the only ideas which can make sense of the world, of reality, of social life and of human beings.” (Smith, 2009) this system is already set up to be dogmatic and narrow, add to this the fact that capitalism is the basis for western thought which has attempted from its inception to put a price tag on the human life, literally in the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and now in more dubious and systematic ways. This begs the question: when the profitability of a human life is deemed worthless (with the occasional press out cry, or law suit), while the profitability of a certain project is millions, what will the corporate sectors choose? Especially in the developing world, lives are often dehumanized and devalued through their representation in media, their positions in historical texts, and the delayed reaction of the west in responding to crisis in ‘developing’ regions. If this is the system of knowledge which modern research was born from, how can we expect that it will do anything more than categorize those being researched as the other and the researcher as the figurehead of the academy.

However, I contend that any research project which does not serve the people and preserve the land with transparency, active participation in decision making, and greater opportunity, cannot be considered a development. In Harts historical account and analysis, he questions the benefits of the Volta River Project (VRP), “the VRP seems not to have assisted Ghana’s development. Even if the definition of development is restricted to a purely technical criterion such as whether industrialization has occurred, the VRP remains open to severe criticism. If development is defined in terms of economic criteria (In terms of monetary gain or loss), the success of the VRP is even more in doubt. And when development is defined in terms of the achievement of political autonomy, the VRP looks as much a backward as a forward step.” (Hart, 1970). As the first independent African nation of course the burden of ‘development’ was heavy for Ghana, and true enough, many issues needed to be addressed especially in the economy. However, it seems clear that the first government of Ghana was not invested in development for the whole country, but rather the selected elite.

Thus, this historical telling of the project will center the effects it has had on the majority, and emphasize the benefits it has bestowed upon the corporate elites who are quickly becoming another global governing system of their own. This account centers the wellbeing of the people of Ghana, and specifically, three major ethnic groups including: the Akan (Ashanti, and Fante),

the Anlo-Ewe, and the Ga-Adangbe; as greater than the economic and industrial goals of the state, since the country itself cannot survive if it has forgotten its people. The land and its many names and attachments also plays a central role in any comprehensive understanding of the history and the people. Especially in light of the enormous suffering the land has endured as a result of human activity. Natural resource exploitation is the constant preoccupation of the economic powers, and as a globe we continue to mourn for the earth as our home and mother, knowing that all of us are being killed and dehumanized in the process. In talking about the people and the land it is necessary that the very complex power dynamics of the Volta River Project are examined. As a project conceived with colonial interests in mind, and rushed forward by the independent state, it is difficult to distinguish imperialism during colonial times and imperialism after independence. One such power dynamic is the act of naming and documenting history or knowledge.

I recognize that I am unable to address all of the peoples who have historical ties to the lands of Ghana, I apologize for this exclusion, and hope that one day I can write justice to the ever-increasing complexity that is Ghana. My position as a descendant of the colonial legacy puts me in a privileged class of researchers who have been given authority through the Western empire. This authority gives me (and other westerners) access “to modes of communication and enables them to project an interpretation, a definition, a description of their work and actions, that may not be accurate, that may obscure what is really taking place” (Moosa-Mitha, 2005, *Research as Resistance*). Because of this historical reality, Western study and research in historically exploited, dehumanized, and colonized areas of the world has perpetuated this legacy. Instead of coming with the intention of working together and learning from the communities; the researchers have named, categorized, and stereotyped the culture and life of the ‘native’ in an attempt to claim the history and tell the story of the ‘other’. Thus, I desire for my research to center the narratives and scholarship of Ghanaians, and West Africans- and where I cannot, I wish to recognize the social position and interests of the authors and sources. Therefore, my work and research will always be dedicated to the people, and the land. To the red earth and purple night skies, to the strength of the Baobab, to the relentless women and men who work day and night for the wellbeing of their families, and to the children who continue to dream. I hope that this research will eventually manifest itself toward your benefit.



("Ghana." Map. In *World Maps: Maps and flags of the World*. Unimaps, 2005.)
Histor(ies) and Context: the Land, the People

A brief Peoples History of Ghana

Modern Ghana is a nation on the west coast of Africa situated between Togo on the right, Burkina Faso above, Cote d'Ivoire on the left, and the Gulf of Guinea on the coast. Ghana's name comes from the Western Sudan Soninke Kingdom of Ancient Ghana whose rulers were renowned for their wealth in gold and their power in the region. Thus, when the leaders of the newly independent state had to decide the name in 1957, the choice was clear (Amenumey, 2011).

Central and Southern Ghana

The Akan or Ashanti of Central and Southern Ghana have been predominant in the region since the thirteenth century. Before the colonial invasion, there were many prosperous and largely peaceful Kingdoms in Ghana. Particularly in the North, there was substantial interaction with the Trans-Saharan trade which spread the influence of Muslim theology to Ghana and influenced important kinship based trade networks (McLaughlin and Owusu-Ansah, 1994). The first Europeans to invade Ghana were the Portuguese who are said to have established the slave trade and other mass commercial trades in gold and cocoa around 1470. For Ghana, this began six centuries of invasion, exploitation, and murder by many European empires including the Dutch, French, English, Flemish, Danish, Swedish, and the Prussians (*ibid.*). The Akan became very powerful during the beginnings of the European trade in Ghana, especially in gold, cocoa, and slaves (which the Akan participated in 'buying' and 'selling' slaves) (Sarbah, 1906). By the mid 1700's the Ashanti had established Kumasi as their capital, but were constantly at war. As a kingdom well prepared for battle, they beat the imperial forces for nearly two centuries, but the struggle became increasingly violent as the British deployed more forces in their newly claimed 'protectorate'. There were four notable wars from 1811-1896 called the Anglo-Ashanti wars ending with British 'victory' after the War of the Golden Stool in 1896 when the imperialists exiled Prempeh I (the Asantehene or king of the Ashanti) and claimed Kumasi as theirs (LaVerle Bennette, 1995). As a part of the European 'scramble for Africa' the British began extending their rule to the Northern parts of the newly proclaimed 'Gold Coast' (Ghana) in order to safeguard the natural resources from French or German annexation. By 1902 the British, French, and German governments haphazardly decreed the borders between 'gold coast' (Ghana), Cote

D'ivoire (French), Republic of the Upper Volta (Burkina Faso) (French), and Togo (German) (Adjeyi, 1981). Around this time John Mensah Sarbah published *The Fanti Constitution* which outlines the rights and demands of the Akan: Ashanti and Fante protectorates as sovereign nations, in defiance to the invasion of the British Empire (Sarbah, 1906). The struggles with the British seem to have solidified Akan identity and patriotism, which has led to an essentialism of ethnicity which some scholars argue helped to define the Akan Polity as separate from that of the Anlo to the East (Lentz, 2006).

