

THEATRE AND  
PERFORMANCE  
THEORY

# Acts of Activism

Human Rights as Radical Performance

**D. Soyini Madison**



CAMBRIDGE

## ACTS OF ACTIVISM

Madison presents the neglected yet compelling and necessary story of local activists in South Saharan Africa who employ modes of performance as tactics of resistance and intervention in their day-to-day struggles for human rights and social justice. The dynamic relationships between performance and activism are illustrated in three case studies or acts of activism: Act I presents a battle between tradition and modernity as the bodies of African women are caught in the cross-fire. Act II focuses on “water democracy” as activists fight for safe, accessible public water as a human right. Act III examines the efficacy of street performance and Theatre for Development in the oral histories of Ghanaian gender activists committed to the well-being of women and children. Local activism is illuminated and extended as Madison translates these experiences to the public stage. Unique to this book is the continuing juxtaposition between the everyday performances “on the ground” of local activism and their staged enactments before theatre audiences in Ghana and the USA. Madison beautifully demonstrates how these disparate sites of performance cohere in the service of rights, justice, and activism.

D. SOYINI MADISON is Professor of Performance Studies and Anthropology, and served as Interim Director of the Program of African Studies at Northwestern University. She is the author of *Critical Ethnography: Method, Performance, and Ethics* (2005) and the editor of *The Woman That I Am: Literature and Culture of Contemporary Women of Color* (1994). Madison lived in West Africa as a Senior Fulbright Scholar and has conducted field research over the past ten years on the performance tactics of local human rights activists in Ghana.

THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE THEORY

SERIES EDITOR

Tracy C. Davis *Northwestern University*

Each volume in the Theatre and Performance Theory series introduces a key issue about theatre's role in culture. Specially written for students and a wide readership, each book uses case studies to guide readers into today's pressing debates in theatre and performance studies. Topics include contemporary theatrical practices; historiography; interdisciplinary approaches to making theatre; and the choices and consequences of how theatre is studied; among other areas of investigation.

BOOKS IN THE SERIES

JACKY BRATTON, *New Readings in Theatre History*

TRACY C. DAVIS AND THOMAS POSTLEWAIT (EDS.), *Theatricality*

SHANNON JACKSON, *Professing Performance: Theatre in the Academy from  
Philology to Performativity*

RIC KNOWLES, *Reading the Material Theatre*

NICHOLAS RIDOUT, *Stage Fright, Animals, and Other Theatrical Problems*

D. SOYINI MADISON, *Acts of Activism: Human Rights as Radical Performance*

# ACTS OF ACTIVISM

*Human Rights as Radical Performance*

D. SOYINI MADISON



**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,  
São Paulo, Delhi, Dubai, Tokyo

Cambridge University Press  
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521519229](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521519229)

© D. Soyini Madison 2010

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception  
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,  
no reproduction of any part may take place without the written  
permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2010

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

ISBN 978-0-521-51922-9 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or  
accuracy of URLs for external or third-party Internet websites referred to  
in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such  
websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

*To my sister*

Versions of scenes from this book have appeared in the following publications: *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*, eds. N. Denzin, Y. Lincoln, and L. Tuhiwa Smith (2008); *Performance Research: A Journal of the Arts*, 12:3 (2007); *Remembering: Oral History Performance*, ed. Della Pollock (2005), and *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, eds. Norman Denzin and Yvonne Lincoln (2005).



# Contents

<i>List of illustrations</i>	page viii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	ix
Introduction	I
Act I: Is it a human being or a girl?	34
Scene one: Watching <i>60 Minutes</i>	34
Scene two: Deep particularities	60
Scene three: Klikor, the sage, and the chief	67
Scene four: Graduation day	86
Act II: Water rites/rights	97
Scene one: "Then do it!"	97
Scene two: The sense of being present	124
Scene three: The aim to provoke	139
Scene four: Who am I in all this?	148
Act III: Acts of activism	157
Scene one: The white girl upstairs	157
Scene two: Don't cry, wail	172
Scene three: I am an activist	187
Scene four: Narrating Theatre for Development	201
Epilogue	224
<i>Appendices: Scripts</i>	229
<i>Appendix 1 Is it a human being or a girl?</i>	231
<i>Appendix 2 Water rites</i>	268
<i>Bibliography</i>	305
<i>Index</i>	318



## *List of illustrations*

### Act I

- I.1: Wisdom and Soyini at a performance of “*Is It a Human Being or a Girl?*” page 47
- I.2: Patience sitting with three Trokosi women 54
- I.3: The matrix scene from “*Is It a Human Being or a Girl?*” 85
- I.4: Trokosis in sewing and dressmaking class at the ING Vocational Training School 91

### Act II

- 2.1: Al-Hassan speaking at a water rights meeting 104
- 2.2: On the way to Savelugu 117
- 2.3: Women and children at pond fetching water in Savelugu 127

### Act III

- 3.1: One of the “brides” from the “Teaser” street performance 193
- 3.2: Bernice Sam at the United Nations 200
- 3.3: Cast and crew of Makola Market performance. Nathaniel is kneeling first row center and Esie is the second woman on the left 203

## *Acknowledgments*

To Tracy C. Davis whose intellectual generosity, tender guidance, and wise insight helped bring this study into being. Tracy understood the form and intent of this book from the beginning.

To Vicki Cooper, Rebecca Jones, Damian Love and Thomas O'Reilly at Cambridge University Press for your efficiency, patience, and expertise. It was a pleasure to work with you.

To Wisdom Mensah, Walter Pimpong, and Patience Vormawor, for your commitment and courage and opening a way for me to begin this search for rights and activism in Ghana.

To Nasser Adam, Al-Hassan Adam, Kwesi Pratt, and Yao Graham, whose courage is exemplary, whose commitment to social justice is inspirational, and whose intellectual depth profoundly matters.

To Vincent Azumah, Ali Mensah Quaye, Essau Ayetor, Elam Dovlo, Awudu Issah Mahmudu, Agnis Okudzeto, Emile Short, and to International Needs Ghana (ING) and The Commission of Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), for your examples of activism and for providing invaluable sources of information.

To Sam Salifu Danse, Mawuli Dake, and Sule Gariba, for your assistance at the most crucial times.

To Mabel Kumasi and Kari Dako for being such supportive colleagues and to Auntie Aggie, Agnis Frimpong, for your kindness and generosity.

To Kofi Anyidoho for your insights on the Trokosi/Fiashidi debate and never settling for the simple answers.

To Kwesi Awusu, Sarah Grusky, and Rudolf N. Amenga-Etego, whose words and writings deepened my thinking on the politics of water.

To Sika Ahadzie and Mawuli Adjei, dear friends, for one of my most important trips to Klikor.

To Tugbui Addo VIII and the late Dale Massiasta for your leadership and vision.

To the many women's coalitions in Ghana, particularly NETRIGHT, WILDAF, The Ark Foundation, and the Coalition on the Women's

Manifesto for Ghana, all of whose gender and justice activism have immeasurably influenced this study over the years by demonstrating democratic processes in motion.

To Bernice Sam and Angela Dwamena-Aboagye for your narratives and your tactical performances for the human rights of women.

To Takyiwaa Manuh and Angela Djamenah whose activism and intellect opened important questions and challenges that enriched this study.

To Esie and Nathaniel and their teacher, Elias Kwaku Asiamah, who demonstrate the enormous potential of community-based performance.

To the editors and staff of *The Public Agenda* and *The Insight* newspapers who “speak the truth to power” with precision and force.

To The Ghana Socialist Forum, Freedom Center, and Third World Network, for your wealth of information and “radical” integrity as I plowed my way through the political economy of rights.

To Iliasu Adam and Coleman Agyeyomah, my Tamale comrades, who continue to fight the good, hard fight and whose wisdom and strength of character, under the most difficult of circumstances, remains remarkable.

To Awudu Issah Mahmudu, my Tamale brother, for showing me the paths I must travel, for believing in the significance of this study, for being an unrelenting teacher of human rights, and for being the lawyer/defender “of the people and for the people.”

To Bishop Peter Sarpong whose wisdom and humanity exemplify the best of both traditional African religion and Christianity without malice or contradiction.

To Jacqueline “Jackie” Afodemo Dowetin whose experience and talent crafted the Trokosi/Fiashidi monologues with truth and dramatic acumen.

To the Trokosis of the Tongu area and the Fiashidis of Klikor for your kindness and your stories.

To the Ghana cast of “Is It a Human Being or A Girl?” for one of the most significant and heartfelt memories of my life.

To faculty and colleagues in the Department of Communication Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the Department of Performance Studies at Northwestern University for your support and special thanks to Alan Shefsky.

To the Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Center for the time to write and think in the beauty of Italy.

To the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill cast and crew of “Is It a Human Being or a Girl?” and “Water Rites” for the experience of working with you and invoking more complicated questions about the relationship between performance and human rights.

To Ramon Servera-Rivera and Sandra Richards, colleagues par excellence, for your good humor and from whom I've learned so much.

To Kara Keeling and Chandra Ford whose scholarship and friendship are a blessing, and Delritia "Dell" Hornbuckle for her generosity.

To Lisa Calvente who continues to teach me the importance of "telling it like it is."

To Lisa Merrill, Tami Spry, Elyse Lamm Pineau and Della Pollock, whose love for performance informs my work at every turn.

To Lisa Aubrey, Robin Vander, and Wahneema Lubiano, for being my sisters of the soul and exemplifying integrity, compassion, and intellectual prowess of the highest order.

To Akua McDaniel, Genna Rae McNeal, Arlean Jackson, Treva Cunningham, and Ira McGill, whose loyal and devoted friendship carried me through the decade of this book.

To Faisal Sangari for your good questions that kept me honest and made clarity even more important.

To William Obeng and Claire Obeng for providing refuge and a place to lay my head.

To James Kobble who makes dreams come true and "development" a reality.

To Judith Hamera who has been my intellectual and moral rock over the years. Her authentic genius and ethics always invoke clarity, guiding many of these pages to a more meaningful end.

To Micaela di Leonardo whose sharp mind and unrelenting political conviction is a force of nature and whose friendship is a gift.

To Karen Tranberg Hansen, dear colleague, friend, and first teacher of African Studies, who showed me how to do work in Africa with the deepest commitment and ethics.

To E. Patrick Johnson, my dear one, for your love, support, scholarship, and endless talent.

To Joni "Omi" Jones who has been a blessed muse, dear friend, and "sister of the waters" through the decades.

To Mejai and Torkwase Dyson, my son and daughter, who are a wonder and my greatest source of pride.

To Reighne Madison Dyson, my granddaughter, for bringing me joy and reminding me that this work is about the future.

To Kweku Kingsley, heart's joy and my partner in all things.

To the memories of my mentor and soul mate, Dwight Conquergood, who showed me the light, and my sister, Kathleen Madison Merritt, my protector who kept the light burning.



## *Introduction*

You can study everything *as* performance, but it doesn't mean everything *is* performance.

Richard Schechner

The aim is not to claim all human behavior as performance but to illuminate what new insights can be gained from a performance analytic.

Della Pollock

Meaning is always in-between structures, at the interstices of systems, institutions, State and law.

Dwight Conquergood

The focus of this book is to address the relationship between performance and local activism in the service of human rights and social justice.<sup>1</sup> The purpose is to present the often neglected yet compelling and important story of local activism in Africa, specifically Ghana, West Africa, and how particular individuals who take up the charge of activists are making notable and lasting contributions for equity and rights in their home country. The philosophical expressions of these men and women, their body-to-body activities on the ground, and how performance becomes integral to their work are presented in three case studies or three *acts of activism*.

Since 1998, I have witnessed courageous interventions by men and women who have faced great risks in the defense of human rights and social justice. I have also witnessed how they employ performance as a means of communication and as a subversive tactic to win hearts and minds in their efforts toward a more humane and democratic society. I have, in turn, adapted these interventions and tactical performances for the stage, in the United States and Ghana, while also staging the implications of my own positionality – my own split identity and gendered body – as an African American and as a woman living and teaching in Ghana. As I examine ethnographic inquiry and local rights activism through performances

onstage *and* in the field, the role of performance is also theorized in (as) public discourse within larger local and transnational structures of economic globalization.

By applying a performance analytic to acts of activism, we enter a poetics of understanding and an embodied epistemology concerning how activism is constituted, its dimensions of imagination and creativity, and its rhetoric and politics. There are central questions that animate the three case studies or acts of activism: How do activists utilize performance as a *tactic* in their work for human rights and social justice? How do these tactical performances of public protests *emerge* into varied modes of performative gestures and actions? How do *advocacy* and *ethics* become inseparable factors in ethnographic, transnational performances? What makes *radical* performances radical? How is *political economy* implicated in radical performance? In addressing these questions, the relevant terms become: “tactics and emergence,” “advocacy and ethics,” and “radicalism and political economy.”

#### TACTICS AND EMERGENCE<sup>2</sup>

Performance, as a tactic and as emergent, in the service of human rights and social justice is variously effective and affective. By tactic, in this instance, I mean *creating a means and a space from whatever elements or resources are available in order to resist or subvert the strategies of more powerful institutions, ideologies, or processes.*<sup>3</sup> The activists in this study develop tactics under the formidable backdrop of national and international forces (and the strategies that sustain them) in order to ennoble and establish gender equity, water rights and public health, and economic justice. These tactical performances often come into being through a communal yearning, an inventive spontaneity, and through improvisational meanings that evolve and emerge. One such emergent performance during my fieldwork comprised a political rally that became a tactic toward the promise of a new vision for Ghanaian politics.

His name is Nasser Adam. The car stops in the midst of a crowd of cheering supporters. The joyful crowd circles the car, and they lead Nasser up a few steps to an outdoor platform in public view. I follow him from the car and we sit in two chairs that resemble large thrones above the crowd. Nasser seems uncomfortable. He does not believe he should be positioned above the people and does not favor royalty or its appearances in any form in Africa or anywhere else in the world. But he is warm and gracious to his supporters and respectfully adheres to tradition. He introduces me as his friend from the United States who has come to learn about Ghana and her

people and who is visiting Tamale to support his campaign for Parliament. He tells them this is also an election year in Professor Madison's home country – George Bush and Al Gore are running for president – he reminds them of the importance of voting and the value of free and fair elections.

Nasser is a practicing Muslim and he was born in Northern Ghana. He is head of the Department of Modern Languages at the University of Ghana. He teaches Russian and French and is a scholar of Russian and French literature. He received his Ph.D. from the Pushkin Institute. He reads Arabic and speaks about six local languages. I asked him how he felt about placing his teaching and intellectual activities on hold to run for Parliament. He said, "I am an activist, what is most important to me is that the poorest of the poor in Ghana have opportunities to live a full and productive life. Government is supposed to dedicate itself to the betterment of its citizens, not exploit them. If the money government officials spent on big cars was all returned to the people for health care, education, infrastructure, and to care for our old, then government would be doing what it should. Members of parliament should be trading their big cars for bicycles."

Nasser is speaking to his supporters in Dagbani; I can only make out a few words and phrases. His message is about Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana, and Nkrumah's vision for Africa and her people: "Nkrumah gave us a sense of African identity ... a national identity, but most important an African identity. Nkrumah debunked the whole idea of inferiority and that Africans should accept subjugation without question. He debunked the idea that God created some people to rule and others to be ruled by them." His voice rises to a higher pitch. The quiet reserved man that I know has transformed before my eyes, enlivened and animated by this scene of oration and jubilation. His body and gestures are in sync with the motion and excitement of the crowd:

The only way that we can extricate ourselves is by developing our own technology – getting our own technologies and embarking on an industrial revolution. We must produce our most basic needs. We are not talking about going to space. We are just talking about industrialization where we can produce our most basic needs ... So no child will go to bed hungry, and so that anyone who wants to work is given the opportunity to work. It is not too much to ask for. Here in the North, it is the breadbasket of the country. The soil is productive for rice and agriculture, but with this import liberalization program, it hurts our local farmers. The big agricultural businesses dump their imports like rice and so the people suffer ...

Nasser talks more about government accountability and promises to fight against the big agro-businesses and neoliberal policies, and he promises to



work, in the best interest, for all of them. The people begin to chant. It is a chant that is more than a repetition of words or a rhythmic incantation of a political trope. The chant is a combination of traditional forms – remembered and rehearsed – alongside an alternative vocabulary, a different lexicon of politics. This chant is a collective performance that swells into a chorus of tones and pitches that underscore the message and the messenger. The people chant with a deep comprehension of the promises, but more, translating each promise into an embodied response that is musical and improvisational because bare words and silent listening cannot contain the enormous possibilities the man sitting above in the chair has inspired. In the midst of the volume and lyricism of these chanting voices, the timing and beat created through their collective bodies in motion, the crowd is generating a performance that names and reclaims a new beginning of politics and their future in its process. The musicality and rhetorical force of the chant, in turn, inspires the messenger:

Life in Ghana has become unbearable  
 Life in Ghana has become unbearable  
 Brother Nasser, come rescue us!  
 Brother Nasser, come rescue us!  
 Life in Ghana has become so-so unbearable

This public meeting, now transformed into an emergent performance, has become a theatrics of high stakes and profoundly serious expectations. This enactment of thrones, chant, song, and dance is a spirited reclamation of local political power. We step down from the platform to return to the car in which we will drive to a nearby village and Nasser will continue the second part of his speech. The crowd follows us to the car. The chanting is now reaching a peak. I look out over the crowd and there is a woman with her children holding a sign for the Convention People's Party (CPP) the political party of Nasser and of Kwame Nkrumah. The symbol for the CPP is the rooster, and there are rooster signs everywhere gliding up and down above the heads of the crowd in rhythm and sync with their enthusiasm. The woman takes hold of the sign and, with a grand sweep, symbolically places the sign on her head and makes a gesture as though she is crowing like a rooster to bring in the new day, the sign simulating a rooster's head. The children mimic her, and others in the crowd adopt her movements, enlarging and punctuating them with added hand gestures, hips and feet synchronizing a collaborative dance of the rooster – the quintessential symbol for second chances and each new day. If it were not for the rooster, each new beginning and each new possibility could not come into being.

The rooster is the continuing new start – a beckoning and a pronouncement. The dance invoked by the emergent theatrics of the chanting crowd reminds us that we must all be roosters and we must all be CPP.

Kokolayi K-o-o-o-o-o  
 B(ə) (y)u Neiya<sup>4</sup>  
 Kokolayi K-o-o-o-o

Nasser speaks of a new politics and a new vision for Ghana and her people that is built on economic independence, radical democracy, social justice, and human rights.

As we pull off, everyone follows the car, dancing and singing down the road and through village pathways, in partnership with Nasser and in anticipation of more to come.

In every corner of the world, there are those heightened moments when public speech erupts into song, dance, poetry, chant, dramatic testimony, and a procession of symbolic acts. Sometimes these performances are planned but often they seem to surface from the passion and communion of public deliberation or dissent. What really accounts for this *emergence* as though in these moments we become possessed by performance? What inspires them? Could we argue these emergences are more than convention, habit, or tradition, but something that more organically and viscerally swells up, unleashed from human energy? We must necessarily be suspicious of claims toward natural inclination or biological determination, or ontology, as evidence to justify or to explain human behavior, but I still wonder about human energy and survival. Might the whirling energy and vitality of a common cause to survive under certain conditions (for ourselves and others) capture us – the (e)motions of this too grand a moment – and invoke emergent performances? Kelly Oliver states:

All human relationships are the result of the flow and circulation of energy – thermal energy, chemical energy, electrical energy, social energy. Social energy includes *affective energy* [emphasis mine], which can move between people. In our relationships, we constantly negotiate affective energy transfers. Just as we can train ourselves to be more attuned to photic, mechanical, or chemical energy in our environment, so too can we train ourselves to be more attuned to affective energy.<sup>5</sup>

Might we embrace a metaphysical vocabulary such as energy and affect to account for the collective emergence of a tactical performance charged by public, communal action? In these instances, feelings and emotions inspired by a shared cause – body to body and soul to soul – become palpable, viscerally pressing forth toward collective, symbolic, and enlivened (e)motions. These moments are reminiscent of what has been

conceptualized as “flow,” that is, “the holistic sensation present when we act with total involvement” that becomes a state where “action follows action according to an internal logic which seems to need no conscious intervention on our part.”<sup>6</sup> We live evocatively as moment transcends into moment where distinctions between self and act, stimulus and response, time and space, coalesce here in the possession of this moment – this moment being all there is.<sup>7</sup> This unifying act or “flow” for an individual is an experience of inspiration and deep involvement. When this *deep involvement* animates collective action, it rises in a temporal cohesion where individual identities come together in a kind of rapture, a transference of communal, affective energy. Flow moves to communion. These moments are spontaneous and improvisational, emergent and volatile; there is a deep, immediate, and interpersonal alchemy that “has something magical about it.”<sup>8</sup> These moments constitute affective energy that brings us semblances of pleasure even in our anger and distress. They are ubiquitous, profoundly human, and existentially *anatomical*. Ten billion or so neurons constitute the human neo-cortex,<sup>9</sup> with an estimate of ten trillion synaptic connections<sup>10</sup> that are formed among and between them. The cells in our body signal pleasure to the brain. Our cognitive system yearns for the pleasure of improvisation – this pleasure of new ideas, experiences, insights, and sensations.<sup>11</sup> Each emergence, each spontaneous sensation, becomes a culmination of affective energy and communion addressing the call from our cognitive system for pleasure and new performances, new ideas, new hopes to be lived and remembered.

The tactical and emergent performances in this book are thick with description and layered with purpose. Central to what binds them is that they all have the qualities of being embodied and public.

*Public.* In these tactical and emergent performances what was a localized problem is now cast forward for public deliberation and/or “incitement.”<sup>12</sup> Entering a public sphere enlivens scrutiny, enlarges responsibility, and cracks open into plain sight hidden wrongs. It is said that a dimension of our humanity emerges only when we engage in public discourse.<sup>13</sup> Public performance invokes public discourse by becoming a communicative instrument where the shared naming and marking of injustice can be realized; where multiple vocabularies for interrogation are formed; where ideology becomes enlarged due to the ways in which “performance can overrun ideology’s containment,”<sup>14</sup> where communal mourning or resistance becomes a platform “to reject not only what we see and how we see it, but how we can reject the reality of what we see and know to be true.”<sup>15</sup> What is public is open and made common. A public space is a promise of a democratic space, and a

public performance becomes an open invitation to participate and (or) witness how democracy can be variously conjured and re-imagined.

*Embodiment.* These tactical and emergent performances encourage an embodied epistemology.<sup>16</sup> They become a transformation of knowledge that literally *moves* our musculature and the rhythms of our breath and heart, as corporeal knowledge conjoins cognition through enfleshment knowledge.<sup>17</sup> Elyse Lamm Pineau states that “from the moment of birth, cultural associations regarding ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, able-bodiedness, and so on are imprinted into our very musculature.”<sup>18</sup> Tactical/emergent performances embellish this organic musculature as it can embellish identity, seizing it in the call to re-perform itself, exaggerated, in heightened reiterations of itself through the “magic” of communal dissent. Or, it can usurp us, seizing our identity imprints, unlearning our organic musculature (at least in this moment) for other and different musculatures invoked through the reverie or flow of other bodies in motion. But, however our bodies over-learn or un-learn in the temporality of tactical/emergent, public performance, the body is still a learning body. Performance “combines full body engagement with critical reflexivity,” where information is “engaged somatically as well as intellectually.” This becomes a “dialectical process of doing and reflecting, experiencing and interpreting.”<sup>19</sup> A tactical/emergent performance, as embodied and public, is illustrated by Kwesi Pratt, whom a Ghanaian friend described as “having no fear.”

Kwesi Pratt is a controversial media commentator, a grassroots organizer, a renowned social justice activist, and former president of the Private Newspaper Publishers Association of Ghana (PRINPAG). He is a member of the Ghana Socialist Forum and founding editor of the independent newspaper, *The Insight*, which is noted as a bold voice against local corruption and corporate greed. Kwesi was imprisoned as a result of his political activism and for, in his words, “striving everyday to be a socialist.” When I asked him what that meant, he said: “It is the unwavering belief and practice that no one on this planet should be starving for food and in want of shelter and that every human being is worthy of respect and dignity.” I asked Kwesi if there was one incident in his long career as an activist that he could never forget. Kwesi recounted a public protest (while under a military regime and before multiple political parties were established in Ghana) that he led in 1986 at the Old Ghana House in Accra against the system of military rule.

We called him Choirmaster. He was inspiring. He was a performer. He composed songs but many of the songs were spontaneous. Choirmaster had been with us for a long, long time. He was an activist and he liked to express himself through songs.

He would break into a song in a meeting and people would sing. He was the son of one of the most prominent religious leaders in the country. And he, I think, was a Socialist. He had rejected everything that his family stood for. His family was very wealthy. The father owned the church and owned everything that the church owned ... it was a huge property. Choirmaster rejected all of that. He went into exile to Holland and he has never returned. He was with us singing and inspiring the crowd on this particular day. There must have been about 100 to 150 of us. When we arrived at the Old Ghana House in Accra the policemen far outnumbered us. We were surprised. We didn't expect so many. They were lined up waiting for us. When there became the possibility of violence, we asked our comrades to sit in the street and block the traffic. So everybody sat down. One of the police officers spoke through a megaphone and said they were giving us a count of three to leave. If we did not leave on the count of three, we would all be under fire. And then the policeman started counting. We were all face-to-face with the guns as he started counting. But something happened. I don't know how it happened. He counted one, and by the time he counted two, I started walking toward the police. I don't know what made me stand up and start walking. I didn't think about it. It just happened. I just walked towards the police. I spoke to the policeman who was in charge of the rest. I don't really remember what I said. I think I told him the people there could be their brothers, their fathers, their mothers, their sisters. I think I told him they have nothing in common with the people in power. I think I told him that if he gave the orders to shoot, he would bear full responsibility for their deaths. I walked back to the crowd and sat down with my comrades. Then, the police officer gave the order ... and I heard him shout "Charge." But, not one policeman moved. Not one moved. Not one policeman fired a gun. I cannot explain it to this day. I have no words for it. I will never forget it. It was incredible.

Could it be that "it was incredible" because the police yielded to the theatricality of their countrymen sitting down, quiet and still, in the middle of one of the busiest, most crowded streets in Accra and this act of peaceful defiance moved them to pity or empathy or fear? Could it be that the police yielded to the theatricality of Kwesi Pratt, the man known in Ghana for "having no fear," walking alone toward them – their guns pointing – because too great an affective energy, too poignant a bodily presence stopped them and their own musculature from advancing upon this man and his comrades to pull the triggers of their guns? Kwesi said he heard the head policeman shout "Charge." To "charge" is very significant here because to "charge" operates through the disciplinary command of the head policeman as well as the inspired performance led by the choirmaster. To "charge" is to "go forth," "authorize," "enable," and "empower." Kwesi places the "Choirmaster" at the beginning of the narrative and characterizes his songs as being a source of inspiration. Protest songs and protest

performances – as throughout the history of civil disobedience they both generate and are generated by acts of activism all over the world – function as a “charge” of inspiration, of motivation, and of energy. Could it be that the choirmaster’s inspired performances, and the affective energy they helped to generate, were a factor in why the police did not shoot? The choirmaster and the head policeman both enacted “charge.”<sup>20</sup> By examining the notion of “charge,” the force of the choirmaster’s inspirational action against the “incredible” non-action of the police comes into focus, especially as it relates to the significance of performance. The choirmaster inspired and therefore contributed to the determination of the dissenters to sit in the middle of the street and of Kwesi Pratt to walk alone toward rows of armed officers. The charge resulting in the inspiring performances directed by the choirmaster for his comrades became a greater force than the charge commanded by the head policeman to his armed officers. When the head policeman shouted “Charge” to the armed men, the dissenters were already charged by a force of determination and purpose that seemed to usurp the charge of a punishing authority and a disciplinary power. Kwesi’s narrative illustrates another form of performance, punctuating and circling, through the manners and modes of social protests that raise the question of humankind being naturally wired to perform. Could it be that the choirmaster tapped into both inspiration and biology? Whether it was from his standard repertoire and/or created within that improvisational moment, whether it was neurological and/or philosophical, the Choirmaster became a source of energy and motivation by keeping bodies and souls in step and on the move until it was time to sit still in the street. The Choirmaster and inspired performance charged justice and justice charged inspired performance, evolving into an act that was “incredible” and leaving us under its ineffable wonder: “I cannot explain it to this day,” “I have no words for it.”

The following example of justice charging performance and performance charging justice is of a different time and space:

A death camp in Treblinka. A dancer stands naked in line waiting for her turn to enter the gas chamber. We see a human being with a natural power to command space reduced to a body taking up space, passively submitting to the prospect of death. A guard tells her to step out of line and dance. She does, and carried away by her *authoritative action* and by her *repossession of a self and a world* she dances up to the guard – now within the compass of *her* space – takes his gun and shoots him. What a surprise a zombie-like creature can spring back to life by means of a performance.<sup>21</sup>

Although different, the two events are comparable: the woman who turns the gun on her persecutor and shoots him; the man who faces the guns of his

persecutors who do not shoot. In both instances, life and death hang in the balance and the outcomes defy expectation. In both instances, the protagonists are “carried away” by their “authoritative action” and their “repossession of a self and a world.” Both are charged by the *embodiment* of the interpenetrating forces of performance and justice to enact and invoke the unimaginable. Judith Hamera writes: “Transcendence has always, ironically, required embodiment ... yet even as the body speaks in the special case of mystical discourse, or when characterizing the inter-subjectivity of transcendence more generally, it also ‘unsays’; it exposes the ineffable resistance to language.”<sup>22</sup> Could it be that performance emerges ubiquitously within acts of justice because it embraces thinking, feeling, imagining, and survival from the immediate and inextricable home of our own bodies? In the example of Kwesi Pratt, perhaps it is the quality of performance to transcend words that will ironically call words back again through the body with a force and motivation that ultimately in time must speak and defy silence.

#### ADVOCACY AND ETHICS

Ethics ... defines a distance between what is and what ought to be. This distance designates a space where we have something to do.<sup>23</sup> (Michel de Certeau)

Advocacy and ethics require that the “I” of my personal responsibility to fieldwork be explicitly stated in order to address what is for me a fundamental question, “What do I do now?” In moving from Tactics and Emergence to Advocacy and Ethics, the challenge of having “something to do,” of defining “a distance between what is and what ought to be,” requires a turning inward toward self-reflection and my own positionality in the field. The acts of activism I witnessed in the field were performances of intervention that were political and efficacious, and they were performances where people were putting their bodies on the line, where they were creating a “changing script”<sup>24</sup> envisioning another way of being by challenging threatening traditions as well as working against the macro forces of a neoliberal global economy. Advocacy and ethics were interconnected, responding to the question: “What should I do with what I have witnessed?” I had strong responses to what I witnessed during my fieldwork. These responses demanded that I be responsible for providing an opportunity for others to also gain the *ability* to respond in some form.<sup>25</sup> I bear witness and in bearing witness I do not have the singular response-ability for what I witness but the responsibility of invoking a response-ability in

others to what was seen, heard, learned, felt, and done in the field and through performance. As Kelly Oliver states, “We have an obligation not only to respond but also to respond in a way that opens up rather than closes off the possibility to respond by others.”<sup>26</sup> Steven Durland states, “A person who bears witness to an injustice takes responsibility for that awareness. That person may then choose to do something or stand by, but he may not turn away in ignorance.”<sup>27</sup>

Response, response-ability, and responsibility became aligned with advocacy and ethics. To be an advocate is to feel a responsibility to exhort and appeal on behalf of another or for another’s cause with the hope that still others will gain the ability to respond to your advocacy agenda. Being an advocate has a different intent than speaking in the manner of a ventriloquist, in the sense of muting Other voices to only amplify one’s own. Being an advocate is to actively *assist* in the struggles of others; or (and) it is learning the tactics, symbols, and everyday forms of resistance which the sub-altern *enact* but of which they “do not speak”<sup>28</sup> in order that they may provide platforms from which their struggles can be known and heard. As advocates we aim for a cycle of responses that will set loose a stream of response-abilities that will lead to something more, something of larger philosophical and material effects.

In addition, the position of advocate and the labor of advocacy are riddled with the pleasure and burden of representation that is always already so much about ethics. Advocates represent who and what they are advocating for: their names, narratives, histories, their logics of persuasion as well as imagining what more is needed in the service of advocacy. All this requires labor that is entrenched in power relations and representations that are inextricable from ethics. Representation happens at different points along power’s spectrum – we are all “vehicles and targets” of power’s contagion and omnipresence.<sup>29</sup> As advocates, surrounded by the far and wide entanglements of power’s disguises and infinite forms, we aim to invoke a response – a response-ability – to its operations and consequences. In doing the work of advocacy, whether we consider ethics or not, it is always already present within the horizons of representation and the machinations of power. Because ethics requires responsibility (and the ability to respond), it is inherently antithetical to apathy.

If apathy cannot rest beside the ethical responsibility to respond and if ethics also includes providing opportunities for others to gain access to the ability to respond, then performance can form a vibrant and efficacious partnership with ethics. Ethics and advocacy now pave the way as we move



from the field to the stage – from being in the field and conducting fieldwork to its transformation and representation onto a public stage.

Stage performance becomes a dynamic space where response-ability, advocacy, and ethics are heightened and ultimately culminate.

The fieldwork data *travels* to the public stage with the hope that the performance will invoke a response (ability) among a group or spectators. It is said that theatre and performance *show ourselves to ourselves* in ways that help us recognize our behavior and life worlds as well as the behavior and life worlds of others, for better or worse, as well as our/Others' unconscious needs and desires. Victor Turner said, "when we act in everyday life we do not merely re-act to indicative stimuli, we act in frames wrested from the genres of cultural performance."<sup>30</sup>

It might be possible to regard the ensemble of performative and narrative genres, active and acting modalities of expressive culture as a hall of mirrors, or better magic mirrors ... In this hall of mirrors the reflections are multiple, some magnifying, some diminishing, some distorting the faces peering into them, but in such a way as to provoke not merely thought, but also powerful feelings and the will to modify everyday matters in the minds of the gazers, for no one likes to see himself as ugly, ungainly, or dwarfish. Mirror distortions of reflection provoke reflexivity.<sup>31</sup>

These performances not only reflect who we are but they also shape and direct who we are and what we can become. The major work of performance ethnography is to make performances that do the labor of advocacy, and do it ethically to inspire realms of reflection and responsibility. Bertolt Brecht reminds us that performance must also proceed beyond that of a mirror reflection to become the hammer that breaks the mirror, distorts the reflection, to build a new reality.<sup>32</sup>

Bryant Alexander defines performance ethnography as "literally the staged re-enactment of ethnographically derived notes."<sup>33</sup> He goes on to add "that performance ethnography *is* and *can* be a strategic method of *inciting culture*."<sup>34</sup> Norman Denzin further states that "critical ethnographers go beyond thick description of local situations to resistance performance texts/events that urge social transformations."<sup>35</sup> In embracing ethics and advocacy, one cannot simply be a mirror and a hammer to an outer world without implicating oneself in what is to be shown and interrogated and in how one chooses to incite culture and urge social transformation. Ethics and advocacy demand that the self be located. Denzin notes that performance ethnography is "doubly reflexive" because, by "*self-consciously locating the researcher in the research process* [emphasis mine], it challenges any notion that an easy identification between observer and observed can be

forged.”<sup>36</sup> This means that the ethnographer must self-consciously represent herself by presenting some semblance of her own dispositions and methods of representation. The aim is not for the researcher to disappear from the performance or the report, but to be accountable and responsible for her own choices. The presentation of oneself in the report and/or the performance is not gratuitous self-presentation, but it is to be critically self-reflexive, accountable for one’s biases, vulnerabilities, and blind spots.

Ethics and advocacy insist that the researcher turn back on herself in a necessary reflexivity by requiring that the research data “acknowledge and utilize subjective experience as an intrinsic part of the research.”<sup>37</sup> Moreover, the performance of self is “less about reflecting on the self in a public space than using the public space and performance as an act of critically reflecting culture, an act of *seeing the self see the self through and as the other*.”<sup>38</sup> As the self is staged, issues of self-representation surface, teasing the limits between navel-gazing and self-reflection. Toni Morrison provides an important insight:

I am not interested in indulging myself in some private, closed exercise of my imagination that fulfills only the obligation of my personal dreams – which is to say yes, the work must be political. It must have that as its thrust. That’s a pejorative term in critical circles now: if a work of art has any political influence in it, somehow it’s tainted. My feeling is just the opposite: If it has none, it is tainted. The problem comes when you find harangue passing off as art. It seems to me that the best art is political and you ought to be able to make it unquestionably political and irrevocably beautiful at the same time.<sup>39</sup>

Staged ethnography seeks to avoid the harangue while understanding that we are still staging a moral discourse through an embodied epistemology where our own intentions, biases, subjectivity, and politics never disappear. Moving from the field to the stage we recreate “templates of sociality,”<sup>40</sup> decoding our field data in order to recode it “beautifully” for the stage event.<sup>41</sup> In staging the quotidian performances of everyday remembrances, imaginings, and deeply felt encounters of ethnographic fieldwork, it becomes a radical act of translation that is surpassed in its significance only by the sometimes overwhelming necessity of purpose, advocacy, and ethical obligation.<sup>42</sup> When we re-present our fieldwork data by artistically and politically translating it for public performance, we are not only representing Others that we have come to know and that expect our representation to be honorable, we are also representing their contexts – their cultural politics, material conditions, and power relations – because “the staged performance of culture is also an appraisal of culture.”<sup>43</sup> Ethics and advocacy will always raise the question: To what end do I make the

performance? If “how a people are represented is how they are treated,”<sup>44</sup> then the ethnographic representation of others onstage becomes a moral and ethical enterprise because hearts, minds, bodies, and futures are implicated. An illustration of stage performance as both a method and a manifestation of ethics and advocacy, relative to responsibility and the ability to respond, may be seen in the following excerpts from the public performance *Is It a Human Being or A Girl?* that I directed at the W. E. B. Dubois Outdoor Theatre in Ghana (2000). The performance was adapted from my fieldwork interviews with human rights activists and reflects the challenges they face against the forces of political economy.

*(The Recorder represents the ethnographer in the field searching for the “right question.” The Recorder speaks out to the audience cautiously and self-consciously searching for the answer to her question with her back against the performers who are in various stylized positions onstage. As soon as the Recorder asks the question, the upstage performers quickly and robustly take the stage in highly choreographed crisscross movements. They are fast and frenetic in their answers but also clear-voiced and deliberate in their movement. Each actor moves with a focused precision. The stage becomes a whirl of information and motion, each line punctuated by the next.)*

RECORDER *(Speaking nervously to the audience, unaware of the performers upstage)* Could you clarify for me the problems some Africans are having with the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and Structural Adjustment Programs?

*(Shaken by the commotion upstage by the actors, the Recorder now turns to them as they boldly charge the stage. Throughout the scene she struggles to listen, understand, and record what is said and done. She is working hard to listen and follow.)*

PERFORMER 3 First of all the IMF and the World Bank need to listen!

*(During this section, the stage becomes a series of crisscross movements as the lines are delivered to and among each other in a rhythm of call and response.)*

PERFORMER 4 People who put up an intellectual defense for the IMF and WB, I wonder if they actually read the letters of intent or conditionalities.

PERFORMER 2 One thing we must recognize is that the only way that we can acutely extricate ourselves is by developing technology – getting our own technologies and embarking on an industrial revolution. We must produce our most basic needs.

PERFORMER 5 We are not talking about going to space. We are just talking about industrialization where we can produce our most basic needs ...

PERFORMER 1 So no child will go to bed hungry, and so that anyone who wants to work is given the opportunity to work.

PERFORMER 3 It is not too much to ask for.

PERFORMER 2 In the North, where I come from, it is the breadbasket of the country. The soil is productive for rice and agriculture, but with this import liberalization program, it hurts the local farmer.

PERFORMER 4 The big agricultural businesses dump their imports like rice and so the people suffer. How? You don't expect my uncle who is a rice farmer about fifty miles from Tamale who has just about two acres and who doesn't have a tractor, just a hoe, to compete with these big agro-businesses. My uncle produces about fifteen bags of rice. He doesn't have the technology to produce a lot of rice. He goes to the market to sell his rice. Now, because he doesn't enjoy the economies of scale and production, his rice will be slightly more expensive than the imported one. So, you can't expect that peasant farmer to compete with that big agro-business.

PERFORMER 5 The IMF and WB don't factor that in, in terms of economic stability. Yes, the situation is better than it was some eighteen or twenty years ago. But it is not where it could be or should be. It is aid driven and the social cost of that is enormous.

PERFORMER 3 Plus, the indebtedness. There is no way we can ever pay back the loans –

PERFORMER 1 Close to 7 billion dollars.

ALL There is no way.

*(The performers turn their backs to the audience and take positions on the platforms far upstage as the Recorder comes down centerstage. In frustration the Recorder can hardly take it all in. She stands still on the stage and speaks out in a loud voice to everyone and no one in particular.)*

RECORDER The rich and the poor are at distances beyond comprehension

Yet

The rich and the poor are strangers up close and personal like opposing twins

One holds the other by global strings

Global and enormous

Global

Together and apart!

*(On the line “Together and apart” each of the performers picks up a journal from the platform – which is meant to symbolize the Recorder’s journal. The Recorder then turns and speaks directly to them.)*

RECORDER The UN Development Report documents how globalization has dramatically increased inequality between and within nations, but at the same time it has brought people together like never before!

*(Motivated by the dubious fact of globalization, the performers begin reading passages from the Recorder’s journal. They read each passage loudly but without emotion, as if they were reading information from a book, taking care to almost over-pronounce every word but without emotion. This technique of punctuated reading without feeling results in dramatizing the “facts” of globalization.)*

PERFORMER 4 We live in a world where the financial assets of just 200 of the richest people in the world are greater than the combined income of the more than 2 billion people!

PERFORMER 3 The majority of trade and investments takes place between industrial nations.

PERFORMER 2 Global corporations control a third of world exports.

PERFORMER 5 Of the hundred largest economies in the world, fifty-one are corporations.

PERFORMER 1 The global economy disrupts traditional economies and weakens their governments to help them.

*(The following lines are spoken as one continuous and overlaying rhythm.)*

PERFORMER 4 They are forced to migrate –

PERFORMER 3 They are forced to offer their labor at wages below what it takes for them to live –

PERFORMER 1 They are forced to cash in their physical environments –

PERFORMER 5 They are forced to neglect their personal health –

*(Performer Two breaks the pattern and looks up from her journal in disbelief.)*

PERFORMER 2 They are forced to just survive?

*(The pattern of exaggeration and focused reading continues.)*

PERFORMER 5 Education and health budgets are slashed to pay off debts.

PERFORMER 4 The total wealth of the 358 global billionaires equals the combined income of 45 percent of the world’s population.