The Trans Volta Region and the Ga-Adangbe costal settlements

Another prominent people group who have spanned the West coast of Africa for many centuries are the Anlo-Ewe peoples. The Anlo-Ewe are thought to have migrated from the Oyo State in Western Nigeria between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries. They settled along the coast in Nigeria, Benin, Togo and Ghana (Adjeyi, 1981). Traditionally, the Ewe, along with multiple people groups in this region occupy Eweland (bordered by the Volta River in Ghana and the Mono River in Togo), in modern Ghana the region was predominated by the Ewe- yet many lived there including the Ga, the Guan, the Akan, and the Gurma. The Trans-Volta region refers to Eweland East of the Volta and West of the border with Togo. The primary livelihoods in region have been as fisherman, clam divers, coastal traders and subsistence farmers and the economy was largely based on trade. From their primary trading ports in Keta, and Lome, the Ewe engaged in trade of many kinds including the slave trade in both 'buying' and 'selling' slaves (Lawson, 1958).

The Ga-Adangme are shrouded in an elusive history, even the conflation of Ga and Adangme as people groups has been called into question. However, there is a general consensus that the Ga-Adangme have lived along the Central and Eastern coasts of Ghana since before both the Anlo and Akan migrations (Manoukian, 1950). Many Ga nationals and researchers regard Accra as one of the major settlements formed by the Ga-Adangbe. Although characterized by linguistic non-unity between the people groups, the Ga-Adangme have many ties through cultural and historic roots (Dakubu, 1972). Highly evangelized and exploited during the colonial eras, the Ga-Adangme, along with the Anlo-Ewe have continued to be degraded by the worsening environmental problems which have exponentially increased since the construction of the Akosombo dam and then the Kpong dam.

Therefore, the prominent crisis faced both by the Ewe and the Ga during the colonial and independent rule has been coastal erosion, and environmental degradation. The colonial government ruled early on that it would not be responsible for any “uneconomic environmental programs” in Ghana, effectively dooming the Eastern Coastal regions (Akyeampong, 2001). Instead of investing in the trading industry east of the Volta, and particularly neglecting the regions of Keta and Ada, the colonial government built Takoradi Harbor (West of Accra) between 1921 and 1928 at the cost of £3.4 Million, and constructed a breakwater at the same place in an effort to tame the waves around the harbor. The Anlo claim that the breakwater has altered wave patterns and the littoral drift of the sand, thus diverting the waves westward, and aggravating erosion along Ada and Anlo regions. The Voltaic lobby advocated for a harbor at Ada and the smelter in Kpong, as recommended in the Duncan Rose report so as to develop the region. Their advocacy and hopes were rendered useless as the Halcrow report updated the project in 1951 by placing both the harbor and smelter at Tema, Accra (Lumsden, 1971). Further exacerbating their marginalization was that the report did not mention any towns east of the Volta when listing the beneficiaries of electricity. Probably because of the exploitative ethos of capitalism, the project favored mining towns and larger cities. After the release of the Halcrow report, the Voltaic Lobby came out with a statement to the colonial government declaring that it is, “unconscionable that the Volta Basin was to be exploited to the detriment of local communities and that none of the Voltaic towns were even to benefit from the electrification programme.”. The chiefs asserted that this was part of a deliberate neglect of the Gold Coast Volta region, which dated back to the British assumption of Danish influence in 1850. The chiefs stated that this resolution should serve as a final warning to the government ‘not to interfere with our lands and the Volta River which we hold in sacred trust for our people and generations yet unborn’ (PRO, CO 554/506. Resolution passed by the Natural Rulers of the Lower Volta Region on 5 April 1952 at Dodowa) (Cited in Akyeampong, 2001). Sadly, the economic colonial lines continued to be etched more deeply into Ghanaian society and history. For example, the advent of railways and the cocoa trade significantly undermined the palm kernel and oil trade by diverting trade along the triangular railways from Takoradi, Kumasi, and Accra (Konings, 1986). This trade route completely cut out both the Eastern and Northern regions of Ghana. The Ewe considered the divide “between Gold Coast east and west of the Volta to have been drawn in a rather belligerent fashion, but the cards were stacked against the communities east of the Volta.

It seemed unjust that, to those who had much, more would be added, while the Volta region remained underdeveloped. But the distribution of cocoa and mineral deposits had determined this pattern at the turn of the century” (Akyeampong, 2001).

The Colonial boundary between Ghana and Togo was established between 1884 (Berlin Conference) and 1890, restricting mobility and forcing traders in the region into the western monetary system through taxation, at this time multiple states such as the Aduklu and Waya protested the border as not in the interests of the people or West African trade, but were silenced by German forces (Lawson, 1958). The boarder demarcating ‘gold coast’ (Ghana) from Togo created a literal divide between the Ewe and Ga-Adangme peoples in the two separately colonized states. Regardless of the fact that the people of Eweland were neither consulted nor considered in the erection of the boarder, its effects disempowered the already neglected people of the region and established European interests and wealth as supreme. In 1914, during WWI German Togo was invaded by French and British forces with the help of the Ghanaian army lead by Sri II a decorated army general and member of the Gold Coast Legislative Council. With the successful overthrow of German power, the French and English empires decided in 1916 that Togoland was to be separated into two zones: the British taking the North Western part, and France taking the Eastern part including the port city of Lome, which served as a major trading port along with Keta on the opposite side of the boarder (Nugent, 1962).