*(During the following five lines all the performers put their journals down on the platform and look straight out to the audience. They are speaking with emphases and sincerity in continuous rhythm.)*

PERFORMER 3 The recent transformation of the world economy –  
 PERFORMER 1 has not been matched by –  
 PERFORMER 2 changes in our political institutions – <sup>45</sup>  
 PERFORMER 4 by changes in our political institutions –  
 PERFORMER 5 by changes in our political institutions –

*(The upstage performers quietly turn their focus to the Recorder. She is center-stage, performing in a manner of mature self-reflection and critical awareness, while vacillating between the tensions of humility and confidence. The Recorder comes downstage as the performers look on.)*

RECORDER Can I listen for good purposes?  
 Anthropologist on Board? Oh! BEWARE  
 Another Westerner charges human rights abuses in Africa ... against an  
 oblique paradigm?  
 Against her performance?  
 Westerners ... ah, here we come to save Africa from herself  
 We have the answers ... we have the A\_I\_D  
 Listen while we show and tell you  
 To yourselves  
 Here we come, giddi yup, giddi yup, the wild, wild West will show you  
 and tell you  
 Who you are!  
 I am in the middle of my fieldwork and there are so many questions *still*  
 unanswered  
 The dilemma of listening for good purposes  
 What do I do with what I have heard  
 With what I have seen  
 A distant country  
 A distant people  
 But this country / these people / are not so distant anymore  
 They are part of me now  
 like an inseparable friend  
 like an unforgettable lover  
 This land / These people  
 Can these notes capture the poignancy of their lives?  
 The everyday moments of their laughter and  
 their suffering  
 “I cannot indulge in sentiment without politics”<sup>46</sup>  
 “I cannot indulge in sentiment without politics”  
 Development

Democracy

Wealth / poverty

"I cannot indulge in aesthetic spectatorship without political engagement"<sup>47</sup>

America

American

African

African American

Advanced

Advanced Country

Black

American

Living

In

An

Advanced Country

BlackAmericanLivingInAnAdvancedCountry

I live in the richest country in the world

What do I do with what I've learned here

I live in the richest country in the world

What have I learned here?

*(Recorder freezes and upstage performers freeze. Blackout.)*

#### RADICALISM AND NEOLIBERALISM

A *radical* act is a confrontation with the "root" of a problem.<sup>48</sup> It is to reach for the causes of an issue and not simply respond to its symptoms. It is a showdown with limitations to embrace necessary excess and to disturb a state of affairs in pursuit of confronting those root causes. A very astute student once asked me if an act can be radical even when it does not necessarily intend to be radical. In innocently, beautifully, or honestly representing a subject for the sake of art, the work has unintended consequences and sets off an explosion of controversy; it is shut down or censored because it is "too radical." Can a work of art or a set of actions be radical based on reception and not intention? In a reverse example, what of a work of art or a set of actions that deliberately intends to be radical by boldly contesting the status quo, an "in-your-face" confrontation with power, but it is received as merely inconsequential, or an insipid gesture of bad art or poor taste? How radical performances become radical is certainly a matter of who asks and who answers the question. Although

we may define “the radical” in general terms, what is ultimately radical shifts and changes depending on the subject(ivity) and circumstances. The three acts of activism in this volume take up radical performance as they variously explore women’s freedom and cultural tradition; water rights and private profit; and, finally, public dissent, public health, and issues of development. The quintessential element across all three case studies that participate in the radical is illustrated in Baz Kershaw’s words: “radical performance always participates in the most vital cultural, social and political tensions of its time.”<sup>49</sup> I argue throughout this book – directly and indirectly, implicitly and explicitly – based on scenes from the field that these “tensions” of our time and one of the overriding root causes troubling local human rights and social justice activism are the *machinations of neoconservatism and a corporate, global political economy* that affects small stories everywhere. These small stories of how human rights and social justice are fought for and defended become the reference points in locating radical performances.

One example of neoliberalism’s effects on everyday lives and small stories, particularly in the global South, is the policy of structural adjustment. Micaela di Leonardo states:

In the global South, neoliberal ideology has been implemented through World Bank/IMF ‘structural adjustment programs,’ beginning with Chile’s experiment under the post-1973 coup dictator Augusto Pinochet. These programs demand that states denationalize industries, end protectionist policies that safeguard native industries, open their markets to international trade, and ruthlessly cut back social programs.<sup>50</sup>

Neoliberal ideology, as it is constituted by neoconservative policies, has set off a chain of hardships as education, health, local poverty reduction efforts and other social service mechanisms are weakened and jeopardized; as farming, small business, and indigenous income-generating traditions are diminished; and as free trade policies exploit the human labor, natural resources, and struggles for economic equity while profits from corrupt African leaders pile up stolen currency into European banks. Two brief points clarify the connections between neoliberalism and human rights relative to root causes.

First, *liberal* commonly refers to someone who endorses government support for domestic programs and progressive taxes, who is pro-labor, and is critical of big business. Liberal in these terms is not the same as neoliberalism or neoliberal. Neoliberalism can often function in opposition to the general liberal principles listed above. Neoliberalism and neoliberal are more



aligned with neoconservative, a principle which at its core is a philosophical commitment to individualism within politics, economics, and society where government regulations and social welfare assistance are impediments to individual freedom. Neoliberalism is an ideology that human well-being is better served by “liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills” within structures and institutions that generate, promote, and sustain strong property rights, free markets, and free trade, all of which takes precedence over the interest of labor, social services, and local entrepreneurship.<sup>51</sup>

Second, neoliberal policies have created an economic situation in poor and developing countries that protects private property rights and ensures that capitalist markets can operate without state interference. Global restructuring with IMF and World Bank mandates over the past thirty years have resulted in states having to reduce and sometimes abolish governmental assistance for labor, health care, education, housing, and employment to satisfy the requirements of private investors who have no interest in the populations of the country. This global restructuring has increased poverty and broadened economic inequalities across the world – the rich have grown richer and the poor have grown poorer.

As neoliberal policies have affected both basic human rights and humanitarian justice in varying degrees, I want to underscore a discreet distinction within the rubric of human rights between basic human rights and humanitarian justice. Humanitarian justice encompasses human rights violations that are considered “*in extremis*,”<sup>52</sup> such as genocide and crimes against humanity. Basic human rights are the rights to health care, clean air and water, food security, freedom of speech and movement, a decent job, and education.<sup>53</sup>

The consequences of neoliberal policies were most apparent during a student strike at the University of Ghana at Legon in August 1999. To compensate for foreign loans and the ideology of free markets, such strikes, then and now, are staged in schools and universities across the global South where tuition and student fees have increased under Structural Adjustment Programs, and educational instruction, programs, and services have decreased. The Legon students were notified shortly before classes began of an increase in user fees, therefore they had little time to raise the money. After large-scale complaints by students, the government agreed to a small scholarship fund. However, several weeks after classes started, the funds were not distributed, raising doubts that they ever would be.

Most graduate classes were held despite the early days of the strike, and many faculty members continued instruction with the students who did show up. The Chair of the English Department, where I was teaching,

encouraged all of us to continue classes, whether we were in sympathy with the strikers or not, because the government simply had no choice and was operating as best it could, with genuine concern for the students. Many felt the government was caught in a financial web of difficulties: its concern for the well-being and future of Ghanaian students; its enormous financial debt from international loans; its weakened economy from free market and free trade restrictions; its responsibility to the faltering infrastructure of its flagship university which, built during the colonial era to accommodate 1,500 students, is now beyond capacity with over 5,000.<sup>54</sup> As one colleague said to me, “The students are suffering, but we need capital to run a university. The hands of the government are tied under the conditionalities of these international financial institutions. We must increase student fees to maintain a top-ranked African university. If we do not comply with these mandates, we get nothing, and what will happen then?”

On one day near the beginning of the strike, most of my students were in attendance. We were in the middle of a class discussion on postcolonial theory and how concepts like “hegemony,” “alienation,” and “neocolonialism” relate to the issues of the strike, when I heard a storm of footsteps marching up the stairs toward our classroom. I turned toward the front of the room and saw an onrush of young men with red bandanas and red T-shirts charge into the room. They were part of a brigade of strikers – all men – going from classroom to classroom to shut down instruction and mobilize students to join the strike. It looked as if a few of my students were afraid, but most seemed intrigued by the intruders. The strikers, with a masculine bravado, sat on top of desks, stood at the entrance, and along the walls.

“You know there is a strike. Why are you holding class?”

“Do you know why we are striking?”

A few of the strikers called out the names of students they knew and asked why they were sitting in class instead of protesting against the fee increase. Concerned that my students were being put on the defensive, to guard against a confrontation, and because I didn’t know what else to say, I blurted out:

“Please, look at what is on the board.”

On the blackboard, the class had listed the demands of the strike alongside tenets of neoliberalism and concepts of postcolonial theory. We then drew lines connecting the lists to descriptions of empire and citizenship. After looking at all the scribbling, one of the young men asked why I was teaching at Legon.

I tried to sound calm and undisturbed: “So I can teach what is on the board to students here.”

Intuitively I began to slowly read a few concepts from the board.

“This is what you are teaching?” asked one young man earnestly.

“Do you like teaching in Africa?” said another more defiantly. Then one of the young strikers, whom I had met months earlier through his brother – a friend whom I worked with on a water democracy project – interrupted the questions and simply said to the others, “Okay, let’s go. But Prof, no more classes after today.”

“No more classes after today,” I repeated.

The young men left with as much bravado as they entered.

At the end of class, I was walking toward the main road on my way to town. As I approached the gate, I suddenly noticed a sea of students in red marching down the road. The strikers, men and women, had gained in numbers and momentum. They were chanting, “Aluta Continua!” “Long live Mobrowa!”<sup>55</sup> and “Short live increase in fees!” Marching bodies advancing in synchronized footsteps, slogans, and chants transformed the campus of colonial architecture and grand monuments into a space of local incitement and youthful self-determination. For some, this new space was a spectacle of undignified insubordination and troubling chaos and for others it was a spectacle of student power and righteous contention.

The striking students claimed their public platform in the center of campus in front of the main library.

“World Bank, IMF, and the government of Ghana, you must not underestimate the power of students!” said one of the speakers.

“The government is failing us just to satisfy World Bank and IMF conditionalities!” said another.

As I stood and watched in rapt attention at the drama of it all, two of my students, who were among the strikers, approached me and suggested that I “should probably leave.” They felt the protest was beginning to escalate and being a Prof and an American might cause me some trouble. I thanked them for their concern and started toward town.

Acts of activism demand our attention and some stay with us through time. One of the most memorable performatives of the ’98 strike was when students climbed one of the most renowned monuments in Legon. The majestic statue of a young man and woman in academic robes reaching out to the future, gazing toward the horizon, stands tall and prominent in the

middle of campus. The couple is encircled by a garden of flowers as they hold a torch up to the sky. The students turned two red bandanas into blindfolds and covered the eyes of the couple. The revered symbol in the middle of campus was now ironically marked and overlaid by the contested symbol of “striking,” bright red cloth concealing the noble faces of the man and woman to signify a troubled present, a contested past, and the need for an alternative future beyond the one monumentalized by their colonial fathers.

Days after the rally, the campus officially closed. All Ghanaian students were required to leave the university. The administration posted directives in all residential halls announcing that “due to kidnappings and threats against students, the university would be closed indefinitely, and all Ghanaian students had four hours to vacate.” Then we got the news of Her Majesty’s visit. Several weeks after the closing, it was announced that Queen Elizabeth II was coming to Ghana. With the arrival of the Queen, the university reopened on November 1 and Ghanaian students were allowed to move back onto the campus. “The streets and gutters were swept clean, Ghanaian and British flags adorned the streets,” and the government agreed to a 30 percent reduction in fees.<sup>56</sup>

The aim of this study is to “offer a global perspective and, at the same time, to produce a study that is locally informed.”<sup>57</sup> Ghanaian activists serve as examples of what it means to make radical performances and what it means for the performance ethnographer to be entwined in the habitation of a local–global space of inquiry. I often hear the comment: “Why make reference to global political economy, just tell the local story about a people and their culture?” Or, “What does neoliberalism have to do with cultural traditions and human rights?” Micaela di Leonardo provides a helpful response:

Culture is never separate from, and cannot be understood apart from, politics and economy ... To insist upon a bounded knowledge domain of idealist-defined culture is simply to claim a kind of permanent adolescence, or court jester status, among intellectuals – to restrict ourselves to an un-ambitious terrain, to refuse to take responsibility as adults for the world in which we live and work.<sup>58</sup>

Each *act of activism* in this book variously illuminates quotidian struggles for the survival of basic human rights and each is a compilation of stories or “scenes” that could not be told without acknowledging the macro forces of a neoliberal political economy that is ingrained in their plots.

“INTIMATE HABITATION” AND “PERFORMATIVE-  
WITNESSING”

Echoing Gayatri Spivak’s notion of *intimate habitation*, Kamala Visweswaran describes Zora Neale Hurston’s fieldwork with the people of Eatonville, Florida and Hurston’s method of privileging their voices and actions as “speaking subjects,” allowing readers access to their words in their own idioms and intonations. She writes: “In Hurston’s ethnography, community is seen not merely as an object to be externally described, but as a realm intimately inhabited.”<sup>59</sup> The idea of intimate habitation becomes one of the guiding principles in this book. I aimed to reflect intimate habitation throughout these pages by representing Ghanaians *in their own words*. This means that their analysis and descriptions are widely and variously woven throughout these pages by direct quotes, verbatim interviews, and oral histories as “speaking subjects.” I have read too much ethnography where the “subjects” of a study are hardly or never directly quoted; we know them *only* or *primarily* through the thick descriptions and detailed analysis of the researcher, or through the scholarly quotes about them and their contexts from cited scholars (who never met them) referenced by the ethnographer. This is not to argue that the researcher’s analysis and relevant citations from other thinkers are not valuable or cannot deepen our questions and enlarge our understanding in profound ways. This book is formed by my own analysis and depends on such scholarly references. The problem comes when it is “only,” or even “primarily,” the researcher’s analysis that inscribes the Other or when scholarly commentary and ethnographic reflection become a prevailing *stand-in* or *substitute* for the words and philosophies of those who consult and advise you and whose life worlds constitute the study. I do not claim a perfect balance between the words of Ghanaians, my own, and the scholars I cite. However, I do claim that at pivotal moments this ethnography of acts of activism endeavors to share with readers, as intimately and directly as possible, the actual words of Ghanaians themselves about rights and justice in their country.

Intimate habitation also means representing how I inhabited my fieldwork during those quiet moments of self-reflection, of abiding connections and disconnections for and with Others, of encounters with small stories and symbolic acts and how love, hope, and desire took form and ignited political activism. Intimate habitation involves living up close and personally with how these small, affective, and performative dynamics seep through the cracks of law, institution, and state, but still constitute them all and yet have the potential to break open the solidity of their rules and power through

alternative ideas, practices, and discourses that grow and spread through both victory and defeat. These small stories were everywhere and all at once. Dwight Conquergood once suggested that to intimately inhabit these small stories we must become “co-performative witnesses” rather than “participant-observers.” To displace participant-observation for co-performative witnessing or performative-witnessing is to emphasize performance over participation and witnessing over observation. Performative-witnessing is to be engaged and committed body-to-body in the field. It is a politics of the body deeply in action with Others. Conquergood believed that participant-observation does not capture the active, risky, and intimate engagement with Others that is the expectation of performance. Performative-witnessing also embraces the concept of coevalness or co-temporality as the recognition of actively *sharing the same time* with others as opposed to the fixed time of keeping others in an immutable and distanced past tense where there is a disjunction between the coeval experiences in the field of gathering/sharing information and when one returns home to write up the data. The co-temporal and co-performative interaction is now denied in the report and “in the professional discourse that temporally distances others.”<sup>60</sup> What we want instead is coevalness as co-temporality in the “acknowledgement of others as contemporaries” moving away from the “Other-as-theme to Other-as-interlocutor.”<sup>61</sup> Performative-witnessing is to speak “with” not “to” or “at” others and where ethnographic interlocutors are as co-temporal in the report and on the stage as they were in the field. Performative-witnessing is also to emphasize the political act (responsibility) of witnessing over the neutrality (voyeurism) of observation. Witnessing does not stand from a position of ideological and axiological purity; it contributes to the labor and performances of those researchers and activists who do not simply attempt to reflect the world as a mirror but take up the hammer to build and imagine it differently.

Moving from intimate habitation and performative-witnessing, the question becomes how does one write about it and in what form? The greatest challenge in writing this book was how to organize and shape the content of years of fieldwork data into a readable form. After some time, I finally came to realize three things: first, the data for this study, like intimate habitation, was not neat, sequential, or predictable; second, the data, like performative-witnessing, could not be inscribed without first recognizing that it was enfolded; third, like both, my fieldwork experiences were not so much planned as they were emergent and improvisational. Intimate habitation and performative-witnessing for a performance ethnographer’s life lived in the field is multi-cited, embodied, and primarily extemporaneous. Therefore

these are the layers that reflect the structure of this book. Linear time is not and could not be captured. The events and experiences in this book go back and forth through time, memory, space, and reflections. Interviews, incidents, and performances that are presented here are sometimes interrupted by juxtaposing and inserting a different text or scene that depicts the simultaneity of temporalities and discourses that are more authentic to how it was lived and remembered in the field. Fieldwork data and the small stories that constitute them, as Norman Denzin reminds us, “do not follow a necessary progression. Narrative collage fractures time; speakers leap forward and backward in time. Time is not linear; it is not attached to causal sequences.” Denzin goes on to state that “intervals between temporal moments can be collapsed in an instant. More than one voice can speak at once, in more than one tense. The text can be a collage, a montage, with photographs, blank spaces, poems, monologues, dialogues, voice-overs, and interior streams of consciousness.”<sup>62</sup>

Performance, therefore, is the core analytic in this study, but it also comprises its overall organizational structure as a performance in print. The three Acts present three illustrations of actions that generated activism relative to human rights and social justice. Within each Act there are scenes to reflect specific locations, differing actions, or varied perspectives. Beyond presenting three acts of activism from the field, the organization into the three Acts also characterizes three different performances: Act I staged in Ghana; Act II staged in the United States; Act III comprising oral history performances of Ghanaians directing street performances and Theatre for Development. The theatrical material has been revised and adapted for this book to illustrate the analysis and contexts discussed in Acts I and II, and also reflects the most recent stage performances and workshops. The appendix texts represent the original scripts.

Across the three *Acts of Activism*, the unifying link that joins them is how *performance* is employed as a method in the defense of human rights and in the actualization of social justice. Moreover, each Act serves as a poignant example of the overarching focus on *activism* in Ghanaian civil society where *performance* becomes a pivotal method for change in the contentious spaces of a “developing” country.

Act I examines a volatile debate that focused on modernity and tradition as they related to a specific cultural practice involving women and girls sent to religious shrines in reparation for crimes committed by members of their family and community. Act I weaves in scenes from a public performance I directed in Ghana, based on my field notes of men and women on both sides of the debate. This is in combination with scenes from the field involving human rights activists who worked to reform the cultural practice.

Act II focuses on water democracy activists working against the corporate privatization of public water systems as they fight for public water as a human right. This Act weaves in scenes from a collaborative performance I directed in the United States, based on the political economy of water, with varied fieldwork accounts of water activism in Ghana. This was in addition to the stories and viewpoints of my student cast at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill relative to their philosophy and experience with water.

Act III focuses on oral history and street performance in the presentation of three Ghanaian women who employed performance as a means toward advancing the human rights and the well-being of women and children. The first oral history performance describes a street performance to bring police and government attention to the serial killings of women in the capital city of Accra. The second describes a street performance to promote a Domestic Violence Bill that was under the consideration of Parliament at the time. The final oral history performance involves Theatre for Development in addressing the challenges of nutritional education for mothers, infant mortality, and public health.

The acts of activism contained in these pages become performed stories that aim to honor, through intimate habitation and performative-witnessing, everyday acts of resistance, hope, and victory that are too often hidden, unspoken, and unknown.

#### TIME LINE FOR ACTS OF ACTIVISM

##### *May 1998 – Durham, North Carolina, USA*

First learned of the Trokosi/Troxovi cultural practice while in Durham, NC watching the *60 Minutes* investigative news television program filmed in Ghana, West Africa.

##### *August 1998 – Ghana, West Africa*

Departed from Raleigh-Durham Airport to arrive at Kotoka Airport in Accra, Ghana on a Fulbright Senior Scholar Fellowship to begin teaching at the University of Ghana at Legon.

##### *October 1998 – Ghana, West Africa*

Began fieldwork with local human rights activists at International Needs Ghana (ING).



*August 1999 – Ghana, West Africa*

Granted a second year by Fulbright foundation to develop and adapt fieldwork data on local human rights activism and the defense of women's human rights in Ghana.

*March 2000 – Ghana, West Africa*

Amadou Diallo March to the America Embassy in Accra, Ghana.

*June 2000 – Ghana, West Africa*

Presented the performance adapted from fieldwork data, *Is It a Human Being or a Girl?* Opened at the Outdoor Theatre, the University of Ghana at Legon, June 10 and 11, and the Outdoor Theatre at the W. E. B. Dubois Centre in Accra, June 24 and 25.

*December 2000 – Chapel Hill, NC, USA*

Departed Ghana to resume teaching at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

*June–July 2001 – Ghana, West Africa*

Returned to Ghana to continue fieldwork on local activism and human rights.

*April 2002 – Chapel Hill, NC, USA*

Presented *Is It a Human Being or a Girl?* in Studio Six, Swain Hall, Department of Communication Studies, at Chapel Hill with UNC students.

*June–July 2002 – Ghana, West Africa*

Returned to Ghana to conduct fieldwork with water activists in Tamale (Northern Ghana) and Accra on water as a human right.

*August–December 2004 – Ghana, West Africa*

Directed the UNC Study Abroad Program on the Legacy of Kwame Nkrumah and continued fieldwork on human rights and local activism.

*July–August 2005 – Ghana, West Africa*

Returned to Ghana to continue fieldwork on water as a human right.

*March 2006 – Chapel Hill, NC, USA*

Presented *Water Rites* in Studio Six, Swain Hall, Department of Communication Studies, at Chapel Hill with UNC students on the human right to water, March 2–6.

*July–August 2006 – Ghana, West Africa*

Returned to Ghana to continue fieldwork on local activism and human rights.

*September 2006–May 2007 – Evanston, Illinois, USA*

Accepted invitation in September 2006 to serve as visiting professor at Northwestern University and in May 2007 accepted permanent offer as professor of Performance Studies.