In his study on *The Eco-social History of the Anlo in Southeastern Ghana*, Harvard professor Dr. Emmanuel Kwaku Akyeampong examines how landscape and environmental citizenship formed the basis of the movement for Ewe reunification and the surge of Ewe nationalism. He posits that the, “Artificial German and British boundaries reinforced kinship and cultural ties among the Ewe and underscored the disabilities of forced partition.”, the 1914 defeat of Germany in Togo, catalyzed the movement for Ewe reunification, which sought the reunification of the ‘gold coast’ (Ghana) and British Togoland under the mastery of the British. In 1919, after years of intense lobbying, meetings and petitions on the part of the Ewe, the British formalized the agreement with the French under the Simon-Milner Agreement (La Verle Berry, 1994). The Anlo-Ewe people contributed substantially to the British war effort, and they were “aghast at the cavalier dismissal of their expressed sentiments on the settlement of their future.” (Kimble, 1971). They used this time to mobilize and unite the Ewe under the Ewe

reunification movement to protect Anlo's distributive role in the economy east of the Volta, fight against environmental decline, and demand more power in the political economy of the 'gold coast' (Ghana) (Akyeampong, 2001). Throughout the first half of the 20th century the complex and non-homogenous movement for Ewe reunification continued to fight for autonomy and representation as the movement became more vocal about international liberation struggles and the global power imbalance, establishing many informational and organizing bodies.

The struggle for representation and reunification by the Ewe and other Trans-Volta border communities went almost completely ignored by the ruling colonial caste. This systematic disenfranchisement is made even more evident by the 1947 gold coast joint memorandum to the UN, where the colonial government pointed out that the Ewe in 'gold coast' (Ghana) lay outside the UN trusteeship system, therefore the Ewe in the gold coast could not petition the UN on the status of the two Togo's, this worked to isolate the Ewe from any decision making concerning British and French Togo (Akyeampong, 2001). Ghana's independence in 1948, and the incorporation of British Togo, the Ashanti protectorate, and the Fante protectorate into Ghana marked the rise of the new ruling party- The Convention Peoples Party (CPP) lead by Kwame Nkrumah whose vision was toward a united West Africa. These events, and the concurrent rise of the Togo independence movement split the Ewe polity between Ghana and Togo, and, "aware that the unification argument was in part an underdevelopment argument, the CPP ensured that development funds were directed towards the Trans-Votla-Togoland Region" (*ibid.*). When the promised funding did not begin to solve the Anlo-Ewe environmental problems, and the subsequent administrations further excluded the Anlo-Ewe; the media framed the political power dynamics of exclusion and inclusion struggles as an ethnic Akan-Anlo split, diminishing centuries of oppression and neglect into petty ethnic squirmishes (Esseks, 1971). Thus, the refusal of both the Colonial and independent governments to respect the land and the people as autonomous and crucial to national development has worked to push the Ewe and Ga-Adangme out of the nation state. It is within this historical context that the lines of Ewe ethnicity were drawn, essentially excluding many from the Central and Volta regions- such as the Ga-Adangme- from Ewe movements. Additionally, the struggles and histories of the Ewe people are not unlike many of the movements and hardships from people groups in the Northern, and Brong Ahafo Regions who have been displaced and dispossessed of their lands and livelihoods,

neglected in development, and exploited through the labor force (Pickett and Singer, 1990; Konings, 1986)¹. As one alternative to breaking down these historical constructions, and offering a more united resistance front, Akyeampong suggests the use of Ewe understanding of political ecology and environmental citizenship. Leaders of the reunification movement have presented the space between the Volta and Mono rivers as “unified by landscape and culture” artificially cut which “the a Anlo perceived a breach in their moral ecology, the equilibrium of the social, cosmological, and natural worlds that facilitated a successful pursuit of life and underpinned the Anlo understanding of their landscape. The futility of a moral solution provided a backdrop for an Anlo critique of colonial rule and the ‘modernity’ that had encouraged the dismissal of custom and the loss of valuable knowledge about the sea.” (Akyeampong, 217). For the Anlo-Ewe, land is a unifying force to the people who are touched by it, both living and dead. As a people who have experienced the crushing blows of imperial greed and elitism in both the colonial and independent governments, it is crucial that the Anlo-Ewe refuse such exclusions in the fight for the land and the people and use their position to unify the oppressed peoples of Ghana. Whereas other arguments have advocated for a separate Ewe polity, environmental citizenship since the building of the dam is about the inclusion of the people effected through a shared historiography and the need for equal representation and the reintegration of isolated people groups into the Ghana government.

The Politics of Independence

Ghana’s political activism and resistance to oppressive regimes has been an integral part of the people, the land, and subsequently the history. The foundations for independence were therefore laid in the very spirits of the people and the earth. The early movements for independence- lead primarily by the growing number of Akan foreign educated elites- were threatened by British takeover through laws concerning land tenure and taxation. In response they formed the Aborigines’ Rights Protection Society in 1897, co-founded by Casely Hayford and John Mensah Sarbah. The intention of the organization was to resist the colonial rule, and to maintain the sovereignty of the Ashanti and Fanti (Akan) protectorates (the Northern territory was also a protectorate at the time). The Aborigines’ Rights Protection Society, along with

¹ See the Veia and Tono Irrigation Projects (Koning, 237) and the Bui hydroelectric/resettlement scheme (Mettle, 2011)

multiple international organizations such as the African Progress Union laid the ground work for the establishment of the Ghanaian chapter of the National Congress of British West Africa (NCBWA) in 1920 (Hodgkin, 1971). These early movements pushed for elected and equal representation, and independence. Paradoxically, the organizations members consisted of all Akan elite males, while simultaneously claiming to be representative of Ghana. This had an exclusionary effect on both the Northern and Trans-Volta regions of Ghana, which were also being exploited and excluded by the colonial regime (Kimble, 1962). While certainly not representative, the Akan-lead movements for independence did chip away at the sovereignty of the colonial regime, and proved the effectiveness of continual advocacy. Unfortunately, these early movements forecasted the divides which continue to exist in post-colonial Ghana.