*July–August 2008 – Ghana, West Africa*

Distributed drafts of manuscript, *Acts of Activism*, to consultants and friends, where they were named and represented, for their suggestions and feedback.

## NOTES

1. On December 20, 2001 the Parliament of Ghana established the National Reconciliation Commission, designed to investigate human rights violations and abuses during the periods of unconstitutional rule since Independence in 1957, as well as special cases of rights violations committed under periods of civilian rule between March 6, 1957 and January 6, 1993. The goal of the commission was to seek national reconciliation by investigating “the truth about past abuses.” The Commission functioned as a public court hearing in calling witnesses and victims who were expected to truthfully recount their stories under oath and respond to questions by the Commission. Although the Commission had the powers of a court, it was “essentially a fact-finding body” and did not exercise the power of imprisonment or other forms of punitive action (from p. 4 of the report). One of the primary benefits of the Commission is described below:

National reconciliation is essential for a steady democratic transition. It is also a necessary condition for long-term political and economic development. The aim of the process is to promote truth, accountability, forgiveness, peace, and unity and to prevent the recurrence of such human rights violations. Talking about painful events is difficult, but it is important for the future that these stories be told. Each person who has a story to tell, including victims, witnesses, and perpetrators, should come before the National Reconciliation Commission. (p. 13)

The Commission began reviewing statements of human rights violations from the public on September 3, 2002. On January 14, 2003 these statements had been vetted and the public hearings began. The hearings lasted a little over one year and were broadcast across the country on radio and television. At the end of the hearings, it was the duty of the Commission to first submit a report to the president describing the causes and effects of human rights abuses that were reported; second, to make recommendations on the appropriate redress for the abuses and to aid the victims in healing and coming “to terms with their experience” (p. 7); and, third, to recommend methods of preventing such violations in the future pertaining to “institutional reforms (e.g., torture-prone state institutions and facilities), human rights education campaigns, and legal and administrative measures” (p. 8). I went to several of the hearings and listened with an audience of ordinary Ghanaians, public officials, human rights activists, educators, members of civil society organizations, and the media. We heard stories of beatings, disappearances, molestations, thievery, corruption, and disturbing accounts of affronts to personal dignity. What was most striking about the testimonials was not only the feelings and emotions from the witnesses and victims in their need to be heard and their appreciation of it, but also their abiding need to be *believed*. Not to be believed is not to be heard. Without truth, there can be no reconciliation. The purpose of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, from South Africa, Ghana, Sierra Leone, and from countries across the globe, is to begin a process toward healing and reconciliation through efforts of seeking *truth*. Ambassador Oluyemi Adeniji, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone, stated:

Truth is a prerequisite for genuine reconciliation and can pave the way for redress and the deterrence of further abuses (of human rights). In this way, revealing the truth leads to the addressing of impunity. Reconciliation also becomes possible on the basis of knowing the truth and having the will to acknowledge and learn from the past, in order not to repeat it. Without truth and reconciliation, communities will not heal, grievances will remain deep-seated, reintegration will be illusory, development will remain a mirage, and peace may be no more than an interlude between periods of war.

Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, just as Ghana’s National Reconciliation Commission, primarily focused on human rights abuses that centered on humanitarian justice *in extremis*. Although this study focuses on acts

of activism that centered on basic human rights and not exclusively humanitarian justice, I want to take up the significance of *truth* as it relates to the spectrum of human rights and social justice issues, whether they are acts of genocide or nutritional health for mothers and babies. There are certainly rights that are more urgent than others, e.g., against the facts of starvation and genocide, to be denied the right to marry seems less urgent. But that does not erase the fact that it is a legitimate and deeply lived human rights violation for populations across the world. The focus of this book is to present testimonies and stories of acts of activism relative to human rights, social justice, and human well-being as a performance tactic. Each act and scene in this ethnography constitutes a traveling story; a treatise on truth seekers, an expression of the dangers in claiming one truth over the many, and a reflection on how to ask questions and live between countries and their translations of truths.

2. I am grateful to Della Pollock for initiating a discussion on “emergence” as a quality of performance during a presentation I gave on a panel she chaired (the intersections among performance, politics, and pedagogy) at the Association of Cultural Studies Crossroads Conference, at the University of the West Indies in Kingston, Jamaica in July 2008.
3. Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*.
4. Meaning “the dawn is broken” or “the light of day will come” in the Dagbani language of Northern Ghana.
5. Oliver, *Witnessing*, p. 14.
6. Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, pp. 48–49.
7. M. Csikszentmihalyi, quoted in Turner, pp. 48–49.
8. Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, p. 47.
9. The top layer of the cerebral cortex that forms the part of the human brain that is responsible for higher and more complex brain functions. Referring to “our mental architecture” John Emigh states: “Performances serve to project the mind’s sketching and paradigm-making abilities out beyond the confines of the individual being, where other minds can assess the persuasiveness and power of our fleeting, embodied visions – affirming and denying, remembering and forgetting, assimilating them into old categories, forging new ones, blending fantasy and reality in fragile images made of our very biological selves, shifting storage areas, strengthening weak synaptic connections and making new ones, redirecting neurons used to store information that has fallen into disuse, and maybe, if we are very, very lucky, using this process as a way to live better, or at least to enjoy the passage of our time here more fully” (in “Performance Studies, Neuroscience, and the Limits of Culture”).
10. A synaptic connection is the space between two neurons, across which they communicate.
11. Emigh, p. 266.
12. Alexander, “Performance Ethnography.”
13. Words of Ernesto J. Cortes, Jr., the political activist and community organizer, found on a flyer for labor rights many years ago. Although I don’t remember the specifics of the event, I wrote the words in a journal.

14. This phrase builds on Reinelt, *Crucibles of Crisis*.
15. Taylor, *Disappearing Acts*, p. 3.
16. Alexander, "Performance Ethnography," pp. 411–41.
17. This concept is taken from Pineau, "Performance Studies Across the Curriculum."
18. Pineau, "Re-casting Rehearsal," p. 46.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
20. Barnhart and Barnhart (eds.), *The World Book Dictionary*, vol. II (1980 edn).
21. Hallie, *The Paradox of Cruelty*, p. 46.
22. Hamera, *Dancing Communities*, p. 176.
23. This quote is taken from Bruce McConachie's essay "Approaching the 'Structure of Feeling' in Grassroots Theater," p. 40.
24. Kershaw in *The Radical in Performance* and Cohen-Cruz in *Local Acts* discuss the "Changing Script" as the means by which performance opens the possibility to change reality and the given scripts of life, politics, and culture. "Changing Script" is the possibility to change the script of hegemonic power and practices.
25. This concept draws on Kelly Oliver in *Witnessing*.
26. Oliver, pp. 18, 19.
27. Durland, "Witnessing," p. 65.
28. This is a reference to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's classic essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" I am appropriating Spivak here to assert the temporalities of speaking within indigenous locations where the subaltern speaking subject escapes and/or transgresses the bounds of allowed speech constituted by Western epistemologies and venues.
29. I am drawing here on Michel Foucault's articulation of power as set forth primarily in *Discipline and Punish*.
30. Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, p. 122.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 105.
32. Brecht, *Brechtian Theatre*.
33. Alexander, "Performance Ethnography," p. 411.
34. *Ibid.*
35. Denzin, *Performance Ethnography*, pp. 203, 33.
36. *Ibid.*
37. Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography*, p. 5.
38. Alexander, "Performance Ethnography," p. 43.
39. Morrison, "Rootedness," p. 497.
40. Hamera, "Performance Studies," p. 122.
41. Van Maanen, *Tales of the Field*.
42. Madison, *Critical Ethnography*, p. 397.
43. Alexander, "Performance Ethnography," p. 417.
44. This is taken from a public presentation at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1997 by Stuart Hall.
45. The phrase "changes in political institutions" comes from Mazur, "Labor's New Internationalism."

46. Ibid.
47. I appropriated the phrase “aesthetic spectatorship” from hearing Susan Sontag in a radio interview.
48. In a recent interview on the Public Broadcasting System, Howard Zinn defined the word “radical” based on a line from his play *Marx in Soho*. He stated: “to be radical is simply to grasp the root of the problem.”
49. Kershaw, *The Radical in Performance*, p. 7.
50. Di Leonardo, “New Global and American Landscapes of Inequality,” p. 6.
51. Blau and Moncada, *Human Rights*, p. 220.
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid.
54. The population at Legon has tripled.
55. Meaning the “struggle continues” and “long live the distressed struggle.”
56. Riggs, “Akwaaba! Welcome to Ghana,” pp. 134–39.
57. Ebron, *Performing Africa*, p. 23.
58. Di Leonardo, *Exotics At Home*, p. 7.
59. Visweswaran, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*, p. 33.
60. Conquergood, “Rethinking Ethnography: Towards a Critical Cultural Politics,” p. 354.
61. Ibid.
62. Denzin, *Performance Ethnography*, p. 87.

ACT I

*Is it a human being or a girl?*

In Act I we will enter a local debate relative to modernity and tradition and how the bodies of women become the center point of this local conflict, invoking volatile claims about culture, religion, and human rights. We will examine how modes of performance, in the field and on a public stage in Ghana, re-vision the debate and generate alternative claims, questions, and practices.

SCENE ONE: WATCHING *60 MINUTES*

It is a Sunday afternoon in May 1998. I am in the kitchen preparing dinner when I hear a man's voice from the television in the next room: "If you roam the Third World on a regular basis like our reporter, you are bound from time to time to come across something that defies belief." I glance over, it is the investigative news program *60 Minutes*, and I see a white female reporter sitting in a small boat being paddled down a river by a black African boy. I leave the kitchen to listen closer. The reporter is in Ghana, West Africa, and she is telling a story of modern-day slavery and sexual servitude where women and girls are taken from their homes and placed in "bondage" to serve a shrine priest.

The reporter speaks with a seven-year-old girl in bare feet wearing a tattered grey cloth wrapped around her small body. The girl is carrying a large bucket of water half her size on her head. The reporter asks her why she was sent to the shrine. The little girl, frightened and in despair, does not speak. The reporter asks if she wants to live in the shrine. The child looks down to the ground sorrowfully and whispers "No."

We discover the little girl is condemned to the shrine in atonement for her uncle who committed adultery. *60 Minutes* reports that this traditional practice of young girls being sent to religious shrines to pay for "crimes" committed by members of their family is called "Trokosi." The reporter now interviews a shrine priest. The priest wears a cone-shaped hat made of a

straw material, a cord is tied around his neck and hangs down his chest like a necklace, a white cloth is draped over his left shoulder, and he holds what resembles a wand of straw raffia. He asks the reporter, "What is wrong with our religion that you would come so far away from your country to speak with us?" She replies that she is in Ghana to find out why young girls are sent to Trokosi shrines against their will. The priest defensively responds by denying the girls are sent against their will and explains that if a village member commits a crime against traditional law then the gods will punish the lawbreaker's family and the entire village unless a virgin daughter from the offender's family is sent to assuage the gods' anger and wrath. If a virgin is not sent, death and destruction will prevail.

The camera then shifts to a group of women walking down an empty road carrying large baskets and boxes of various items on their heads. As they continue to walk, the women pass through a village where people gather around appearing to be jeering and mocking them. One of the young women in the center of the crowd wearing a braided hairstyle with lovely multicolored beads in shades of yellow, green, red, and blue is crying quietly as she walks. We discover the woman is being sent away to a fetish shrine that very day. The entourage of women are responsible for accompanying her as she leaves her home on the journey to her next life as a Trokosi and for what the reporter describes as "the six-mile walk of humiliation" to the shrine. The camera follows the young woman until she finally reaches the shrine. The condemned woman is then taken inside a mud hut and into the "inner sanctum" of the shrine. The reporter is allowed inside to view the "secret rituals that have never been filmed before." The young woman sits before the priest, and in the small, dark space there are two or three other men sitting beside the priest. The camera focuses on the hands of an older woman taking off the condemned woman's beads, her earrings, and "finally her pride" as the camera pans down to the woman's panties being removed.<sup>1</sup> The men are having an alcoholic drink as the woman is being "stripped of her former life."

From the news exposé we observe that, although the offenders to the gods and to the community are usually men, it is the girl-child who must reconcile the offense and pay for the crime. The crimes range from murder, theft, and infidelity to lies and insults. It is reported that these women and girls known as Trokosis are often condemned to shrines for the remainder of their lives, and in many cases subsequent generations are also condemned – when a Trokosi dies, she must then be replaced by another young girl from her family, and so it is after each death. According to the broadcast, the cycle can extend so far back that a Trokosi may not know the reason for her "bondage," only that her great-great grandmother or aunt was a Trokosi.



The original crime is no longer remembered by anyone. The reporter describes how the Trokosi “slaves” work day and night farming, fetching water, sweeping, cooking, cleaning, or performing whatever labors the priest demands. She goes on to report that in some cases the “slaves” are not always properly fed and they are denied an education. The reporter is even more emphatic in describing sexual abuse by the priest. According to the report, Trokosi “slaves,” young and old, are under sexual bondage, and if they should attempt to run away, they are brought back by their family and repeatedly raped as punishment. The reporter interviews one woman who weeps as she tells the story of running away and then being shamed by her family who “refuse to look at her.” Out of fear of the gods, her family brought her back to the shrine where she was raped by the shrine priest. When the reporter asks the priest about the allegations of sexual abuse and rape, he replies by saying, “No one is raped.” He goes on to claim that the Trokosis “are wives of the gods.” The reporter is incredulous, responding that by becoming wives of the gods, they become wives of the shrine priest who feels at liberty to rape them.

Trokosi certainly appears to be an abusive tradition, but I can’t help but wonder if this is yet another stereotypical representation about sub-Saharan Africa and her backward traditions, if this is yet another dubious report about the brutality of the “Third World” in the name of culture, if this is yet another patronizing account about Westerners traveling to the “dark continent” to enlighten the “primitive.”

Everything related to Ghana is of absolute importance. I leave for Ghana in just a few months to live for a year and teach at the University in Legon. In all my reading and research on traditional Ghanaian religion and culture, I never heard of Trokosi until now. What is the point of this news exposé? Certainly not to sensationalize human rights abuse in Africa and inscribe another mark upon the “savage African.” Should I not appreciate that such a horrid abuse of women’s rights is now made public in order to potentially put an end to this cruel tradition? The camera now shifts and turns to an interview with the Reverend Walter Pimpong. He is Ghanaian, a local human rights activist, and director of the human rights NGO,<sup>2</sup> International Needs Ghana. According to the interview, Reverend Pimpong and his organization are waging a campaign against the Trokosi practice. They are working to liberate women and girls in all the shrines across Ghana. Finally! I take a deep breath, feeling some relief that *60 Minutes* has the good sense to represent African people as more than just abusers and victims. Reverend Pimpong now begins describing a tactic he and his organization employ to free the Trokosis. I am intrigued by his

words and want to hear more, but before he can fully describe his tactics, the camera cuts to a different scene of him now speaking in a village. I begin listening to his speech, and he is an extraordinary man, but before he completes his message, the camera cuts again to another scene. Now we see what is called a “Liberation Ceremony.” This is a ceremony Reverend Pimpong and ING present when they liberate Trokosi women and girls from the shrines. The organization has already liberated dozens of former Trokosis but, according to the broadcast, there are thousands still in bondage. As the camera focuses on the Liberation Ceremony, a large circle of drummers are beating their drums fast and powerfully before a crowd of dancers and spectators. A goat has been killed, and with blood still dripping from its cut throat, the goat is carried around the inside of the circle, the blood forming a large round ring to symbolize the end of slavery and death. We see groups of women wearing white dresses and scarves, symbolizing freedom, tied to their heads as they joyfully dance to the drums. One by one, each former Trokosi jumps forward inside the circle, to symbolize leaving her old life of servitude to now enter her new life of freedom. Reverend Pimpong is embracing the women and then handing them something, but it is difficult to see. I lean into the television trying to look closer, but the camera cuts from the Liberation Ceremony to the shrine priest who spoke earlier. The priest, with pride and confidence, says, “Trokosi will continue until I die.”

The program ends. I am stunned. Why did the priest get the last word? What happened to Reverend Pimpong? How did he decide to go against an ancient tradition? What exactly are the tactics ING employs to liberate Trokosi women and girls? Why a Liberation Ceremony? The important story was too brief. The hard, complicated, and most compelling story of how local activism can change the most fundamental and time-worn beliefs of culture and society was eclipsed to sensationalize suffering in the “Third World.” In the end, brutality in Africa prevailed over local courage and everyday acts of resistance by African people. But shouldn’t the work of this reporter who crossed the Volta River to go deep into the dangerous hinterlands of the continent to expose the hardships of suffering girls and women be valuable information? Exposing human rights abuse anywhere in the world seems a noble task, but I must also ask, toward what end? What I think is most noble – what I think we all need to know – is how indigenous people who live inside injustice, close up, and on the same ground where it happens, work to change it themselves, on their own terms, and at its very roots.

What I could not imagine on that Sunday afternoon in 1998 in Durham, North Carolina, USA, was that watching *60 Minutes* was just the beginning.

A story was unfolding, and its implications were much larger and deeper, more ancient and volatile, than a news broadcast could ever convey. And little did I know then that it would take me nearly ten years to try to tell the story and how that particular story led to other stories and other stories.

*The field – Ghana morning radio*

Unfortunately, there are certain people who use culture to justify discriminatory practices against women and other groups ... Gender inequalities cannot be justified in the name of Ghanaian culture. Culture is a dynamic force for good when it changes in response to the concerns and values of the times. We believe that Ghanaian culture is strong and resilient enough to withstand the questioning and abolition of harmful practices. Indeed, there are elements of Ghanaian culture which form a strong basis for promoting gender equality and highlighting these will strengthen the development potential of our culture.<sup>3</sup>

The Women's Manifesto for Ghana

It is about 6:30 a.m. As I get up and prepare to walk over to the English Department to teach my morning class, I turn the radio to one of the many Ghanaian morning talk shows. Two men are in a heated debate. The first man raises his voice in frustration: "We must honor our tradition. It is an insult to our ancestors and everything that it means to be Ghanaian to disrespect our tradition. We are nothing as a people, as a country without our history, without our tradition. You are not a real Ghanaian if you think you can destroy tradition. It is an abomination!"

The second man speaks quickly: "Some of our traditions are bad! We must leave those traditions behind in order to build a modern state! I believe in the importance of our traditions, but not if they are outmoded and not if they are violating human rights and making slaves of our women and children. Some traditions are holding us back as a modern people. The Trokosi ..."

The first man quickly interrupts: "The word is not 'Trokosi!' You are not saying the proper word. You do not know what you are talking about! You say the wrong word. It is not Trokosi it is Troxovi! You use the term Trokosi to mean slave of the deity – Tro for deity and kosi for slave. This is not correct! The proper term is Troxovi meaning a divinity which adopts children. It also refers to a divinity of justice, morality, public security, education, and social welfare. A person trained in a Troxovi shrine is not a Trokosi but a Fiashidi. The word Fiashidi means 'queen fit for kings.' The Fiashidi are among the best and most dependable women one can find in the world. They are not slaves! You are trying to say that the ancient practice

of Troxovi makes slaves out of our women! You are trying to say that the Troxovi practice maltreats women and takes away their human rights! This is rubbish! And it is just Western propaganda to make Africans look like savages, to destroy Ghanaian culture, and to get money from the West!”

“This is not true!” the second man exclaims. “I am Ghanaian and ...” He tries to speak but is cut off again by the first man. “These so-called Ghanaian human rights activists are puppets of the West. They will do and say whatever Western money tells them to do and say that is against the African. Please, what is important for all your listeners to understand is that these so-called human rights activists are only trying to promote their Christian agenda. They are puppets of the West!”

The second man confidently responds, “Yes, it is true that I am a Christian. But I am not against tradition. I am against backward, brutal customs!”

The first man charges, “These people are Christian chauvinists that want to destroy African religion because it is not the belief of the West! They think African religion is backward and brutal, because it is not the white man’s religion. If you do not believe in their Jesus Christ, then you are violating human rights. If you do not believe in their Jesus Christ, then you are a savage and need to be converted. This man is an impostor. He is a puppet used by big money and Christian donors from the West to civilize the African, to destroy our traditional religion, and turn us all into Christians!”

The second man asserts, “Times change with each generation and we must change with it. Our people must be saved from the sins of ignorance and backward thinking. Traditions that violate the freedom and well-being of our people must be changed, because they are against the progress of our people. They are against God and our modern state.”

*A reflection ... tradition, modernity, and alternative modernities*

The Christian missionary movement has a long and enduring legacy on the continent of Africa. But it is the wave of modernity that fuels the sparks between the living doctrines of Christian missionaries and the ongoing values of traditional worldviews that bring modernity and its influences into question. Modernity affects every corner of the globe, even the remote tribal village that appears untouched by the modern world of literacy and capitalism – where time seems to stop with hunters and gatherers, where fire is light and warmth, and where the wheel is still mobility and freedom. But, however “primitive” one regards a people untouched by modernity, it is an

illusion to think such people are completely outside of its influences. Modernity cuts up the world by category, conquest, and capital. These politics of geospatial/temporal arrangements and orderings are facts of modernity's history and sustenance. Rising from the West, modernity is centuries old and ironically as old or older than the formations of some traditions. Dilip Gaonkar reminds us that modernity came slowly, "bit by bit" (then and now), spanning a range of postmedieval histories through machinations of exchange, encounter, and confrontation that were "transported through commerce; administered by empires, bearing colonial inscriptions; propelled by nationalism; and now increasingly steered by global media, migration, and capital."<sup>4</sup> As multiple as modernity is in its different stages and formations across the globe and within nations, it is universally understood as *the* post-Enlightenment phenomenon of progress that does the work of advancing knowledge and existence. As Lawrence Grossberg states, "Modernity is always built upon a distinction through which the modern (nation) distinguishes and separates itself – spatially, temporally, and culturally – from the premodern or traditional."<sup>5</sup>

This separation between tradition and modernity defined and constituted the Trokosi/Troxovi debate. Those upholding the practice were considered on the side of tradition and those opposed to it were considered on the side of modernity. And for those opposed, to stake a claim for modernity is to stake a claim for development, progress, and advancement of the nation that also carries with it a legacy of Western thought and practices, as well as Christian missions. But what does it mean to stake a claim for tradition? The stakes here must reside in local articulations of a glorified heritage and in indigenous performances of a revered past.

Tradition is represented in the African symbol of *Sankofa*, a majestic bird whose commanding body is positioned forward, while the bird's long elegant neck dramatically circles backward gazing into the past. Sankofa symbolizes the significance of the past and tradition in order to move toward the present and future.

In Ghana, I came to understand more than ever (for better and for worse) that tradition is the life breath of the past and the very ground upon which the present stands and the future becomes possible. Traditional religion is evidence of the past, but, more, it is also the hope, creation, and embodiment of *generations*. Tradition is collective memory in motion. We enact tradition to honor and not forget. It is the sacred materialization of what those who came before believed, valued, and desired. To forget or defy cultural and religious tradition is to defy the sacred debt we owe to the ancestor. It is to desecrate the sacred ground of our kinship. But at the same

time I was compelled to ask: Why does this not always happen? Why is it not a natural social progression for everyone? What happens when tradition does harm? What happens when it is no longer remembered? What of those who defy tradition and dare to oppose and change it? Ghanaian philosopher Kwame Gyekye explores the dilemmas of tradition:

To say that a belief or practice is handed down to a generation is to say that it is bequeathed to the generation, passed on to it. But what this really means is that the belief or practice is placed at the disposal of the new generation in the expectation that the generation would preserve it. *But the preservation of it, in part or in whole, would depend very much on the attitude the new generation adopts toward it and would not necessarily be automatic, as the word “transmit” would suggest* [emphasis mine]. If we look back across the line, we find that some of the cultural values created ... are dropped by subsequent generations, or they simply sink into oblivion – winnowed away by time. Those values were, for one reason or another, not accepted, maintained, or preserved by subsequent generations. This means that the continuity and survival of a pristine cultural product depends on the normative considerations that will be brought to bear on it by a subsequent generation. The forebears – the previous generation – do not “transmit” their cultural creations as such; what they do rather is to place them at the disposal of subsequent generations of people. But the subsequent generations may on normative or other rational grounds either accept, refine, or preserve them or spurn, depreciate them, abandon them. The desire or intention of a subsequent generation to preserve or abandon inherited cultural products often results from some kind of *evaluation* [emphasis mine] of those cultural products and the tradition they lead to. *Such critical evaluations are essential for the growth and revitalization of cultural tradition.*<sup>6</sup>

What is provocative here is that Gyekye is reminding us that tradition is a thing “made” and “remade” based on generational will and “critical evaluations.” Tradition is not an automatic or natural, inherent progression; it lives only through the deliberate considerations of proceeding generations. But does it? Gyekye has opened a compelling contrast between “natural transmission” and “critical considerations” and, in doing so, further inscribes tradition as contingent and constructed. But questions still linger about how tradition is made or remade. The contrast between tradition as constructed and critical and tradition as automatic and natural, I would argue, is better understood in how traditions are all animated through performance and performativity, whether they are generally called performance/performativity or not. I want to distinguish tradition as natural/automatic against tradition as critical/evaluative from within a performance paradigm in order to make sense of the Trokosi/Troxovi debate in particular and debates on tradition versus modernity in general.

Within the uneventful and the quotidian motions of the day-to-day, generation after generation will enact a tradition. What constitutes this tradition are repeated social and cultural norms, i.e., repeated and continuous re-enactments of inherited gestures and behaviors that are performativities. For example, such performativities include raffia cord placed and worn around the neck, walking distances to fetch water and firewood, cleaning the shrine and daily preparations of meals, caring for the children, and being a concubine of the priest. Generations will enact performativities that constitute tradition without “critical considerations” of the meaning or consequences of that tradition (or performativity) because it is always already done, always already enacted – always already feeling natural – a stylized repetitive (traditional) act across time that becomes automatic where an alternative (untraditional) act becomes alien, unknown, and often unimaginable. For example, such a breach (alternative act) in the traditional (the repetitive), would include a reversal, of sorts, in the role of the priest – serving meals to the Trokosi, assuming primary care of the children, fetching water, cleaning the shrine, and being denied sexual choice and freedom. Everyday performativities constitute tradition and are disposed to subsequent generations on and on in a continuing cycle that hardly ruptures. The Trokosi/Troxovi practice is perpetuated because it is perpetuated. Granted, these traditions are not inherent or natural, but they are inherited and naturalized because they are repeatedly enacted through time and thereby concretized and believed to be foundational, immutable, irrefutable, and normal. The point here is that there are special or heightened events and cultural performances (in contrast to the everyday quotidian performatives of tradition) that also constitute and solidify tradition, such as the public ceremonies represented in the *60 Minutes* documentary, in cases where the female, upon first entering the shrine, will walk through the village past a chorus of song, chant, and jeers to then enter the shrine where the raffia is ritually placed around her neck, her underwear is removed, and she begins her new life as a Trokosi. Tradition, I would argue, is strengthened and remade both through the public spectacles of cultural performances and the domestic, quotidian performativities of the everyday. Tradition is less a matter of inherent transmission or critical evaluation and more a matter of habitual enactments through generations believed to be the proper order of the world because they are always already being done. But what accounts for the interruption or cessation of repetition? The perpetuation of a tradition is contingent on its performativities but it is also contingent upon how *protected* these performativities are from *critical evaluation*. Things can fall apart under the weight of a critical

question. In order to survive ruptures in the performativities of tradition, they must withstand critical evaluation, ignore it, refute it, or, in some cases, try to destroy it by any means necessary.

Up to this point, repetition serves to preserve tradition as more or less unchanging, more or less natural. Gyekye, however, is offering “evaluation” as the tipping point in either the conscious and considered continuation of tradition or as an entranceway to alterity where other ideas, discourses, and practices function to break open its stronghold in order to envision alternative realities. Critical evaluation moves us from uncritical repetitions of tradition toward ruptures and meditations that create something new or uphold tradition through deliberation and conscious choice. This tipping point of evaluation – whether it is to disrupt or continue – is for Gyekye both the symptom and sign of modernity. These ruptures and meditations, however, do not necessarily cast tradition in opposition to modernity (or vice versa) but become possibilities, in Gaonkar’s words, for “alternative modernities” where forms of tradition and forms of modernity can organically co-exist. Alternative modernities are modernities that question how the past works upon the present and how the past and present merge to create certain consequences and representations of reality. The notion of alternative modernities also demonstrates that non-Western people engage and critically generate their own “hybrid modernities” which often means taking what they need from Western discourses and practices and then keeping what they need from their own traditions. Alternative modernities then constitute alternative traditions.

I experienced in Ghana an “evaluation” of the kind that produces alternative modernities within one’s own culture and society and involves processes of interanimating dynamics. The particular admixture of elements I witnessed that rose to the surface most prominently were those of self-reflection, mobility, disturbance, language, and comrades. *Self-Reflection*. I am compelled by my circumstances or a particular situation, trauma, dream, or inexplicable impression to contemplate and evaluate who I am, where and how I live, and, in turn, the workings of my life and my environment. What is guiding and determining the world of my being? I begin to dream of possible alternatives that are different from the ones at my disposal. *Mobility*. I move from the microspace of my own world to witness another world and way of being, whether that world is a neighboring village, the city, or a different continent. My world is not all there is. I discover how Others live. I experience their movements, their ways of speaking, their productions, their desires, and their futures as different from my own. I witness alternative experiences and longings. I contemplate



alternatives from what I knew to be true. *Disturbance*. I feel the weight of lingering and substantial discontent. I am not at ease or at peace within my environment. I begin to rethink the workings of my world and I feel in opposition to it. I am inside a value and behavior that I can no longer accept. I am not the same person I once was. I feel the need to act differently. *Language*. I enter a larger vocabulary. I discover words that move my native language in the direction of my new consciousness. I begin to formulate words out of which I can now name my discontent as well as a different future. My newly learned speech inspires me to think and act differently. I now speak about alternative ways of being in the world and alternative futures. *Comrades*. I am emboldened by a dialogue with others. Our hearts and minds dream together about difference. We imagine alternatives. With these others I feel a sense of belonging inside a common ideal and I am bonded with them in a commitment to act. I now act with these others who substantiate and inspire my hope for alternatives. We speak the same vocabulary. I find a home with comrades. Together, we act for change.

*The field – local activism – meeting Wisdom Mensah*

Many people believe that because this practice is ancient, there is no way to stop it. Some think we should take up arms, and destroy the shrines, and put fear in the fetish priest! I took the middle road, and that was to win the respect of the fetish priests. I was for reforming the practice, not destroying it. We went to the villages and spoke to the priests, and we became friends. They saw we were not crusaders coming to abolish their practice. We were people who cared about them. When people were ill in the shrines, they called for us and we helped them ... We involved as many people as possible to try and reform the practice. All these women who are kept illiterate and subjugated, imagine what they could contribute to our social economy, our politics, and culture. Imagine what free men and women can do together. Imagine what type of development we would have in this country.<sup>7</sup>

Reverend Walter Pimpong, Director of International Needs Ghana

A friend attended a conference where she met Wisdom Mensah, a human rights activist who worked with Reverend Pimpong. My friend explained to Wisdom my interest in the Trokosi/Troxovi practice and persuaded him to speak with me about ING. After we spoke, we arranged to meet at my flat the following afternoon. At the beginning of our meeting, Wisdom was understandably quiet and listened for me to introduce myself and my interests in the practice more fully. I described seeing the *60 Minutes* program in the USA and how it sparked my interest in the ways Ghanaians were working to reform cultural traditions for the sake of human rights, especially as they relate to women and religion. I explained

I was particularly interested in how local activists were employing performance as a tactic in their work. We talked about the broadcast, and sensing he was more at ease, I asked,

“What influenced you to defend the rights of women and girls?”

Warmly responding, he said, “My interest in human rights – the rights of women and girls – began with my mother and my grandmother. Well, let me begin at the beginning. My great grandfather was a slave trader. His name was De’ suza. He traded slaves to Brazil. He was Catholic. My grandmother was raised to be a Christian and she raised my mother to be a Christian.”

“So you trace your maternal Christian roots from your great grandfather? Was your mother Catholic?” I asked.

“No, my mother and her father were Presbyterians.”

“Are you also a Christian?” I asked.

“Yes, I am a Christian.” He went on to describe his mother and grandmother as very kind and spoke of how much they believed in forgiveness and caring for people in need.

“My mother was not rich and she worked very, very hard. I grew up around women who were good, hardworking, and loving. I saw how my mother struggled, but she never stopped being a loving person or believing in God.”

“What about your father?” I asked

“My father was very irresponsible. He had children by many other women. He worked for a petroleum company. He was a rich man, while my mother was struggling to feed and clothe her children and provide shelter for us.”

Wisdom’s father married a very young wife who advised him not to give Wisdom’s mother or her children money or support. His father eventually fell on hard times, lost his job, and became very sick. Wisdom and his elder sister then came to their father’s aid.

“Mother did not turn her back on him when he was sick. She asked us, the children, to help him although he neglected us when we needed him. It is my mother and her belief in God that first inspired me to work for women’s rights.”

Wisdom then explained how he and Reverend Pimpong became involved with the Trokosi/Troxovi practice. In 1997 a district government official in Volta region was concerned that the practice was stifling the progress and development of the district. The official heard about the newly formed NGO organized by Reverend Pimpong and Wisdom to defend human rights and consequently sought their assistance. One of the first

projects Reverend Pimpong and Wisdom initiated to aid Trokosis in the region was to establish a vocational training center to provide literacy and vocational skills toward their personal development and economic independence. However, the two men began to feel a school was not enough and a more radical intervention was necessary. It was at this point that Wisdom and Pimpong decided to work toward complete “liberation” from the shrines.

“It was not enough to train the women while they were still slaves to the shrine. So we began to do more research on the Trokosi practice. We investigated all aspects of it and did a great deal of groundwork and visitations to the shrine and the surrounding villages. We talked to everyone involved with the practice: community members, shrine owners, shrine priests, as well as the Trokosis themselves.”

“You felt it was important to really understand the practice and talk with people, face-to-face, before you took the next step toward liberation?” I asked.

“Yes, it was very important,” he said.

“How did the Liberation Ceremony come about?” I asked.

“Well, it was not immediate, because there were many stages and much hard work to be done before we could perform the ceremony.”

Shortly after the government official came to them in need of help, Wisdom and Pimpong held a series of community meetings of priests and shrine owners in Trokosi-practicing districts of the Volta and the greater Accra region. At these meetings, the idea of liberating the Trokosis from the shrines was introduced.

“The shrine priests were very angry, very angry. They wanted to know what we meant by liberating the Trokosis. They would say to us, ‘Does this mean we should sleep with cows, goats, and animals? What do you mean by letting all the girls go? All these women are our wives!’ They told us they could not go around courting other women and marrying them. ‘What will we do?’ They were very upset and told us that to do without the Trokosis would end the existence of the practice, and this would make the gods very angry. They said they could not do it. Never!”

“It sounds like they were intractable. What did you do to change their minds?” I asked.

“We talked to them. We listened to them. It was important to listen to them. We didn’t judge them. We made sure we were in constant dialogue with them. It was a long process. It did not happen overnight. It took much time and perseverance to gain trust and mutual respect. We made friends with them and we offered them an alternative.”



1.1: Wisdom and Soyini at a performance of “*Is It a Human Being or a Girl?*”

*A reflection ... the dialogic performative*

One does not have to delay entering the conversation until self and other have become old friends. Indeed ... one cannot build a friendship without beginning a conversation.<sup>8</sup>

Dwight Conquergood

Although Wisdom and the other ING activists are Ghanaians and Ewes<sup>9</sup> and their interventions have met with some success, their work still faces formidable oppositions: as Ghanaian activists they are insiders, but they are also outsiders to the Trokosi/Troxovi system; they want to end the practice, but they also do not want to end the tradition; they want to free the Trokosis/Fiashidis from an unjust traditional system, but they are also constrained by an unjust economic, global order. In many ways the Trokosi/Troxovi traditionalists and the rights activists are Other to each other. But what is of value here is that, for ING activists, being insider and outsider provides productive and fertile ground for change through their genuine efforts and sincere tactics of “constant dialogue.” This is compellingly understood by what Dwight Conquergood described as “dialogic

performance.” For Conquergood, dialogic performance meant *genuine* conversation:

The aim of dialogical performance is to bring self and other together so that they can question, debate, and challenge one another ... the dialogical stance is situated in the space between competing ideologies. It brings self and other together even while it holds them apart. It is more like a hyphen than a period ... Dialogical performance is a way of having intimate conversation with other people and cultures. Instead of speaking about them, one speaks to and with them.<sup>10</sup>

Wisdom describes their efforts at “constant dialogue” as being a process that took “a great deal of groundwork” that required “face-to-face” understanding. The performance part of dialogic performance for ING activists was to interact inside the everyday performances and performativities of daily life. It is a factor of being with another human being, in sharing the living presence of your difference. Literally facing and being *in* the face of another – eyes, mouth, and flesh – through the landscapes of your differences is an act of both vulnerability and strength. This is especially true when that radical first step is taken on a journey toward a terrain of deeply entrenched oppositions. This is the activist work of ING. They are stepping across and into a dialogue to disturb ancient and revered terrains of tradition. It is necessarily done the hard way – on the ground and face-to-face within sites and modes of disagreement. When Wisdom says, “We talked to them. We listened to them. We didn’t judge them. We made sure we were in constant dialogue with them. It was a long process,” he is a witness that dialogue is the means as much as the end of deeply realized understanding.<sup>11</sup> But for dialogue to invoke honest conversation relative to a means and an end, the question becomes, according to Conquergood, “But what are the qualities one absolutely needs before joining the conversation?” He answers by invoking Henry Glassie’s three suggestions: “energy, imagination, and courage.” These qualities are reflected in the work of ING activists in bringing to fruition an alternative. The activists seek all stakeholders involved in the practice and make it their mission to have a genuine conversation with “everyone.” They persevere and put in time on the ground until trust is gained, turning what was once an intractable belief into a starting point for reflection and new insight. This is labor that certainly requires energy, courage, and imagination. Wisdom said, “It did not happen overnight. It took much time and perseverance to gain trust and mutual respect. We made friends with them and we offered them an alternative.” To build friendship from the ground of a volatile disagreement transformed into dialogue and then to ultimately open the possibilities for an alternative belief and way of being is a radical act of

humanity and an ethical commitment. It means that “dialogical performance is a way of finding the moral center as much as it is an indicator that one is ethically grounded.”<sup>12</sup>

What happens if we tweak Conquergood’s dialogic *performance* a bit to encompass the dialogic *performative* that is also charged by a desire for a productive and embodied conversation? Adding the performative also emphasizes the everyday and layers of social processes that are nuanced, discreet, and ubiquitous but can nonetheless be as effectively active as a performance event or a grand interventionist gesture. The dialogic performative also reflects a purposeful imaginary that envisions the world and ourselves differently and alternatively. However, by turning more precisely to the performative, we include the classic definition of speech acts. The performative encompasses words and “speech acts” that do more than name and describe but are causal in that they “do things” and effect some form of change. The performative is therefore a dynamic within the larger rubric of performance that can move progressively past performativity as primarily “stylized repetitions of acts” and thereby escapes performativity’s pull to conform. While performativity has marked identity through repetition, Homi Bhabha discusses the performative as a *punctum*, a break in the flow of expectation that resists repetitive and hegemonic power. From J. L. Austin’s performative as “doing,” Bhabha goes further to a performative that is intentionally subversive. What I am calling the dialogic performative – bringing Conquergood and Bhabha together – is the expressive and responsive frequencies where conversation sparks alternative imaginaries and disruptions against the mesmerizing pull to conform, even to tradition. Like its enduring friend *praxis*, the performative through the *imaginary* does more than interpret and express, it initiates, it is “a doing” that intends to incite. The performative, through the imaginary, draws for José Esteban Muñoz “blueprints of a world not quite here, a horizon of possibility, not a fixed schema.”<sup>13</sup> For Wisdom and the ING rights activists this *imaginary* of a world yet to be made is always already linked to the real world we inhabit.

While on the one hand, under the overarching rubric of performance, social behavior embodies certain repetitive norms (performativity) that re-inscribe identity and belonging, thereby concretizing tradition, on the other hand social behavior also embodies behaviors that “do something” (performative) to disrupt or interrupt these repetitions to open up possibilities for alternative actions and behaviors. However, the dialogical performance and the dialogic performative cannot yield a possibility of alterity or get us from the world where we live to the world we imagine without an

additional quality, a fundamental quality that both Wisdom and Pimpong express and embody, and that is: *paying attention*. Before a performative politics of effective dialogue can begin, the ethics of first being fully present with another requires this deep paying attention. Dialogical performance and a dialogic performative are made and constituted by deep paying attention. Wisdom Mensah said, “It was important to listen.” Paying attention reveals sentient beings. I believe it is the first form of respect. It is paying attention to the “being with,” in body-to-body presence with Others, that makes the present realizably present. To “be with” is to be present, not in the Derridean metaphysics of presence as pre-representational or as an absolute origin, but as an “epiphenomenon of representation”:<sup>14</sup> in a body-to-body convergence that pays attention to the right now and is newly comprised by all the representations, histories, and longings that came before this moment to make the now more extraordinary. These extraordinary “now moments” flourish through radical listening, demanding we pay attention to the collaborations and motions that generate our being together and what we can make together. You are intellectually, relationally, and emotionally invested in an Other’s symbol-making practices and traditions as you experience with them a range of yearnings and desires.

In the face of those who say “it will never change,” these human rights activists begin by paying attention and listening. On the ethical ground of being together with another and sincere listening, one may gain the invitation to speak and the trust to be heard. Then a conversation is possible that can lead to the greater possibility for alterity.

*The performance – part one – we see ourselves really helping them*<sup>15</sup>

In keeping with a performance paradigm, the question becomes: How do these elements combine to embody an alternative modernity that becomes more emphatic and more realized when appropriated through performance and set onstage? Just as performativities within the everyday become a “stylized repetition of acts” that uncritically perpetuates tradition, stage performance can promise to interrupt or “undo” these repetitions and continuities by casting new light upon them and by deliberately and aesthetically engaging them.<sup>16</sup> Performance help us realize what we might not otherwise notice as we are blinded by the morass of the everyday or by habitual practice. The guiding question is one that concerns the greater benefit in imagining other ways of being when alternative modernities are represented through stage performance.

It is three months after my first meeting with Wisdom at my flat in Legon. I have begun intensive fieldwork with ING, and Wisdom has become a trusted friend and an invaluable resource for me in coming to understand what it means to witness the defense of human rights in action. I've watched him go into the field to negotiate with stakeholders on all sides, counseling rights activists and working with Reverend Pimpong to defend the organization against charges of attempting to destroy Ghanaian culture and tradition.

On this particular day, I have come to meet Eli and Patience, two of the rights activists working very closely with the shrine owners and priests in liberating Trokosis from the shrines. As I enter the second floor of the building, I meet Reverend Pimpong and I tell him I have come to see Patience and Eli. He is pleased and suggests we conduct the interview in his office where we will have more privacy. I am looking forward to this time with them because when we are together in the field they have no time to discuss tactics or personal reflections on their work. They are too busy focusing their attention on the people who need help – listening, talking, documenting their testimonies, and doing what needs to be done. I have watched them time and again, in various villages of the Volta region, interact with respect and affectionate attention as if nothing were more important in the world than the needs of the women and girls they have come to assist.