In 1925 a new 'gold coast' constitution created a provincial of paramount chiefs for all but the Northern provinces, comprised of six unofficial chiefs. This act on the part of the colonial government made a show of recognizing Ghanaian sentiments, in order to placate the movement (McLaughlin and Owusu-Ansah, 1994). From the late 1940's to 1957 Ghana's political system was shaken as the British government agreed to a transitional period towards independence for Ghana, where the colonial British government was still predominant, but with increasing participation from Ghanaians. The movement continued, independent African Media began to take up the call, and as a result, two more African members were added to the Executive Council in 1943. The post war elections in 1946 established a new colonial constitution in 'gold coast'. Apart from the changes to the Legislative Council, the constitution admitted representatives from Ashanti (Akan) into the council for the first time as government officials. This move did not impress the largely impoverished people of Ghana, as the colonial government continued to pillage the land for resources and exploit the people for labor. In fact, the North did not have representation until 1948 when the Northern Territories Council was established (Whereas Southern and Urban Ghana had been represented (in terms of territorial representation not class) since 1925, whether they had any substantive power in the legislative body is another debate. The northern regions especially had reason to fear 'black imperialism from the South', the North had always been a reliable migratory labor force for the southern trade industries, and were treated very much as below the Southern urban dwellers. (Lentz, 2006). The independent government was evidently focused on the urban areas of the country, rather than the rural farmers and fishers who kept the country alive. By the 1940's, living conditions had worsened

for many Ghanaians due the falling cocoa prices, and the increasing cost of food and staple goods. As a result, there was a nation-wide boycott on trade with the goal of disrupting the status quo enough to shed light on the housing crisis, the immense foreign control of the economy, and widespread poverty and neglect of the people, especially in rural northern and eastern Ghana. In response, the colonial government promised strict price control, and the boycott was called off. When nothing changed, a widespread people's uprising occurred February 28 and, 29, 1948, ending in the gunning down of three people by the police (Maxon, 1984). These occurrences catalyzed the process of Ghana's independence, and forced the British government to hire an Inquiry team -the Watson Commission- to investigate the 'disturbances'. The commission later established itself as an all-African commission of forty Ghanaian men from all over the country who drew up the 1951 constitution, and conducted Ghana's first general elections. Kwame Nkrumah's party the Convention People's Party (CPP) won the election - which released Kwame Nkrumah from his prison sentence - to run the government during a period of internal self-government prior to formal independence on March 6, 1957 (Afrifa, 1967). However, independence was a far cry from equalizing power relations, the elite were still in power serving an urban and primarily Akan dominated party.

History of the Volta River Project

The basin which now contains the Volta Lake has been recorded and studied in Ghana as notable since the early 1900's as archeologists began to study and assess the resources of the British 'gold coast' colony, however the Basin was noted as a potential resource far before that (Agorsah, 2003). These inquiries eventually lead to the Volta River Project, and the corporate aluminum scheme, which would alter the peoples' history of Ghana and West Africa forever. The first person to publish a full report on the potential projects in the Volta Area was the knighted British administrator Sir Albert Kitson who had worked in South Africa before being contracted by the colonial government of Ghana. Notably, all of the studies concerning the VRP were carried out either by European colonists or corporate conglomerates. The projects were never meant to benefit the people of Ghana, because those who created the final project would ensure the corporate and capitalist gains in the USA and the former colonial powers.

Sir Albert Kitson was appointed to colonial office for the 'gold coast' in 1913 to establish a new department to discover mineral wealth in the little known interior of the land. During his time in this station he found traces of bauxite (the ore used to create aluminum) in Northern Ghana. He also noted during a canoe ride that "on entering the narrow gorge below Adjena [he saw] that it was an ideal place for a dam." (Kitson, 1924) he took rough measurements, and estimated the volume of water passing through the gorge per second. He hypothesized that a 100 ft. dam at Akosombo could produce 134,000 KW of power, "He envisioned the consequent lake being at least extensive enough to provide water transport down the Afram stretch (North in the Ashanti region) for the movement of bauxite deposits" (Maxon, 1969). "It was the juxtaposition of raw bauxite and potential water power that pointed to the possibility of an economic project." (Amenumey, 2011). Thus, the project was conceived with purely economic motives from the beginning, with the intention of finding less expensive resources for the principal benefit of the British Empire.

After a trip to France and Scotland, Kitson returned to the 'gold coast' (Ghana) with the information needed to write a detailed proposal for the use of Volta hydro-electric power to run an aluminum smelting plant. Kitson also proposed many other hydro-power dam projects including the Bui dam on the Black Volta and the Kpong dam further down stream from Akosombo; he saw these projects as electrifying a future railway north. (Maxon, 1969). While Kitson's proposals intrigued the colonial government, they were already invested in many projects which postponed the development of the project until the next decade.

In 1938, after finding the 1925 bulletin post by Kitson about the possibilities of hydro power in the 'gold coast' (Ghana), Duncan Rose an English settler colonist in South Africa, became interested in further developing the scheme. Rose was an aluminum investor, and "sensing that war was imminent he could see the advantage to the commonwealth of a sterling source of aluminum." (*ibid.*). His subsequent research in Ghana caught the interest of the Anglo-Transvaal Consolidated Investment Co., a South African financier, which agreed to sponsor a full-scale investigation into the bauxite and power potential of the scheme. In collaboration with Christopher St. John Bird with the Johannesburg Firm of Consulting Engineers they created the African Aluminum Syndicate, ironically owned entirely by Europeans. That same year, the syndicate proposed a 40 meter dam costing between £2.5- 3.5 million (Hart, 1980). Notably,

Rose pointed out in his initial presentation and study that the costs of resettlement and flooding could very well jeopardize the whole scheme (Okoampa-Ahoofe, 2009). The project morphed under the research of Rose and St. John Bird from 1939-1949 as ALCAN and BAC corporations agreed to fund another study of the project. The second version of the project -primarily carried out by St. John Bird- increased the dam height to 75 meters, and estimated the project to cost £6.5 million (Maxon, 1969). By the time of Ghanaian independence in 1948, the path for the VRP had been so historically constructed that regardless of whether or not Nkrumah was the first president, the project probably would have been pushed forward.