The room is air-conditioned and a welcome relief from the suffocating December heat in Ghana. There is a large desk at the front of the room. On the wall is a poster with the image of a young Trokosi girl wearing brightly colored African fabric; both her hands are placed on top of her head to signify mourning or suffering. Written across the poster in red and white letters is: "Stop Trokosi Now!" and beneath it: "Respect the rights of girls and women." Patience and Eli take a seat on the couch across from the desk and I sit in the chair next to them. I ask about the campaign ING has waged to liberate Trokosis against a religious tradition that is ancient and where the belief is so strongly held and defended. I ask them to talk about the tactics of persuading priests and shrine owners to liberate the women and girls.

### *Staging the scene*

I staged the interview that day with Eli and Patience. The scene begins with the performers moving in all directions about the stage in a confused manner. Their voices are chaotic and unintelligible. The Recorder strains to listen. She goes to a basket upstage right and signals for them to look



inside. They do not listen to her and keep moving in chaos. Then the Recorder screams FOREIGNER! The performers stop and gaze at her carefully and curiously and then they begin to look at each other in bewilderment. The performers slowly walk over to the basket and each one takes out a book. They speak softly: "Trokosi are Queens/Trokosi are not Queens" as they each take a seat on different platforms placed at various locations onstage and begin reading from an individual "field journal." Each performer is focused on the words written on the page. They read with keen interest from the basket of journals provided by the Recorder. The scene signifies how learning what Others do, attending to the words, voices, and deeds of Others in the field, brings a level of clarity to the abundance of questions and complexities in the world of ethnographic inquiry. The Recorder listens and observes as the actors around her take turns reading.

PERFORMER 1 Before a release we go to visit the shrine priest  
 We find out from him how he feels about the Trokosi system  
 We find out why he feels he can or cannot release the women and girls  
 We try to find out what he can do to help them  
 We counsel him in adjusting to things he does not understand  
 Those who don't know our work may fear we are coming to break the  
 whole shrine  
 But we come to help make the shrine more progressive and more  
 humane  
 After we come to an understanding, we ask the priest to release the  
 women and girls  
 If he understands and we come to an agreement, he will let us speak to  
 the Trokosi  
 We meet the girls and we counsel them one by one  
 We help them psychologically about being separated from their parents  
 about being sent into the shrine  
 about going back into the village  
 about what kind of work they will do  
 about who they will live with  
 about how they will take care of their children

PERFORMER 2 We help them go to school for professional training if that  
 is what they want to do  
 All this is not a one-day affair  
 When they are released, then we go with them to their homes  
 And we continue to go back to see how they are adjusting

We counsel the family / the household / and the community who fear the girls are still

Trokosi and should remain as outcasts

We must counsel the Trokosi and the non-Trokosi because the fear is very powerful

PERFORMER 3 We follow them for about two years to be sure they are socially integrated / economically independent / psychologically adjusted / and healthy

We encourage them to think on their own and for themselves

The priest does not need to think for them anymore

We even study all aspects of their body movements and facial expressions to observe if they are happy

PERFORMER 4 During this time of tracking we keep profiles of the women

We check in on all the factors: health / finances / social adjustments / and so forth

We want them to realize they can be independent

When they have a problem, they don't have to wait for someone to come

They can take care of it themselves

PERFORMER 5 Some believe that we do not know the Trokosi system because we have not lived there we are outsiders

This is not true

We have lived there

We are not outsiders

We have Trokosi relatives

The village people should not think we are just city people trying to change the system

We have people who are victims of the system on our team / we know what we are doing

We have been there talking to people one-on-one

PERFORMER 1 One thing about human beings / they are not like machines

In this work you learn a lot about human beings

And one thing you learn is that they all behave differently

You learn how the environment changes them

You begin to develop relationships with them / even if you believe in different things

You get to know them very well and you learn all about them

And you respect them even if you have different ideas from them / you respect them



1.2: Patience sitting with three Trokosi women

We see ourselves really helping them  
 When I play a part in this person's life to make it better,  
 I am happy

*(Fade to black)*

*Back to the field – conversation with Wisdom – the Liberation Ceremony*

Intrigued by the idea of a Liberation Ceremony, I asked Wisdom how the ceremony takes form.

“At the last negotiating meeting on emancipating the Trokosi, I myself, as the coordinator of the Trokosi project, will raise the issue of performing not only a private sacred Liberation Ceremony in the shrine but also a public liberation where the general public would be present to witness the liberation.”

For the private ceremony, shrine owners and priests will sometimes travel very far to consult a number of soothsayers and diviners about the correct procedure. Wisdom explains it is very important that the ceremony be done “properly.” This includes all artifacts and symbols, as well as each step of the ceremony. In order to do this, ING together with the shrine owners and priests will agree on an acceptable amount of money needed to travel to pay for their consultations. Wisdom emphasized this is a vital step because the shrine has never performed a Liberation Ceremony to set Trokosis free in

perpetuity. The ceremony must be approved by the gods. Since the priests believe the gods will kill them if they do not use the right ceremonial items, this step helps calm the fear they will be harmed.<sup>17</sup>

After the shrine owners and priests are confident they are performing within the proper dictates of the gods, Wisdom then encourages them to write ING a formal resolution signed by all the principal elders and priests documenting their decision to end the Trokosi/Troxovi practice. This is the first legal document that binds the shrine owners and priests to the liberation of the Trokosi. In the resolution, shrine owners and priests also request financial assistance from ING to begin the liberation process.

“What happens after the resolution is signed?” I asked.

“Normally after receiving the resolution, I will meet with the shrine owners and priests to determine the length of the liberation process and fix a time for the public ceremony. After the time frame is determined, on behalf of ING, I will give the shrine owners and priest the agreed sum of money for the Liberation Ceremony. A receipt is prepared with the names of all the shrine owners and priests to sign jointly for the money.”

“How much money is given and how is it determined?” I asked.

“At that time, funds for the liberation rituals range between two million and five hundred thousand Cedis and three million Cedis. The equivalent range is 250 or 400 American dollars.<sup>18</sup> Some shrines are older, and more well known, more established, and have a lot of Trokosis to be liberated. These shrines receive funds at the upper level of the range.”

Smaller shrines will receive smaller amounts for their ceremonies because financial support is determined on a sliding scale based on the needs and number of Trokosi in the shrines. This was important, Wisdom explained, in order not to create rivalry among the various shrine owners and priests.

Wisdom said, “Since the underlying cause of the pervasiveness of the Trokosi practice is poverty, ING makes every effort to equitably distribute resources among the shrines.”

“The pervasiveness is based on poverty?” I asked.

“Yes, the pervasiveness of this practice is poverty,” he said.

“What is the next step in preparation for the ceremony?” I asked.

“After the shrine owners receive the funds to perform the Liberation Ceremony, ING starts monitoring the activities of the shrine to be sure the shrine owners and priests are following through with their pledge. Although ING is not privy to the sacred rituals made in the shrine, we are able to determine from the Trokosis whether they are being taken through the liberation rituals or not.”

ING is consistently communicating with the girls and women, and therefore the Trokosis feel they can trust them and talk freely. At this stage, ING has begun what they call “pre-liberation psychosocial and emotional counseling.” According to Wisdom, this is done “to determine their social needs and to provide them with counseling for their mental and emotional traumatic experiences.”

Through the biographical information provided at the counseling sessions, ING can determine the location of family members in order to inform them of their daughter’s liberation and to invite them to the public ceremony. The most important function of the public ceremony is to help families understand the need and purpose of liberation and, moreover, that the ceremony is sanctioned by the gods. “They do not fear the wrath of the god because god is in favor of the ceremony. Every order of the ceremony is in keeping with the gods’ approval,” said Wisdom.

Those in attendance vary from shrine to shrine. Attendance is contingent on the area and size of the shrine; however, for many ceremonies, invitation letters are sent to the District Assembly, to all government agencies in the district, to the District and National Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice, to the congressman and congresswoman where the shrine is located, to the United Nations agencies working on women’s issues, to the government ministry working on women’s and children’s affairs, and to news media – print and electronic.

Wisdom emphasized the importance of the ceremony being public: “The public emancipation ceremony is very important given the fact that the Trokosi girls are not only physically bound to the shrines but are also psychologically and ritually bound. A public emancipation ceremony liberates the girls, their family members, and adherents of the Trokosi practice at large. It also serves as notice to family members of Trokosis that the practice of perpetually replacing dead Trokosi women with young virgins has now come to a close. It exists no longer. It has ended.”

Most ceremonies, particularly at the larger, more established shrines, begin with the pouring of Libation, a traditional prayer by the chief priest. This prayer will call on the gods to bless the occasion. After the pouring of Libation, the invited guests, including the Commissioner for Human Rights and Administrative Justice and the ING Executive Director, will speak to the gathering about the human rights violations inherent in the Trokosi practice and encourage all to obey the laws of the land and accept the freed women back into the society.

Wisdom described how ING will then announce to the public the special services and procedures of rehabilitation for the emancipated Trokosis.

Representatives from ING then encourage families to accept the freed Trokosis back into their families and communities upon completion of their counseling and training. After the formal speeches have been given, the next step is for the shrine owners and priests to perform the emancipation ritual called “Flaxorxor.” This ritual involves a spoken prayer and water mixed with corn flour and a second prayer with imported schnapps. After the gods have been invoked through prayer, the priest proceeds to sprinkle water containing leaves on the Trokosis. After the prayer, the priest will remove the symbolic blue and black cloth and the raffia cord from around their necks.<sup>19</sup>

Wisdom said, “After the last vestiges of slavery are taken off the bodies of the Trokosis, the girls and women then sing a number of traditional songs and begin their dance. When the dance is over, a certificate of emancipation is given to each of the girls by the priest. It is signed by the priest and shrine elders. One or two liberated Trokosi are called upon to come forward and tell the gathering what the ceremony meant to them and what they will do with their lives and to also express thanks to all those who have made their freedom a reality. The shrine elders and priests then proceed to the stage and sign a contractual agreement between the shrine, ING, and the Human Rights Commission never to accept human beings as objects of reparation again. At this juncture, the ceremony is brought to a close with a closing prayer. Food and drinks are then served to refresh the invited guests.”

*A reflection ... rhetoric, performance, and liberation*

The Liberation Ceremony is a heightened, rhetorical performance in its purpose to justify, educate, persuade, and realize both discursively and through symbolic action alternative futures for both the Trokosis and the community. There is much to be learned and unlearned relative to the sacred and the secular; therefore, the Liberation Ceremony must succeed in reason, logic, and persuasion or it will fail. The Liberation Ceremony becomes a ceremonial pedagogy within public and private spheres to teach and inspire a transition and a different life path. It becomes, in the words of Donald Horne, a different set of “hypotheses about existence.”<sup>20</sup>

But in order to be persuasive in bringing forward alternative futures and a different hypothesis about existence (without attempting to shatter faith), it must be divinely sanctioned. The ceremony must comply with the wishes of the gods and adhere to the protocols set by the divine. The priests and shrine owners will travel far and wide to *get it right* according to the principles and procedures of ancient, holy dictates. If it is not authentic or true to these

dictates, the gods' wrath will come down and lives will be in peril. Fear is a factor because accuracy is a matter of life and death. It is interesting that, in garnering the gods' approval, the act of emancipation requires both a private and a public ceremony. The privacy of the shrine constitutes home, intimacy, and all the secrets that home and intimacy hold within that sequestered space. The privacy of the shrine also constitutes the secret codes and rituals of the inner sanctum. All these privacies and secrets now require a ceremonious and sacred reckoning: they must be rethought, transcended, revised, and enacted necessarily through an intimate and final farewell. The rite of passage from the domain of the shrine signals a symbolic and physical exodus from the troubled intimacies of the inner sanctum. The ceremony as constituting a rite of passage marks a departure and arrival, beginnings and endings and therefore must be enacted in private and public. The private passage – passage *from* the private – follows a natural progression toward a public passage – passage *into* a public.

Ironically, the public Liberation Ceremony enacts the very Sankofa symbol of the bird looking back that some opponents of the ceremony say ING denigrates. As opponents accuse ING of not respecting tradition, they also accuse ING of acting against the Sankofa symbol. Contrarily, the ceremony embodies Sankofa as it must be grounded and sanctioned by elements of tradition before it can move forward to an alternative present and future. Traditional artifacts such as beads, song, testimony, dance, food, drink, prayer, libation, and both the instructions and blessings of traditional priests all at once become serious affairs in legitimizing liberation. The Liberation Ceremony necessarily embraces traditional forms to enter this alternative or “modern’ stage of development.” In addition, the Liberation Ceremony cannot uncompromisingly negate, disparage, or ignore traditional performances or their artifacts because a dialogical relationship with the community has been established. What the community believes and values must be incorporated. Therefore the Liberation Ceremony becomes a hybrid iteration – performing known customs differently to invoke alterity. This alterity requires ceremony – ancient and traditional – or it will be incomprehensible or, at worst, forcefully imposed. The Liberation Ceremony must be a familiar ceremony, a hybrid ceremony inspired by revered traditional practices, or the Sankofa bird will lose her beautiful form that is both forward and backward. Its majestic circular neck will become unformed and deformed into a straight, narrow, unidirectional line, its head unturned, and its vision of the future impaired.

The Liberation Ceremony now becomes not only a new threshold into liberation but a rhetorical tactic. It not only serves as a passage from slavery

to freedom and a celebratory embodiment of a life passage, but it is a rhetorical and performative mandate for protection under the law: signing the contractual agreement never to accept human beings as objects of reparation again. It is an enactment of sacred and secular mandates – the gods and the state are both included in the performative intervention to break with tradition on one hand and to not break the law on the other.

The Liberation Ceremony as a rhetorical tactic and a public event, including sacred and secular mandates, is a radical performance because by its very publicity it provides a site for the production and circulation of life, law, value, and knowledge that are articulated, distributed, and negotiated, and, in doing so, break a bond with the ancestors and antiquity. All performers and participants create a commonality of action and accountability – what happens here is not passive or without liability. When the resolution is signed by all the stakeholders, when the divine sanctions the procedures, and when the libation, testimonies, singing, and dancing embody the transition, at that point, the lives of women and girls are liberated by God, community, and law.

During the early days of the Liberation Ceremonies and the *60 Minutes* documentary, many Ghanaians, particularly those living in the cities, were unaware of the Trokosi practice. The interventions by ING, other local activists, and women's rights organizations reached the media and brought the practice to public attention in 1999. News of the practice stirred public interest and emotions. The responses among most Ghanaians upon first learning of the practice were generally a mix of shock, disbelief, and anger. There were Ghanaians who could not believe "slavery" under the guise of religion was practiced in their peaceful and enlightened country, and there were others, like the man on the radio talk show, who felt the controversy over Trokosi/Fiashidi women and girls was just an excuse to once again denigrate African culture. As the two men on the morning radio show demonstrated, once the Trokosi/Troxovi practice was finally brought to light, it exploded into debates that were essentially cast as a battle between tradition and modernity within the general public. The debate spread to television stations, the Op-Ed pages of state and independent newspapers, and just about every corner of the city, government, and civil society. Particularly in Accra, the two polarizing sides were set in a stalemate: The Trokosi/Troxovi is "bad and backward" side argued that the practice was an ugly stain on the modern state and the modern ways of Ghanaian people. As one friend charged, "It is against our modern mindset and an obstacle in our efforts toward development to abuse women!" However, the Trokosi/Troxovi is "good and sacred" side argued that the practice protects and



honors women as it upholds the religious traditions of African ancestry. As another friend charged, “It is abominable to uphold Western tradition against the denigration and destruction of Ghanaian tradition.”

I did not witness the fight for human rights, enlightenment, and progress, on one hand, and the fight for African tradition, honor, and respect, on the other hand, as mutually exclusive for all Ghanaians. But for most Ghanaians, a public debate was cast particularly for voices within the media: the Trokosi/Troxovi question meant only two sides (for it or against it) and each side was positioned in clear opposition to the other. The debate invoking the nobility of tradition, on one side, and the virtue of modernity, on the other, let loose formidable oppositions and entrenched dichotomies regarding religion and the state, global wealth and local poverty, public speech and personal affect, black female bodies and black male bodies, village life and transnational flows. These were all poignant dualities that were dramatically present.

ING had shown there were alternative modernities that settled questions of past and present dichotomies when elements of traditional practices merged effectively with elements of modern laws and beliefs. However, the discourse of tradition versus modernity – within certain sectors of ING and throughout the general public – still prevailed. The debate had become a black-and-white issue in the media and in common parlance. What it all seemed to boil down to (despite ING’s leadership toward dialogue and alterity) was the view that to end the Trokosi/Troxovi practice was a step toward African modernity and away from a backward tradition that impedes development.

#### SCENE TWO: DEEP PARTICULARITIES

In this debate of “all for” or “all against,” there must be other voices, another unyielding field of grey covering the distance between oppositions. I decided to search out the grey territory of the debate that was beyond my fieldwork with ING; although Reverend Pimpong and Wisdom were not painting the Trokosi practice in starkly black or white terms, entering the deep particularities of the debate required that I seek more and other perspectives. The person I turned to for guidance in my search for an in-between space in the debate was Kofi Anyidoho. During my years in Ghana (then and now) Kofi often provided clarity to the most daunting questions of culture. When I first arrived in Legon, Kofi was away in the USA on a visiting professorship at Northwestern University in Evanston (where I now teach). Although I admired his poetry over the years and his work was one

of the motivating factors in my decision to teach in the English Department at Legon, it was not until the second semester at the University of Ghana that I met Kofi in person. A poet and critic of African literature, politics, and culture, Kofi remains a world traveler teaching and lecturing all over the globe. Yet I cannot remember ever seeing him in a Western shirt and tie. Kofi's African batik shirts are a personal semiotics of appearance, a cultural politic literally worn on the skin. Once I asked Kofi how he responds to questions concerning why he always comes back to Ghana when he and his wife Akosua (a prolific professor of Linguistics at Legon and a highly respected teacher) could live and teach in Europe or the USA or just about anywhere they choose.

"This is the country that educated me and provided the foundation for the person I have become, for what I have accomplished. I am what I am today because of what I learned here in Ghana. Ghana is my country and my home. Why should I go and live somewhere else and give to that country what Ghana gave to me?"

The years I have known Kofi as a teacher, poet, and critic, I would describe him as a Ghanaian traditionalist who comprehends and negotiates the political, practical, and philosophical dynamics of modernity. He is an arbitrator of both tradition and modernity. I went to see Kofi to ask if we could talk about Trokosi/Troxovi. He is Ewe, a member of the ethnic group that is primarily identified with the practice, and I knew he had strong feelings about the controversy. We met in his office later in the afternoon.

There were the usual stacks of books covering the surfaces of every desk, chair, and table. I asked what he thought of the debate raging over the Trokosi/Troxovi system.

"Let me tell you what some of us are worried about. We understand that this tradition like any tradition can always be manipulated by people who lost sight of the original goals."

"How do people lose sight of their goals?" I asked.

"Well, because of human nature, because of personal interests. There will be people who will always manipulate the system for their own benefit and for their own advantage. At the same time, we must proceed with caution with those who are waging an attack on this tradition primarily because I don't see this as a disinterested project. I see it as part of a general attack on our traditions. We are particularly worried because that attack is coming from so many areas. You must remember, they tried very hard in the New World to deny the existence and validity of African religious practices, but these practices are vital, they are energizing, in spite of their failings and faults. There has never been a calling for the closing down of the Christian

convents or the abolishing of an entire system. There will always be those priests who can never live by the principles of the religion. It is regrettable but it is a fact of human life.”

I asked, “So when the Trokosi practice is condemned as female slavery, it is not the traditional practice of Trokosi/Troxovi that is the problem, but those priests and shrine owners who are not living by the true tenets of the religion?”

“Yes, but let me add, I can say the traditional practice of *Trokosi*, but that term is a problem. It is not the term I would use. I would like you to understand that the meaning of *tro* is deity and *kosi* is slave. Abdullah, one of the most common names in Islam, means slave of Allah, or slave of God. Literally that is what it means. Yes, if you take the term literally, that is what it means. Are people taking this term literally to condemn an entire Islamic tradition and practice? I wish those who oppose traditional African religion would investigate and thoroughly examine more closely its history and what has actually been practiced within the system before all the hype. They may be surprised at what they discover.”

I needed to clarify: “It seems you are concerned that the opposition to the practice is a veiled attempt to condemn African traditional religion altogether for the purpose of converting practitioners to Christianity. It seems there are those traditionalists and practitioners who are in fact abusing the religion, but they do not represent the true meaning of religion or how it has been and should be practiced. Is this what you are suggesting?”

“Yes,” he said. “We have within the tradition what you call breakaway shrines. Most of the shrines that have been pointed out and that are most guilty of human rights offenses – almost every one of them is a breakaway shrine. And most are concentrated in one particular area of the Volta region. Close to the Volta River, close to the Tongu area as we describe it. It is a very complicated issue.”

I interrupted: “The breakaway shrines are the shrines that some are defining as the entire practice and therefore claiming the entire practice is abusive ...”

“Yes,” he said. “This is why I say it is more complicated than what appears. I am sure if you visited the other areas in Klikor, for example, you will discover that some of the practitioners are not happy at all about the abuses in the Tongu and other breakaway areas.”

“I have not visited Klikor yet, but I will go soon,” I said.

Kofi went on to explain that in Klikor the purpose of the practice and, most importantly, the treatment and status of the females is very different from those breakaway shrines of the Tongu and other areas where most of

the abuses are taking place. Although some of the Fiashidi do enter the shrine in reparation for a crime or transgression committed by a family member and some inherited the designation from their mother or an ancestor, there are others who come for comfort, refuge, and care (orphaned or during family crises) and still others come specifically for the teaching and training the shrines offer in lessons of history and culture, as well as lessons in health, domesticity, and spiritual well-being. Kofi explained that one core fact of the Klikor shrines is that they are not based on slave labor; they are based on learning and education. While receiving their lessons, the Fiashidi have freedom of movement to come and go as they please. They continue to live with their families, attend school, and, when old enough to marry, the man must prove himself worthy before the priest and the woman's family in order to achieve status as husband to a Fiashidi. The females are not concubines of the priest. For a priest to molest a Fiashidi would be considered a crime.