Nkrumah ran on a platform of what has been described as communism, socialism, and pan-Africanism, but was certainly pro-industrialization with a very narrow understanding of development. In many ways, the Volta River Project was Nkrumah's baby, he personally oversaw the progress on the dam, and used it as a symbol of the emergent Ghana in the global political and economic spheres. However, Ghana's substantial but insufficient reserves from the cocoa and sterling trades, and lack of available and trained staff to run and implement the dam, ensured foreign investment and ownership over the project (Esseks, 1971). Thus, the independent government had to rely on foreign investments and loans to conceive and implement the project. Regardless of the many outcries of the people for a more just and equitable system of government, and a restructuring of priorities, the Nkrumah administration seemed to have been convinced that the VRP scheme would jumpstart the social mobility of Ghanaians so that Ghana could become a stronger global power.

World War II announced the explosion of demand for aluminum to satisfy the war, and with it, the exploitation of Ghana's Bauxite reserves by the British dramatically increased. It was during this time (1948-1949) that the British and independent Ghana governments began to seriously consider a full-scale aluminum industry in Ghana. Therefore, one of President Nkrumah's first decisions was to extend a researching contract to Halcrow and Partners, a British firm to do a full survey of the Volta Basin and the Volta River (Frempong, 1982). Though there were many modifications, the final report was submitted in 1951, and entailed a dam of 80 meters, a power station at Adjena, and a separately funded Aluminum smelter in Tema. The proposal was a vision of the VRP as a multi-purpose project including the expansion of the

railway to carry bauxite, the expansion of irrigation: growing rice and cotton downstream; and a proposed port site at Tema (Maxon, 1969). In 1952, the Ghanaian Legislative Assembly approved a motion to begin financing negotiations. Subsequent meetings in London in 1952 produced the U.K. white paper “The Volta River Aluminum Scheme”. The scheme presented in the white paper explained that while the project was (theoretically) planned for the benefit of Ghanaians, “the scheme was justified to the British Parliament as first and foremost a means of British escape from the dollar-based monopoly of the post-war aluminum producers” (Chambers et al., 1970). Britain had to contend with the rising demand for aluminum in 1950 which was forecast to be four to five times greater by 1975, and with limited power resources, England looked towards the colonies as having, “the most potential in the commonwealth area.” (Maxon, 1961). Meanwhile, the Ghana government published their paper on the ‘Development of the Volta River Basin’ which included many of the suggestions made by Halcrow & Partners (Hart, 1970). The original commission set up to undertake the development was called the Preparatory Commission with R.G.A. Jackson as the special Commissioner. At the time of his appointment, Jackson had not been approved by the Legislative Assembly, rather he was personally appointed by Nkrumah. By this time some within the government were beginning to question the far-reaching power of the central leader, and were correct in their fears when Nkrumah disqualified two of the Legislative Assembly’s picks for the commission and changed the structure of the body, further undermining the legislatures power (Hart, 1970). These shows of power resulted in a pattern of centralized decision making and a de-centering of the voices and lives of the people most altered by the project.

Jackson’s Preparatory Commission issued their report in 1956 using the same 80 meter dam measurements and dam placement at Adjena from Birds analysis, and estimating the dam and power station (with resettlement) to cost £144 million. However, including the smelter, harbor and other infrastructure plus a 45% contingency margin, the total cost was raised to £309 million (Tsikata, 2011). Yet, due to the loss of corporate interest from Canadian and British associates and the turning down of the USSR’s three funding proposals, Nkrumah turned to the US which agreed to fund a reassessment of the project (Metzmeier, 1989).

The Final Agreement

In 1958 the USA based Henry J. Kaiser Corporation or Kaiser Aluminum & Chemicals Company (KACC) was hired as the consulting engineer for the VRA, and released their report in 1959 choosing Akosombo for the dam site, and proposing two more Hydroelectric projects at Kpong, and Bui. Their report forecasted that the aluminum plant and smelter would be owned entirely by foreign corporations, and would be built at Tema. The report proposed that for an indeterminate period, the Smelter would use imported alumina from Kaiser owned mines in Jamaica-- instead of developing Ghana's bauxite trade (Tsikata, 2012). This, Kaiser argued would allow for the energy to be sold profitably at the low price of 2.5 Mills per kWh. More importantly, the reassessment cut the entire resettlement budget and all other 'non-economic costs' from the estimate, effectively restricting any foreign funding from directly benefiting the people. On top of all that, Kaiser recommended shortening the construction of the dam from seven to four years to increase energy production and thus profitability (Faber, 1990). By the time the report came out Nkrumah was anxious to actualize the project, and afraid that this was the last chance. From this weak bargaining position, he approved the proposal.

In 1959 Kaiser convened a formation meeting for the Volta Aluminum Company (VALCO). Of the five corporations present only two - Kaiser (90%) and Reynolds (10%) - invested in the company. Soon after, VALCO and the Ghana government entered into the master agreement which outlined the pricing and obligations for each party concerning the smelter and electricity. This final agreement exempted VALCO from import and export tax on alumina and any other necessary materials for the smelter, and was on a general tax holiday - except for income tax - for the first thirty years of operation (Hart, 1980). The deal also made a tolling stipulation that if the smelter did not use Ghanaian Bauxite after ten years, the tolling fee would increase by 4%. Additionally, VALCO was given Pioneer Company Relief which exempted it from income tax for a maximum of 10 years. With the help of negotiation by the World Bank VALCO agreed on a base rate of 2.625 mills per kWh (5% of the average world price in 1983), and (perhaps for the better) did not promise to construct an alumina mining plant in Ghana (Faber, 1990). It is possible that the only net benefit the deal offered Ghana was the VALCO fund for those effected by that dam, which VALCO paid into \$40,000 a year.