I came to discover<sup>21</sup> later that in the Klikor area it is an honor to be a Fiashidi, therefore upon entering the shrine they do not feel condemned to a life of bondage. After completing the training, the Fiashidi will come together from time to time and visit the shrines for special occasions and celebrations.

Kofi said, "One thing that must be obvious to anybody who comes to Africa, our traditions sustain us. We are and have been for centuries sustained by our religious life. Our religious leaders were an integral factor in our survival in and through slavery. All of this, traditional religious practice, should not be easy to judge. It is a long and complicated tradition with many, many factors to consider."

Kofi continued to express concern over the denigration of traditional religion for the purpose of Christian conversion. Our conversation raised troubling questions: Is it that Trokosi/Troxovi is an amoral practice or is it that African religion is immoral because it is not Christian? Is this a mission to liberate the Trokosi/Fiashidi from human rights abuses or to liberate the Trokosi/Fiashidi from a religion that is not Christian?

As Kofi expressed serious displeasure with the shrines in areas that violated human rights and felt there should be interventions in these particular shrines, he was adamant in stating that "not all shrines are the same. There are shrines that are not comparable. To generalize Troxovi shrines as all being the same or as all being abusive is a false assertion." He went on to explain that in the "Klikor area it would be considered unacceptable for a priest to sexually assault a Fiashidi or for anyone to mistreat a Fiashidi. This could not happen. It is against traditional law and belief."

As we talked, Kofi expressed how unfortunate it was that many Ghanaians have been persuaded, whether consciously or unconsciously, by history, missionary movements, or imperialist forces to no longer respect African traditional religion or to honor its wisdom and philosophy. “So many,” he said, “do not seriously examine traditional religion to comprehend the magnitude of its force.”

I was now feeling off center. Is the debate less about Trokosi/Troxovi as an impediment to development and modernity or more about “Christian chauvinism?”<sup>22</sup> Or is there a difference? To be a Christian, for many who are opposed to the practice, is not only to believe in the one true God and to be saved from sin, but it is to leave the backwardness of antiquated beliefs behind. Finally, I asked Kofi if tradition and modernity, for him, can occupy the same space. He said, “Yes, they do all the time and they must as long as we are clear on our definitions and the balance.”

My conversation with Kofi required more and different questions and demands of my research and performance. The conversation confirmed what it means to do ethnographic work: when you enter the ground of Others’ lives and actions, crossroads always constitute it. There is never a one-way path or an unencumbered, unilateral direction to a destination. And because the people you talk to are continually making and remaking their own worlds that you are laboring to learn through the thought, desires, and motion of their being, the ethnographer must put her ear to the ground, especially at the crossroads, or risk the shortcut, a shortcut that will silence the “deep particularities” of their creations and render absent the veracity of their words from her pages.

*A memory ...*

I remember that on the day I was waiting for Patience in Reverend Pimpong’s office, one of the members of ING came over to say hello. We exchanged a friendly greeting and then suddenly she asked me in a serious tone if I were a Christian and to what church I belonged. I was taken off guard by the question and felt a bit defensive. In that instant and in that very small ethnographic moment I felt the power of “the one who questions” had boomeranged and I was repositioned. I was now called upon to express who I was – my own beliefs and practices. This was an uneasy and awkward reversal. The question came at me from the field when I am supposed to be the recorder in the tenuous space between subjectivity and objectivity that entitles the one that asks the questions, not answers them. I am the one assigned as the questioner, because I am trained to be the fair investigator,

the trusted interpreter from afar, perhaps an advocate, but surely one who is the self-reflexive inquirer. I have worked long hours and days in the field to build rapport. So when the question came, I felt like I was suddenly the emperor with no clothes. It never occurred to me for an instant that I might be hiding anything from my friends and consultants at ING, but the tone and authority of the question caused me to stop and think. I was as shaken by my own naïveté and arrogance as I was by how I would try and explain my personal and long-standing crisis of faith with Christianity. The woman looked me square in the eyes waiting for an answer. I said hesitantly, "I do not belong to a church." Disapprovingly she said, "You do not belong to a church?!" Feeling nervous, I quickly responded: "When in the States, I sometimes visit a Unitarian church." She looked puzzled. At that moment Wisdom entered. The disappointed woman half-smiled and made an effort toward a pleasant "goodbye" and left the room. I was relieved. Wisdom asked what happened. I simply told him that she asked me if I was a Christian and what church I belonged to and I told her I did not belong to a church. "She should not have asked you such questions," he said. Wisdom was annoyed and said Reverend Pimpong does not approve of anyone at ING asking such questions. We never talked about it again.

The ethnographic crossroads sometimes demands a rerouting of positionalities. I can't just ask questions, I am also bound to answer too. I don't just talk to one side. I am bound to make my way to the very cross-currents that define the crossroads and enter domains of uneasy questions, shifts of authority, unplanned complications, surprises, and awkward moments. What also reflects the cross-currents and complications of this moment is that the woman's transgressive question was not fully answered. I was saved by Wisdom's entrance. I was set free from the demand of her question. Despite the discomfiting role reversal, I cannot help but feel ambivalent about the gender implications in being rescued by my male friend and consultant and how this woman's "unofficial" inquiry was cut short because of my (Western/American) status as the "official" recorder and all that came and still comes with that privilege. As is the classic ethnographic trajectory, the Trokosi/Troxovi practice was becoming more entangled with implications, as was my relation to it.

Kofi is right: On many accounts Christian proselytizing has become the motivation for disparaging traditional religion and the Trokosi/Troxovi practice. Reverend Pimpong is right: There are human rights abuses under the Trokosi/Troxovi system and they must be stopped. Kofi is right: Traditional African religion is a complicated and life-sustaining force. Patience is right: Her work is not to break the shrine but to make it

more humane. Kofi is right: Not all Trokosi/Troxovi shrines are the same. These truths swirl around one another. They have become the matrix in which the Ghanaian female body, religion and rights, the machinations of poverty and the nation/state are all involved and within which the notions of modernity and tradition remain a core contention. It is all so thick with cross-currents and so layered with connections and contradictions.

This matrix is profoundly an ethnographic space that is enacted in a small story, in a local world, and it is here where I search for some form(s) of resolution, answers, and questions to find a way through and past its entanglements. The here and now of fieldwork superimposes itself upon my home in the United States. When people do fieldwork, they are refracted: passing from home to field, from one prismatic surface to another, practicing an immense doubling. Experience is always conjunctural, and like the Sankofa bird, experience is located in the backwardness and forwardness of the historical present. The ethnographer lives in dual time zones and dual temperatures – the back home world across the Atlantic ocean and the now here world on foreign ground. When the ethnographer first arrives, the doubling is acute. But the double time of our double lives begins to fade – still with us, always already with us – but fading with the body's certainty that it can be only in one place at one time. The place in which it listens and breathes and lives is the place that holds the body *in* place and *in* attention. I am yielding my own doubleness, my own past, to memory and forgetting because the pulse of this new life, here, now – the sights, the sounds, the rhythms – are claiming me; because I am beginning to do what Ghanaians do, but more importantly, I am learning to hear what they hear; and because this is becoming my life now and I truly want to be *here*. I have become deeply, affectively invested in the cross-currents and matrices of this space where I now live. In this present, I am home.

I am here in this village outside the capital city of Accra. I am wearing the garments of a researcher: sunglasses, shoes, a notebook, a tape recorder, and a pen. The children circle around me; they want the pen. Damn. I should have brought extra pens. Stupid. I look down at my hands; they are dirty. My feet, my hair, my clothes are covered with the red dirt of this place. I look at the children around me and I look over at the women pounding fufu. They have walked miles for water: buckets on their heads and children on their backs, and they come back home and pound fufu. About 1.2 billion people worldwide do not have access to fresh water. And I am sitting here with some of them right now – mothers and babies, red dirt under our feet, and I have a newfound reverence for rain and well water ... The heat is blazing, and I look over at Patience. She is sitting beside me. I ask her to take

a photograph of the village women with whom we have been talking all day before we leave to go back to the city. I gather my pen and field journal. I drop my tape recorder in my bag. We are on our way back now from the village to Accra, and Wisdom is driving. On the long drive back, I am thinking about the children, the red dirt, and the fact that these women may never have piped water. Patience is sitting in the front seat, and I am seated in the back seat. She turns around and asks me why I'm so quiet. I tell her I'm thinking about the women and their children we just left. She asks, "You are okay?" I say, "Yes, I am okay." She turns and continues her conversation with Wisdom. I pull out the tape and search for my earplugs so as not to disturb the conversation between Patience and Wisdom in the front seat. I listen to Patience's voice on the recorder:

*We see ourselves really helping them  
When I play a part in this person's life to make it better  
I am happy.*

We arrive back at my flat in Legon long after dark.

#### SCENE THREE: KLIKOR, THE SAGE, AND THE CHIEF

If there are no human rights abuses in Klikor, then what will this reveal about the Trokosi/Troxovi practice? Are the women and girls in Klikor living different lives as Trokosi/Fiashidi under different circumstances than in other locations proven to be nothing more than slave camps? What accounts for the difference in Klikor? Shortly after speaking with Kofi, I ask Wisdom his thoughts on Klikor and it being said that the shrines there are *authentic* Troxovi Shrines, not "run-away" shrines, and that Klikor shrines do not violate human rights. He responds by saying, "Anytime a human being becomes reparation for the crime of another, it is a human rights abuse." I tell him I want to go to Klikor and that Kofi suggested I meet the paramount chief. I ask if he thinks it is possible for me to travel there and meet the chief. "Yes," he says, "I will take you to meet him. He is a good man and he is a friend of mine. I will introduce you."

When we first arrive in Klikor, we cannot locate the paramount chief. We ask people throughout the village and along the road if they know where he might be. Someone eventually directs us toward a field where several men are cutting down weeds. About four or five men with large machetes appear from the high weeds. They are all in work clothes and look sweaty and tired. I cannot identify which one of them is the chief. They all seem to be working hard and appear to relate to each other as equals. I cannot detect



any visible signs of authority among them or any demarcations of status from their clothing. As I silently try to guess which one is the highly regarded paramount chief of Klikor, Wisdom calls out his name. A thin man of medium height and grey hair smiles and comes to the car. Wisdom introduces us and explains my interest in Klikor and the Trokosi/Troxovi practice. He says he and the other men need a bit more time to complete their work and asks if we can come back in about an hour. We agree and apologize for the intrusion upon his time. Wisdom suggests that while we are waiting for the chief there is someone else I should meet, someone I will find most interesting.

We drive a short distance to where a man is seated outside at a square table in front of a hut. He is typing on an old typewriter. We walk over and Wisdom introduces us. I discover the man named Dale Massiasta is basically a one-man research institution committed to studying black African history and culture. He transformed the village hut behind him into the “Black Humanity Development Research Center.”

Wisdom leaves us alone to talk before meeting the chief. Dale begins by expressing his joy for research and the satisfaction it brings him. Although it is not always easy to gather resources, he says he tries to find every book, every piece of information, and every bit of knowledge possible relating to black studies – reading and writing almost every day sitting outside at his wooden table with his old manual typewriter. As we speak, there is a small child about three years old who is playfully laughing and climbing over him. With innocent abandon the child affectionately climbs freely between Dale’s shoulders, head, chest, and lap, turning Dale into her own personal playfield. In the moments when the child becomes so exuberant that it is difficult for Dale to speak, with kind patience, he gently pats her on the back in a tender gesture to “quiet down” and then undeterred continues to talk. There is never a reprimand to “be still” or a warning “to stop.” He just makes more of an effort to speak over the child’s unrestrained playfulness. Although not in a “room of his own” with Internet access, research assistants, shelves of books, air-conditioning, an ergonomic chair, and the luxury of peace and quiet, Dale lives a life of the mind every day sitting outside his museum hut.

I ask Dale about the charges of human rights abuses relating to traditional religion, specifically Trokosi/Troxovi. He responds by saying: “The human rights the people are talking about cannot be applied to religion. In every religion where training is involved, a person will be required to submit or leave some of his or her liberties. So, if, for example, I am marked with a knife as a sign of becoming an initiate of a shrine, that might look

oppressive, but it should be understood that that mark gives an identity to the religious group to which I belong. It is a matter of knowing the thing, understanding it before coming to the conclusion of human rights.”

“Human rights are not relevant when it comes to religion?” I ask.

“When people are talking about human rights, it means they don’t know what religion is. You talk about women, well, women in particular are to suffer in a special way, and it is true that in most of the shrines they are headed by women. There is one here, she lives in the shrine and she is head of the shrine. The initiates come and go. But she lives there. Some people think it is reparation. But in religion we have reform and rebirth. This is when a raw person will be initiated to be reborn, to become part of the ministry of the shrine. Then we have the criminal and that person is not only to be reborn but also reformed. The initiated – the Trokosi – are trained morally in the shrine and then allowed to live as a normal human being.”

“It is not abuse as some have charged, but moral training?” I ask.

“Before you can respect the human rights of others, you have to undergo certain tortures, certain pains – as when you are sent to school. It is painful to receive an education. You must perform certain labors; after that your raw nature is developed into a useful human being which can be used to improve society. So the place of reform and rebirth is always a place of suffering and pain.”

“Are you saying people, in this case women and girls, must suffer in the shrines to make life better for themselves and society?”

“No, no. There may be a Trokosi system in many shrines, but the way Trokosi is practiced in the various shrines is not the same. The difference depends on certain factors, and one is the economy of the place. The other factor is the general understanding of the people who live there. Some places are more advanced than others.”

“What do you mean the economy of the place?” I ask.

“Yes, I am saying that the way Trokosi is practiced and the level of abuse in certain areas are dependent on the economy of the place and the enlightenment of the people. Trokosi is not the same all over. The difference is always contingent on the combinations of enlightenment and economy. I do have one concern about religion.”

“You have a concern?” I ask.

“Yes, I think we should allow our children to grow before they are allowed into a religion. It would not be good for the Christian to baptize his child when he is just one year or two years old. The child is not aware of what is happening to him. This should be the same for traditional religion.

People should be initiated only when they grow to understand what they are getting involved in. I would like the children to grow before they are initiated.”

“You think it is important for children, girl children, to grow up to make their own decisions before they take on a religion?” I ask.

“Yes, because it means that you are not foisting something on someone.”

As I listen to Dale, I am intrigued by the logic of contradiction. The contradiction: women are to suffer in a particular way, but at the same time religion should not be foisted on anyone. The logic: Trokosi/Fiashidi are not the same everywhere because it depends on the economy and the enlightenment of the place.

*A reflection ... political economy, poverty, and rights*

The abiding harm some religious traditions around the world have on the life and freedom of individuals, particularly women and girls, remains one of the greatest challenges to defenders of human rights. This is complicated when traditions are revered, protected, and glorified by members of the same culture. But there is another challenge consistently being expressed on both sides of the debate that is also unjust and life-threatening, that implicates human rights but is certainly more convoluted and disguised than abusive religious traditions, and this is how the global economy and power arrangements affect people in the global South. My work here in Ghana is becoming more intricate as I experience the stark reality of wretched poverty that fuels an already ingrained ideology of phallocentrism<sup>23</sup> and male domination. It is becoming more and more difficult to describe the Trokosi/Troxovi practice as inherently good or bad – through discussions of tradition and modernity – without considerations of political economy because how it is practiced, even what it is called, is in Dale’s words “contingent on the economy of its location.”

*Dear Journal,*

*March 1999*

*This is becoming yet another classic case of human rights and its relationship to poverty. As I travel through the areas where Trokosi/Troxovi is practiced, I am struck by how the maltreatment of women and girls is in direct correlation with the economic and material conditions of the area. What has “development” over the past decades accomplished here? Sometimes one can only feel rage. Arturo Escobar’s work on Development speaks to the question. I paste his words here on the page of my journal.*

*Whatever these traditional ways might have been, and without idealizing them, it is true that massive poverty in the modern sense appeared only when the spread of the market economy broke down community ties and deprived millions of people from access to land, water, and other resources. With the consolidation of Capitalism, systematic pauperization became inevitable.<sup>24</sup>*

*In the poorest areas, the areas that are more remote and distanced from the city and where piped water, electricity, education are scarce or inaccessible, the treatment of women and girls is more severe and their labor more demanding. It is clear to me that the Trokosi/Troxovi practice is not one monolithic or unified cultural practice. What it is and how it is performed across the various shrines is very different and, again, contingent on the economic severity of the area. There is a tension here between oppression from male dominance and oppression from poverty – the colonial past complicates each within discreetly differing force fields.*

In certain conversations, poverty is becoming tiresome and sexism is too easily separated from political economy. The point here is that traditional patriarchy and phallogentrism alone do not account for the consequences of poverty or determine relations of production and reproduction that exploit the lives and labor of African women. Patriarchal relations alone cannot determine the material grounds in the relations of production and reproduction in the lives of African women because “an examination of only the patriarchal relations of both pre-capitalist and colonial capitalist societies will not explain how women’s exploitation and oppression were shaped by the historical limits, changes, and differences of these societies.”<sup>25</sup> Instead of a singular focus on patriarchy or patriarchal traditions as impeding the rights of women, political economy must be factored into the analysis because “the cultural, familial, and political reality of African women was restructured with the introduction of commodity production based on the monopoly of the means of production, racist ideology, and a policy of separate political and economic development.”<sup>26</sup> It was under colonial capitalism that African women experienced “three forms of exploitation based on African women’s position in production, African women’s position in the family, and African women’s racial position in colonial society.”<sup>27</sup>

We cannot leave the colonial legacy out of analysis of the Trokosi/Troxovi practice. With the onset of the colonial epoch, African women were exploited by the “coexistence of dual political systems, dual patriarchal systems, and dual modes of production,” yet they were not identical dualities.<sup>28</sup> African women’s exploitation under the colonial capitalist mode of

production was of a different kind and degree than it was under the traditional, African patriarchal mode of production. Although African women lived under the oppressive and exploitative forces of male control, despite these constraints, they still had a certain amount of power within the familial household.<sup>29</sup> The family was “the source of their social standing and their limited protection within the society, and the site and foundation for collective action to express their dissatisfaction and bring about change.”<sup>30</sup> Therefore, from a more *local commodity production* to foreign *monopoly colonial capitalism*, “Colonialism was the process of the forced and violent integration of the African continent into the world capitalist system.”<sup>31</sup>

There were major factors that combined to bring forth colonial domination: military intervention, the transformation of African economies into monetary economies, the intrusion and exploitation of imperialist colonial trade, and foreign investment in the development of infrastructure and metropolitanism.<sup>32</sup> Compounding these forces were colonial policies of indirect rule whereby “the colonial state controlled and supervised the separate political and economic development of the colonizer” and, as a result, sealed the “underdevelopment of the colonized.”<sup>33</sup>

Oppressive constraints upon African women, from antiquity to independence, were factors of both traditional African society and colonial capitalism. Indeed, African women were constrained under traditional African patriarchy, yet, under the very nature of these laws (by which the patriarchal society existed), they were still able to carve out for themselves precarious elements of independence, but this troubled and fragile independence was, in many circumstances, diminished with the intrusion of colonial capitalism. Therefore the idea that colonialism brought “progress” to a “backward” continent by introducing technology, culture, and infrastructural development becomes an assertion riddled with falsehoods and contingencies, as does the idea held by some Afrocentrists that traditional African culture is based on an egalitarian utopia and spiritual purity. But we must pause to ask: How does this history of traditional patriarchy and colonial capitalism speak to present-day poverty and human rights? How does it seal the “underdevelopment of the continent?” The economic and social effects of colonial capitalism and patriarchy are addressed in this quote by Claude Ake:

The economic relations were characterized by an aggregation of disparate modes of production, dependence on external trade and technology, disarticulation of resources, development of export commodities, market imperfections, and limited

indigenous capital to mobilize for investment and development. The social relations of the colonial society were based on disparate aggregations of African and European patriarchies accompanied by racially structured domination and subordination.<sup>34</sup>

Ake lists the foundations upon which present-day poverty rests: trade, technology, natural resources, indigenous capital, the market, and modes of production. Each of these domains combines to form a political economy that breeds poverty and sets a climate for human rights abuse. In the face of global capitalism and poverty, indigenous human rights activists carry the legacy of a colonial past that makes their work even harder.

*The performance – part two – I am a Trokosi from ...*

After our interview on the day I met Dale at the Center, he took me by the home of one of the Fiashidi of Klikor. There were three women with two of their children outside the house laughing and joking. One of them was singing a song in Ewe. They were all Fiashidi and they were on their way to Accra to visit friends and family. After learning I was teaching at Legon, one of the women said her daughter was a student there studying political science. The other woman's husband was giving them all a ride into town, but before they left for the city, we chatted for a while as the husband patiently waited. They were all educated and fluent in English. They asked me to return to Klikor so we could talk further. What they said that day was captured in a monologue performed by Jacqueline Afodemo, one of the cast members for *Is It a Human Being or a Girl?* who also played the part of the ethnographer or the character of the "Recorder." I asked Jackie to perform the Trokosi/Fiashidi monologues because she was most familiar with the practice and with both sides of the debate. Jackie was also Ewe and working toward a graduate degree in Performing Arts at Legon where she was conducting fieldwork with the Fiashidi in Klikor. Her M.A. thesis focused on Theatre for Development, and she was directing a performance with Fiashidi women of Klikor that comprised their experiences and life histories as Fiashidi. One afternoon Jackie and I were sitting on my porch at Legon. I told Jackie I wanted her to transform onstage from the Recorder into a Trokosi and Fiashidi. She is to represent two different characters that would depict the two different sides of the debate and the two different experiences of Trokosi, on the one hand, and Fiashidi, on the other. The terms Trokosi and Fiashidi represent the two differing sides of the debate. I use them simultaneously, at points in the study, to acknowledge the claim of each side and also to mark my movements as I enter and pass through these two

differing tensions and territories. In preparation for the roles, I asked Jackie a series of questions drawing from her fieldwork in Klikor with Fiashidi women. In collaboration with Jackie and based on my own experiences, after more trips to Klikor, we compiled the Fiashidi monologue. The Fiashidi monologue is then followed by a Trokosi monologue, compiled from my fieldwork in the Tongu area.