In 1961 the government of Ghana passed the Volta River Development act, which established the Volta River Authority tasked with overseeing the construction and electricity

generation of the dam (McLaughlin and Owusu-Ansah, 1994). In the same year Italian consortium, IMPREGILO won the construction contract and began dredging the river bed, and dewatering the channel. The company completed the dam a month earlier than scheduled (despite the flooding in 1963) at the expense of the 28 workers who died working on the dam between 1961 and 1966 (International Rivers, 2007). Kaiser was awarded the contract for engineering, construction, and procurement of materials. Construction began in 1961, the major financiers of the projects included the US import-export Bank, the international Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank), Britain, and Ghana (Jopp, 1965). The lake began to fill in 1964, eventually extending to a length of 250 miles upstream from the dam site, covering 3,275 square miles with a shore line of over 4,500 miles. In the process 738 villages were drowned and 80,000 people displaced (Maxon, 1969). It is clear that both the British Empire and the new US corporate elite had no intentions in Ghana but towards their own capital gain.

The Political Economics of the Volta Dam: Power and Profit

Kwame Nkrumah and the CPP

“Capitalism contains many paradoxes, all of them based on the concept of commodity production: the few rich and many poor; poverty and hunger amid superabundance; “freedom from hunger” campaigns and subsidies for restriction of crop output. But perhaps the most ludicrous is the constant traffic in the same kinds of goods, products and commodities between countries. Everyone is busy, as it were, taking in the other’s washing.”

“Capitalism at home is domestic colonialism.”

~Kwame Nkrumah, Consciencism, 1962

Often referred to as Osagyefo (the redeemer) for his role in pushing forward independence, Nkrumah stood as the symbol of Ghanaian liberation, and still to this day he is recognized as one of the great pan-Africanist leaders. Nkrumah was dedicated to a continent wide pan-African Union, and he intended for much of West Africa to be the first state in this

union, presumably lead by Nkrumah himself. Ali Mazrui defines pan-Africanism to be, “a system of values and attitudes that favor the unity and solidarity of Africans and people of African ancestry” (Agyeman, 1992; introduction by Ali Mazrui). Nkrumah wrote extensively on topics concerning African freedom and autonomy including his passionate and warranted criticism of Euro-American imperialism, Colonialism, and capitalism (as in the quotes above). Paradoxically, Nkrumah was also convinced of the modernization through industrialization paradigm, thus Killick has described his politics as a combination of nationalism and socialism (Killick, 1978). In the case of the VRP, however, the project was rooted in British Colonial motives, and sprouted in the time of neocolonial capitalism with grim results.

At independence, Ghana’s economic situation was by no means advantageous, but most agree that with the resources it had (natural and monetary), there was the potential to develop/industrialize. In 1962 30% of the GDP came from agriculture, and Ghana provided 35% of the world’s cocoa supply. The Northern and upper regions accounted for 9% total value added, and 19% of Ghana’s population, yet the four Southern regions accounted for 75% total value add, but represented only 34% of Ghana. In Ghana’s 1960 population census it reported that 25% of its wage labor force was unemployed; the census considered a person to be employed if they had worked one day in the preceding month (Hart, 1980).

The government speculated that if it did not diversify its economy in the subsequent five years, that Ghana was bound for poverty. Based on this conviction, the CPP released their second five year development plan in 1959, which outlined the uses of a £242 budget, emphasizing the VRP by investing Ghana’s \$40 million savings from the sterling and cocoa trades on the construction of the Akosombo dam. In total, it is estimated that the Ghana government spent £70.1 million to finance the dam, power house, transmission lines (at least km from Akosombo to Tema), sub-stations, and the establishment of the Volta River Authority to oversee the resettlement project (Hart, 1980). The project was loudly acclaimed as the greatest development project of all time by the CPP stating the benefits of the project to be: industrialization, electrification, employment, increased exports, international investments, and larger irrigation systems. However, “These goals were anchored in a political philosophy, which while explicit about the interests of ordinary people, approached development projects as though all citizens in Ghana would benefit equally. This ignored the burgeoning class, rural-urban and North-South dichotomies in Ghanaian society and the situation that those who would benefit from the VRP

would not be the same as those who would be adversely affected.” (Konings, 1986). In the end, the VRP and smelter projects have been argued by many to not have developed or benefited the country and people in any substantial way (Hart, 1980; Tsikata, 2001; Obosu-Mensah, 1996; Esseks, 1971; Jopp, 1965; Lumsden, 1973; Mettle, 2011).

Nkrumah’s administration was wrought with difficulties and paranoia, “That Nkrumah survived in office until 1966 despite repeated attempts on his life, several foreign policy fiascos, and domestic economic conditions that deteriorated steadily from 1961, demonstrates adequately that his political “machine” was formidable.” (Esseks, 1968). Early on in his term Nkrumah worked to systematically silence his opposition, or those he considered to be threatening. The preventative Detention Act was passed in 1958 gave the head of the government (Nkrumah) the power to sentence someone to detention (prison) for up to five years without trial (later extended to 10 years) (Afrifa, 1967). On July 1, 1960, a new constitution was adopted, changing Ghana from a parliamentary system with a prime minister to a republican form of government headed by a powerful president. Then, in August 1960, Nkrumah was given the authority to scrutinize newspapers and other documents before publication. This political devolution continued into early 1964, when a constitutional referendum changed the country to a one-party state (*ibid.*). It seems that Nkrumah could sense his impending ousting, fearing “that the emergence of a strong indigenous capitalist class would undermine his own preeminence in Ghanaian politics”, he said, “Any Ghanaian with a lot of money has a lot of influence; any Ghanaian with a lot of influence is a threat to me” (Esseks, 1971). During this period Nkrumah imprisoned thousands of people including J.B. Danquah (who died in prison) and K.A. Busia (who fled the country); two of the countries founders, and exiled K. A. Gbedemah, Ghana’s economic adviser (McLaughlin and Owusu-Ansah, 1994). As a part of realizing his vision of a unified Africa Nkrumah deployed the Ghana army to support various groups and interests through armed struggle in Congo from 1960 to 1962, and Rhodesia and Angola in 1965. These acts of what the Ghana government would later call imperialism, caused widespread doubt and criticism from the Ghana army, though no one dared to speak out against the regime (Ghana, 1966). This eventually resulted in the February 24, 1966 coup which Busia called ‘a reclaiming of democracy’. The Coup was planned by three officers in the army, and was supported by the Accra police and the Ghana forces.

Nkrumah's rhetoric continues to be very inspiring, however, his flaunting of theoretical revolutions to the people through the deployment of nationalism and socialism did nothing to change the oppressive systems and structure which the administration had inherited from the colonial regime. In Franz Fanon's book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, he analyses the post-independence 'underdeveloped middle class', who, on independence find themselves in the position to benefit from the power vacuum left by the colonial government. Under the guise of nationalization there is "the transfer into native hands [of] those unfair advantages which are a legacy of the colonial period" (Fanon, 1968). The mission of the new ruling class was primarily to be, "the transmission line between the nation and a capitalism, rampant though camouflaged, which today puts on the mask of neo-colonialism." Fanon goes on to say that because the native bourgeoisie aspires to be like the Western bourgeoisie -from whom it has learned- and because of its greed and submission to '*buisness as usual*' it will fail the people, or in the crude language of Fanon, it will 'set up its country as the brothel of Europe.' (*ibid.*). Neoliberalism in independent Ghana, as in many other states, has forced the people to participate in their own exploitation for the ruthless expansion of transnational corporations and diplomatic gambling. Neoliberalism is defined by an elite governing body who use the façade of human rights and democracy, by engaging a rhetoric of equality and freedom, without any intention of changing the exclusionary system. Neoliberal policies are being upheld and validated constantly because they serve the interests of the elite who govern. Somehow the powerful men (mostly) of the world still believe in the sacrifice of the poorest for the gain of the richest, and continue to act as though capitalism and its economic system is our salvation, while the lived experience of the average person shows us that is clearly not the case.

The USA and Kaiser Aluminum & Chemicals Company (KACC)

The decision for the USA to be involved in the VRP was highly political, and spanned the presidencies of Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson. As the first independent African nation, emerging during the cold war – whose government the US considered to be borderline communist- the US was eager to gain influence in the area as a gateway to 'investing in independent Africa (Hart, 180). Highly visible, large-scale development projects served a distinct function in this context, as the US perceived the Tennessee Valley Authority to be successful model and potential '*weapon*' against communism (Smith, 2006). In 1959 the Eisenhower

administration told Kaisers that they would help finance the smelter, but by 1961, Kennedy indicated that Nkrumah's criticisms of US policy in Africa jeopardized this commitment (Metzimeier, 1989). This news came just as Nkrumah was expected to talk about Ghana's intention to nationalize the Aluminum industry in Ghana within thirty years. Instead Nkrumah changed his speech making a thirty year promise to protect Kaisers investment. By this time, "VALCO (owned by Kaiser and Reynolds) was protected by multiple guaranties (and favorable tax legislation) that ensured that the company was treated much more advantageously than the rest of the foreign business community." (Decker, 2011). Another dynamic in the relationship was Kaisers role as a corporate diplomat, mediating the relationship between Ghana and the USA. This gave Kaisers corporation access to information that both governments wanted, and positioned Kaisers to make a very favorable deal.

While the Nkrumah administration publicly expressed its non-aligned position in cold war politics and the US government spoke about supporting the people of Ghana, theses statement did little in leveraging the VRP and master agreements in Ghana's favor. Naturally, as time went on, it became clear that the primary motivations of the USA in Ghana were economic. The central benefits were the use of foreign aid (which only Ghana would be responsible to pay off) to increase the profitability for US goods and services, the development of new overseas markets, and the orientation of national economies toward a free enterprise system in which US firms can prosper (Magdoff, 1969; cited in Hart). Originally brought into the project by the US government, the US Export-Import Bank backed Kaiser's investment through a \$96 million loan in addition to guaranteeing \$100 million of Kaiser's investments against expropriation (Tsikata, 2012). Thus, the US banks backed over 75% of Kaisers projects, but only 43% of the funds for the dam. It has been speculated that Gbedemah, Ghana's first Minister of Finance, was a great diplomatic statesman, and was a critical part in negotiating the early deals between Ghana and the US, thus scholars have said that Nkrumah's decision to exile Gbedemah in 1961 "may well have doomed Ghana's chances of negotiating a sound monetary deal for the construction of the dam" (Okoampa-Ahoofe, 2009). Of course, it would have helped if the US and Kaiser had truly cared about the people of Ghana, but in this world the idea of government and business being compassionate is often unbelievable.

By 1960 the president of *Kaiser Aluminum & Chemicals Company*, Henry Kaiser found himself as not only the main planner of the project, but the potential owner and operator of the smelter and plant (Stein, 1980). The promise of cheap energy was alluring, as was the cheap labor, making for a large margin of profit which was always the bottom line for Kaisers. Ironically, the company has received multiple awards for the VRP including an award from the Overseas Private Development Corporation for the “contribution to the social and economic development in Ghana, and the success of Valco” (Stein, 1980, p. 185). Validations such as these serve to widen the political power differential between developed and less developed countries suggesting that the “political power held by the home economy translates directly into economic power for its Multinational companies”. While many Euro-American TNC’s acquire a great deal of power from their home countries they often twist their position as foreign companies to highlight their power in relation to the sovereignty of nations as being dependent on the host states ‘benevolence’ (Decker, 2011). In addition to the economic power of Kaiser’s home country, Kaiser itself is one of the largest corporate economies in the world. In 1973 Kaiser’s total revenue was \$2,500 mill, compare that with Ghana’s GDP of \$2,600 million for that same year, based on these numbers Hart concludes that in a quantitative sense “the Kaiser Corporation and Ghana are roughly equal in terms of economic power” (Hart, 1980). However, if one takes into account the economic and political power of the USA which fully backed and funded Kaisers projects, then the true dynamic is one of great inequality.

The corporate political system does not understand the intrinsic and autonomous value of the earth or the people, since capitalism can only see worth in dollar signs. This is a system that allows for mass a exploitation of the people and the land, and mandates the usurping of government and law. Like many other situations involving Trans-national corporations (TNC’s), Ghana was left with overwhelming indebtedness to the ‘west’ when it is the incredible greed of the capitalist system which has stolen everything from the people.

The Effects of Corporate and National Blindness

In his introduction to *The Volta Resettlement Experience*, Sir Robert Jackson concludes that, “From my personal experience, I know that these negotiations were conducted in a spirit of reasonableness and goodwill, and that there was always the common objective of creating a Master Agreement which would be fair to all concerned. Nonetheless, if past history is a guide,

that Master Agreement is bound to be attacked at some stage or another in the future; when that happens much will depend on the honesty and reasonableness of the men then responsible for the project... Whatever the future may hold, nothing can now change the fact that Ghana has developed most successfully one of its most precious natural resources, the waters of the Volta, and that from now on it will have at its disposal some of the cheapest power in the world.” (Forward by Sir Robert Jackson in Maxon, 1969), such universal praise for this ‘development’ project highlights either the incredible selfishness or complete ignorance of the powerful men who signed off on the project. Jacksons comments about the goodwill of all involved in creating the project praises their motives and the projects efficiency while completely evading the questions which should have been central to the conversation all along: who will benefit and who will suffer the true costs of the project and what is the responsibility of all beneficiaries towards those who are paying for the project with their lives and land?

Of course, this analysis of the VRP is no surprise from sir Robert Jackson, a Knighted British servant who was dedicated to the advancement of the British Empire above all (Okoampa-Ahoofe, 2009). However, explaining the actions of independent Ghana is a bit more difficult, the government should have had the peoples and the lands best interest at heart in all things- but in the case of the VRP the people and the land seem to be a troublesome afterthought. Using Fanon’s theories Ghana’s first independent government may be explained in terms of domestic imperialism which is characterized by the elite rule. When the colonial systems and structures were not overturned at independence, it ensured that the colonial structures of western based capitalism and Euro-American supremacy would also remain, meaning the majority of Ghanians continued to be silenced.

Sadly, the costs of this oppressive agenda inherited from the British were borne by the land and those resettled and affected by the dam. Shortly after the resettlement scheme was carried out by the Volta River Authority, approximately 40% of the people left the towns for reasons including lack of: work, infrastructure, agriculture, and housing (Tsikata, 2012). Given a budget of \$3,500,000, the VRA was also responsible for paying compensation to the affected people, and any extra cash need were to be paid by the central government. The VRA’s responsibility was paid in full by 1971, after that any lands compensation claim was to go to the Lands department which has now been taken over by the Land Valuation Board. Yet to this day many compensations have not been paid, and Economist W.K. Brobbly has argued that in Ghana

a significant amount of compensation is paid to the wrong people (Decker, 2011). Additionally, many host towns (towns who gave up their lands for the resettlement towns), and almost everyone affected downstream of the dam have not been compensated either. Compensation implies just retribution, but the valuation system used by the VRA massively undervalued everything they were supposed to reimburse, arguing that the resettler's were given a better situation than they had before (Chambers, 1965). Yet, there were and continue to be many grievances concerning resettlement. Resettlement towns were often built in rural areas, with no electricity, water, livelihoods, roads, or any other amenities. Farming and fishing were the typical livelihoods of the resettled people, and each family was promised 3 acres of land under the mechanized agriculture and irrigation project. However, many people still do not have land to farm on, and the monetary economy in these areas is often very poor, thus forcing the resettlers to make something out of nothing.

The dam also caused immense environmental damages which altered living patterns and livelihoods, especially downstream. One of the first impacts came in 1963 when part of the dam split, causing horrible floods, which wiped out nearly all the homes of the coastal and river peoples. Soon after, what used to be a lucrative trade in clams became non-existent. The revenue from this trade was particularly important to the women downstream of the dam who used the trade as a means of independence, but when the clam beds dried up many women were forced to depend on others to provide for their families (Akyeampong, 2001).

Because the Volta basin was not deforested before the dam was built, floating and underwater trees continue to be an obstacle to lake fishing and transportation. Other environmental hazards have become prominent including the takeover of aquatic weeds which hinder fishing, and have contributed to a substantial increase of Schistosomiasis and Onchocerciasis, awful sicknesses both associated with the lake (Hart, 1980).

In terms of trade, the lake substantially increased the tilapia trade, but due to the unconducive environment for the other species of fish, the lake has become dominated by tilapia. The 1960's saw the decline and final demise of Keta as a market and trading port making the distance to a profitable market longer and permanently altering life in Eastern Ghana.

Many books have been written on the VRP resettlement scheme and its full impacts, but history tells us that "most of the people displaced or resettled by development projects are left worse off than before and suffer socio-economic impoverishment (De Wet, 2006; Cited in

Mettle, 2011). This is because, resettlement schemes have been planned and implemented on behalf of and for, rather than by and with, the affected people. This is not a hopeless cause, but a continual struggle for what Kofi Annan has defined as a “rights based approach to development [which] describes situations not simply in terms of human needs, or of development requirements, but in terms of society’s obligations to respond to the inalienable rights of individuals, to empower people to demand justice as a right, and to give communities a moral basis from which to claim international assistance when needed” (Kofi Annan, 2014).

Conclusion

The VRP’s conception as a colonial project implemented by a post-colonial government, and negotiating from a weak position ensured that the benefits and costs of the project were unfairly distributed and the project failed to protect the interests of dam affected populations (Tsikata, 2006). The project set precedent in the newly independent Ghana, showing that the goals of the government did not lie with the people, and allowing for a flood of resource driven corporate developments in Ghana.

The erasure of the suffering which the Akosombo dam brought is a threat to every person in Ghana, not only has the effectiveness of Ghana’s energy projects not been assessed critically on a national level, but the government continues to squander the resources of Ghana to her detriment as in the Bui and Kpong dams, the Sankofa oil mines and the West African oil pipeline.

There are many nuances in understanding the impact the dam and its corporatization has had and continues to have on Ghana and the world. Viewed within global trends the Volta River Project is quite similar to many cases around the world. The call for a world movement against large dams came to life in 2000 with the publishing of: *The Report of the World Commission on Dams* which examined the global impacts of large dams and the unequal displacement of indigenous peoples in these projects (WCD, 2000). As a globe we must continue to fight any project which harms the land or the people, because without transformative justice based change, the future will find that there are no people and there is no land. Indeed, the words of J.B. Danquah spoken in 1952 before the colonial legislature continue to haunt the future of world,

echoing in every drop of the waterfall, in every ocean and every blood stream: ‘the River in not for sale’.

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