### *Staging the scene*

To symbolize her individual quest for and responsibility to the veracity of their stories and to provoke, however fragile or troubled, an alignment between their different worlds, the Recorder performs and transforms into the two different Trokosi and Fiashidi women (first a Fiashidi and second a Trokosi). The Recorder holds a basket of various items from the two different Trokosi/Troxovi shrines, one in Adedome and the other in Klikor. She pulls various symbols from the basket as she “dresses” and “undresses” herself to represent the different experiences of what it means to be a Fiashidi on one hand and a Trokosi on the other. She begins with a celebration sung in Ewe as she places a basket at her feet in front of her. She is on the stage alone. She speaks out to the audience in first person narrative as a proud Fiashidi woman who is honored and revered by all members of her community because of her status as a Fiashidi.

My name is Afi.

I am a Fiashidi from the Klikor region of Ghana.

I am very proud and happy to be a Fiashidi it is a *special* honor.

I am the great-great-great granddaughter of a Fiashidi –

My great grandmother, my grandmother, my mother, and now me – all Fiashidi!

I come from a long line of Trokosi queens, and I am very proud.

My great-great-great grandmother became a Fiashidi because her brother did a terrible, terrible thing. A slave girl became pregnant.

When the elders asked her who was the man who made her pregnant, she pointed to my great-great-great grandmother’s brother.

When he was identified, he then became very angry because he did not want to be disgraced before the whole village, so he stabbed the slave girl to death.

The family of the slave girl demanded justice, so my great-great-great grandmother was sent to the shrine.

When she died, all my mothers after her and now me – all Fiashidi;

When I die, my daughter will become Fiashidi.  
My life here in the shrine is a good life. It is a very good life. I have learned so much.  
The Fiashidi here are trained to be women deserving of respect.  
We are taught lessons in morality and religion.  
We are taught how to cook and clean and manage our affairs.  
We are taught how to take care of ourselves and how to keep our body, mind, and spirit pure and uplifted.  
We are trained here, and it is this training that guides us through our life and makes all of us walk with dignity and knowledge.  
We Fiashidi are powerful women, for we are the only women that can reprimand the priest and the chief! These men must listen to what we say because we are Fiashidi!  
We are *not* slaves, as some have said – that is a lie!  
*And*, we are free to marry *anyone* we choose.  
But we can only marry after our training – after the nubility rites.  
Once the nubility rites are performed, then we are ready to marry.  
But the men who marry a Trokosi have a great responsibility.  
These men must treat their wives with special kindness and respect.  
The husband of a Fiashidi must be strong and generous because he must love and protect his wife for all of his life.  
If he does not hold his wife in the highest esteem, he will be punished.  
Over the years, life has changed in the shrine and the Troxovi system has changed too.  
Many of the Fiashidi now are very modern ladies.  
They are going to school and getting an education. This is my wish. I want my daughter to be a Fiashidi.  
I want her to have the life and training that I have had in the shrine, but I also want her to have an education like some of the young ones coming up now.  
I did not have the opportunity for a formal education.  
But my daughter will be educated – with an education *and* with the Troxovi training – she will be tops!

*(The performer now goes back to the basket and begins “undressing” herself placing items in the basket to now re-dress herself to transform into a Trokosi. At the completion of the Fiashidi monologue, she begins to sing a mourning song in Ewe as she reaches into her basket and places a scarf around her waist. Her persona has changed from prideful and joyous to capture the betrayal and maltreatment of a Trokosi woman under a system of bondage and suffering.)*



My name is Shika.

When I was seven years old, my grandfather came to my school and told me

I had to leave my class because I was going away to visit a friend of the family.

But that was not true.

I was taken to a shrine in the Tongu region of the Volta.

I was taken here because my uncle became very sick.

He could not move his legs.

The shrine priest told him that he was being punished for something he did that was very, very bad and that is why his legs were paining him.

His legs pained him all the time. I didn't know what my uncle had done that was so bad.

No one ever told me.

But my mother told me that everyone in my family would get very sick, just like my uncle, if I didn't go to the shrine.

The shrine priest told my uncle that he must bring a girl to serve the deity. This was the only way the family would be saved.

This was the only way his legs would stop hurting.

God was very angry for the bad thing my uncle did.

They sent me to the shrine to satisfy God.

Soon peace and health would come back to my family.

Soon my uncle would be well again.

The day I was sent to the shrine, my mother gave me a mat to take with me for sleeping.

I remember there was a crowd of people that walked with my mother and me to the shrine.

At that time, I didn't know why they were singing and I didn't know where I was going.

When I got to the shrine, a woman was there.

It seemed like she had been waiting for me to come.

She took me inside the shrine.

Her hands were hard and quick.

They were not like my mother's hands.

The woman began taking off my clothes. She took off my panties.

She wrapped me in a cloth and placed a cord necklace around my neck.

I began to cry.

I wanted my mother to take me away from that place.

But mother left me at the shrine.

I was very confused and frightened.

I was at the shrine for ten years. I was unhappy there. I missed school.

I wanted to go back to school and I wanted to go back home with my mother.

I wanted to read and write like children who were free.

But at the shrine, all I did was clean, work on the farm, and fetch water.

When I started bleeding, I knew that soon the priest would come and make me sleep with him.

I was so scared because I didn't want him to touch me.

He was too old and I didn't like him. But what I feared so much was soon to come.

One night he came to me and he made me take off my clothes.

He entered me.

He entered me, and I remember everything started turning in my head and all around me because it hurt so much.

He didn't care that it hurt. He didn't care at all. When it was over, he left.

I felt like I had been broken. I had been broken into pieces.

I now have two children by the priest.

He doesn't care for my children – sometimes there wasn't enough food to eat.

All my work – on the farm, cleaning the shrine, and carrying water – all my work ... and still there wasn't enough money or food for me and my children.

When I was liberated from the shrine,

I went to school at the International Needs Vocational Training Center. I am learning how to be a dressmaker.

I am reading and writing.

I feel safe and free at the school. My children go to school there too.

The warden of the school loves all the girls and she takes very good care of us.

I want my children to have a better life.

I want them to learn how to read and write.

I never want them to go to the shrine and be slaves.

*The field – Klikor – the chief: Tugbui Addo VIII*

The chief and I sit outside on the veranda of his modest home.

“What does it mean to be the paramount chief?” I ask.

“Well. It means that I have chiefs under me. I am the paramount. I have about forty-seven chiefs under me.”

“As paramount chief what do you do? What are your responsibilities?”

“The most important responsibilities are mobilization of citizens toward development. Yes, building schoolhouses, libraries, making sure the people have water, health care, and making sure there is some sort of civil obedience.”

The paramount chief, he explains, is the protector of the cultural foundation of the community. All this is important, he says, “or people will tear things to pieces.”

Tugbui Addo was born in a village on a coconut plantation in Klikor. When his father became clerk to the local chief, they left the plantation and the family moved closer to Klikor. His father eventually became chief, but died shortly afterward. With the death of his father, his mother shortly remarried and then left Klikor and moved to the Ivory Coast with her new husband. Although Tugbui Addo was the son of a former chief, it was time to turn the chieftancy over to a different branch of the royal family; therefore another chief was installed and assumed the position. With his father dead and his mother now living in the Ivory Coast, he was basically left alone to care for himself: “... there was no one to care for me. But I worked and took care of myself, and I eventually got into school.” He did well in school and scored high on exams, as a result he was awarded a full scholarship to secondary school: “I could not afford books before, but now I could finally afford to buy books.” After graduating from secondary school with honors, he attended the University of Ghana and the University of Cape Coast and eventually earned advanced degrees in physics and mathematics. Basic education was free in Ghana at that time because it was shortly after Independence and before structural adjustment programs were imposed by the International Monetary Fund. After graduate school, Tugbui taught mathematics and physics in secondary school and college. He became head of the Mathematics Department and wrote the core Math textbooks (for the Regional Mathematics Program sponsored by the United States) for secondary schools and colleges in West Africa.

“How did you become a chief?”

“It was decided that I be the paramount chief.”

“You received advanced degrees in mathematics and physics and you were a college teacher and then it was decided that you become a chief here in Klikor?”

“Yes, because my predecessor died and there must be a replacement. The chieftancy is a hereditary system.”

“How did you feel about being chosen as paramount chief? Is this what you wanted?”

“Not at all.”

“You didn’t want to be a paramount chief?”

“No.”

“Why didn’t you just say no, I don’t want to be a chief?”

“It is not so easy to say. Even though I wanted to continue teaching, it was my responsibility.”

“You would have preferred to continue teaching?”

“I loved teaching, but this whole place was void. I felt a responsibility.”

“What do you mean?”

“There were no schools here. I started the first school in 1992.”

“There has been a lot of controversy, as you know, about the Trokosi/Troxovi practice relative to human rights, development, and women’s rights. What are your thoughts on the matter?” I asked.

In a more serious tone, he said, “Whatever be the case, I always hold the opinion that religion must be dynamic. I don’t buy the idea of just violently disturbing the system because there is much to be learned from it. But I do believe there are harsh areas that must be properly tackled in a democratic way. Tackling these harsher areas must be done thoughtfully and carefully. It cannot be done by force, or it will come back by force and attempt to destroy as it was destroyed. There must be subtle transformations.”

He went on to explain the “extreme variations” of the shrines and how the different philosophy and practices in each shrine are reflected in the terminology. “We say Fiashidi here. There are shrines that must be modified to meet the standards of the other shrines, and Klikor could serve as a model.”

The differences, he explained, are substantively striking regarding the treatment of Trokosi/Fiashidi in Klikor contrasted with “the slavery aspect” of other shrines.

He said, “I even consider the Fiashidi here part of a class society.”

His view is the Fiashidi are honored in Klikor and they are very powerful, which he admits is not the case in other areas. The Fiashidi begin with what is understood as a greeting rite or a rite of introduction followed by the females being taken back by their parents to their homes.

“Yes, they may go back to their family, to school, or anywhere they want to go. They are not restricted. During this time they visit the shrine for lessons and training in the history and culture of the practice which includes the morals and values of the religion.”

He emphasized that in the Klikor region no one can abuse a Fiashidi, and no priest is at liberty to touch them sexually because they are Fiashidi and they have undergone these special rites that elevate them to the status of Fiashidi.

He went on to explain how the Fiashidi continue their training in the shrines and at a certain age, when a man is proven worthy enough to marry a Fiashidi, the marriage is arranged, but not before the final rite. The final rite is a second confirmation of the higher status these women hold as Fiashidi. These rites serve as proof that the females have earned exemplary status as Fiashidi through knowledge and cultural training over a period of time. It also confirms that the husband and community must acknowledge the Fiashidi's power and status. Therefore, in the way it is practiced in Klikor, according to the chief, to molest or mistreat a Fiashidi is unacceptable, even blasphemous.

"How do females become Fiashidi?"

"The family or extended family will come and present a case. There was one particular girl from Benin. The girls come from various locations, not only Ghana. This girl was from Benin and was brought by her uncle."

It seems the uncle reported that there was great misfortune taking place in the family and said people were dying. The family originally agreed they would not seek refuge from their hardships in a shrine because they were Christians and the uncle was actually a Christian pastor. But things got worse.

The chief said, "The uncle reported that everybody in the family had begun to emit smoke from their nose, from their hair, from their ears, from their mouth – smoke was coming from everywhere, smoke, smoke, and smoke. So the family changed their minds and decided to bring the girl to the shrine."

The first rite was performed, and the chief told the uncle the girl must return to her family. "But I believe, up to now, the uncle has not taken his niece back home. It has been almost a year now."

The chief decided that because of the fear, if he were to force or demand the family to take this girl back, they would report the calamities and hardships have escalated and grown worse. So the girl will remain in Klikor. "This is the way some of the girls remain in the shrines."

"Do you believe the story about the smoke and calamities in the family?" I asked.

"That is *their* belief," he said.

"But do *you* believe it?" I asked.

"Well, I have my own beliefs [laughs]. For me, I have very little to do with religion, surprisingly."

"You have very little to do with religion?" I asked.

"Yes. I am very skeptical about it. Yes, yes, yes, even though I believe in the existence of God. Religion is very destructive. It's killed so many

people, so many good people. There is a creator. Yes, I believe in God, but not in any particular religion. But I cannot allow what I believe to interfere with how others believe or in their religion. I do not interfere with other people's religion because they need it. They have not developed the state where they do not need religion. I do not disturb this part of them."

"But you believe in the rights to ..." I hesitated and he explained.

"If a man tells you he has seen a ghost, if you merely tell him there is no such thing, you do not change him. He still believes in the existence of the ghost. So, this is why I say we must be very careful. If you do not know how to approach these things, you will damage people. They become empty and they will become human-less. They will not have a human face. You must let them see the problem for themselves."

"They will not have a human face?" I asked.

"Yes. Transformation is delicate. Look at the things that happen around the world because of religion – even Christians versus Christians, Muslims versus Muslims. Fundamentalism kills people. How can you say this is good? Not at all. Yes, transformation must take place over time, delicately."

"You felt you could do some good for the area," I said.

"Yes, and that is what I've been doing. Building this area, in terms of development ... unfortunately, you know, one man's poison is another's meat. I gave up teaching to try and make life better for the people here. I had no real choice. We now have access to water. Water is very important to a community. The people here do not worry about water the way they once did. We have schools. There are over one thousand children in school now. Think of a thousand children who were not in school, who were not being educated, what do you think they were doing? It pained me to leave my chalk and come back here."

"You loved being a teacher?" I asked.

"Yes, I did very much," he said.

"What more would you like to do as paramount chief?" I asked.

"A library. I would like to build a library here. It means everything for people to have access to books. Books can open new horizons. They can make you more human. They can change lives. I will build a library."

*A reflection ... the grey area of third space*

On the way back home, I thought about the chief and his vision of a library – a man who was more interested in being a schoolteacher and in writing math books and who favored "chalk" more than royalty. With the

chief, Dale, and the women singing, I felt I had entered the grey area of a “third space” in the debate over the Trokosi/Troxovi practice. The songs of the Fiashidi were not voices in pain. They were singing freely with joy and confidence. Their bodies were not broken and scarred from slave labor or abuse; instead, they moved with a vibrancy and tenacity of women who determined their own comings and goings without restrictions or fear. On that day they were exuding energy, not lack. But while all this was witnessed on that day and in that moment of time, I wondered about the days after and the days before. What I witnessed in Klikor surely confirmed what Kofi, Jackie, and several other friends had suggested: “Klikor is a ‘proper’ Troxovi system.” But still, it may be a ‘proper’ Trokosi/Troxovi system, but does that make it right? Does the women’s self-determined quotidian performance of joyful song prove that being a Trokosi/Fiashidi is good for them? Kofi expressed concern about cases in which one individual – a woman – is being offered as “reparation” for the transgression of another – usually a man. Dale said an individual should reach a certain age of understanding before choosing his or her religion, and it should not be “foisted” on one. The chief says he believes in God but religion creates division and, too often, violent contention among a people. All this seems counter to the Trokosi/Troxovi practice, even in its more enlightened and benevolent form as it is practiced in Klikor.

The grey area of this in-between space is not starkly black or white, and it is not claiming the Trokosi/Troxovi system as all bad or all good; it is an area of contradiction, irony, and paradox that must be staged. The performance will represent the voices and yearnings of this third space and the ironic logic of its contradictions and paradoxes. This means the performance will not justify the Trokosi/Troxovi practice, nor will it cast the practice as an all-pervasive negative tradition. Homi Bhabha contends that “all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity.” And this is not simply a combination of two different parts being joined together; it is not to “trace two original moments from which the third emerges.” Instead, it is a third space which enables other positions to emerge and which “displaces the histories that constitute it and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives ... The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation.”<sup>35</sup>

The grey area of third space operates here to open new alternatives. The third space is the “Other-than” space that always exists beyond that which is being offered or presented. It responds to Henri Lefebvre’s concern that although the modern era is built upon binary oppositions, the relation

between two terms is never sufficient. Two terms will always necessitate a third term. For Lefebvre, “the third term is the Other, with all that this term implies,” meaning here that the third term as Other is a space of alterity where a mass interplay of alternatives abounds.<sup>36</sup> “Thirthing,” according to Lefebvre, introduces “a critical ‘other-than’ choice that speaks and critiques through its otherness.” He explains that alterity which constitutes the other-than does not simply derive “from an additive combination of its binary antecedents but rather from a disordering, deconstruction, and tentative reconstitution of their presumed totalization producing an open alternative.”<sup>37</sup>

This is just where performing the grey area in the third space of this debate must land. The binary of the debate breaks down into a matrix of implications that produce not simply a third choice but a realm of alterity. “Third,” therefore, does not mean ending at three to “construct a holy trinity,” but it means continually producing approximations, possibilities, and “production(s) of knowledge beyond what is presently known.” It is a “place out of place.”<sup>38</sup> It is also important to note that the choice of the term “space” is inclined toward de Certeau’s idea that, rather than being an object of a fixed location, space is created “by the actions of historical subjects” and a “practiced place.”<sup>39</sup> Edward W. Soja invites us to think about “third Space as an-Other way of understanding and acting to change the spatiality of human life.”<sup>40</sup>

### *The performance – truth is elusive*

The scene was taken from my journal notes. The voices that constitute this “Third Space” are physicalized onstage as a human matrix – unending layers of meanings, incongruities, connections, and possibilities – and the Recorder’s encounter with this third space or human matrix. The Recorder represents the researcher (me) and her role as “writer” and keeper of “written” knowledge. The label of “Recorder” is ironically underscored in this performance moment to trouble the notion of writing and performance’s entry toward orality and the embodied experiences that ethnographers are called upon to embrace. This scene is meant to reflect my struggle to interpret both the symbolic universe and the face-value veracities of the field that are deep with particularities and change.

### *Staging the scene*

The performers form a human matrix. They begin moving into a tightly enclosed circle, entangled and obliquely connected to one another with



their hands, feet, arms, shoulders, knees, and hips all touching in differing positions. Their bodies are contorted to conjoin one another in an intricate pattern of linkages. They form a tangled bond, a human matrix. The Recorder moves toward the matrix, hesitantly and cautiously. She gazes at the entanglements forming the matrix and begins to speak.

Truth is elusive.

It is becoming too difficult to disentangle.

I cannot find it.

It is not neat or clear, not anymore.

Not as I travel further, look deeper, and hear more.

Am I looking in the wrong places?

*(The Recorder moves in closer and begins to follow the entanglements and connections of the matrix. But, before she can completely trace each human connection, the matrix changes form. One position moves to the next in slow motion, never letting the conjoining bond unravel, but changing into varying combinations of connections and entanglements. The Recorder becomes frustrated.)*

I am only stumbling past a million half-truths.

Yet all of them are partial and powerful.

I've met so many people here who are telling their side of the truth:

*(The Recorder walks very slowly closer into the matrix, encircling it, in cautious curiosity, and then backs away from it in apprehension and ambivalent fearfulness. She creates a slow, deliberate rhythm moving toward the matrix and then away from it as if she dared to enter into its dense entanglements but could not transgress its complexity. She is deep in the dilemma. She is trying to decipher this human ball of entanglements – to analyze and interpret means to disentangle and to decipher, then, you are to order, and, finally, to name – but it is not easy to approach or enter into complex webs of human meaning. The recorder moves closer to the matrix and in this nearness she begins to observe and trace the connecting links, but then the matrix changes form. She moves closer to this new and different configuration from another angle, but the matrix changes form again, and then again.)*

The women and girls known as Trokosi *do* live in servitude.

Yes, I've seen them; I've listened to their stories.

I've been to those places ... servitude, it is true.

But there is another truth.

There are women, who are called Fiashidi, who live honorably within the rituals of an ancient tradition.

*(The third formation symbolizes the Third Space and the elusiveness of “truth” in the field when confronted with the ambiguity of human expression, the contexts of contestation, and the unknowing of outsider-hood. This formation also signifies the duality and reciprocity between inner self-reflection and outer observation, as well as literally demonstrating when the focus must cease from self-reflection and move back into the outer world of subjects and field advisors.)*

There is a truth somewhere between servitude and honor.  
I need to ask more questions.

*(This shift from inner reflection to outer observation is triggered by two performers/advisors moving out from the human matrix downstage – her advisors taking hold of her and guiding her attention away from reflections of herself to a seat upstage – a space designed for her by them – where she may watch them and listen to them more closely. In this formation, we are reminded of the power of the Other to translate us when we are caught in the dilemma of translating our translations of them.)*



1.3: The matrix scene from “*Is it a Human Being or a Girl?*”

## SCENE FOUR: GRADUATION DAY

*The field* – the speakers' table and the market – August 10, 2006, 10:30  
 Thursday morning – International Needs Vocational Training Center

I am sitting at the speakers' table on an elevated stage decorated with blue and white balloons. A white cloth covers the table and white plastic chairs are lined in rows behind it for the invited guests and presenters. The arrangement of the table and chairs allows the audience below a clear view of the graduation proceedings while also allowing the presenters a clear view of the audience. Intermittently the audience will transition from spectators into spirited performers as they collectively choreograph traditional dances to the lyrical mixture of local language and Christian testimony. I'm looking out over women dancing below dressed in matching blue and green batik. Each dress is accented by a different Adinkra symbol and circling the Adinkra design is written: "INVTC<sup>41</sup> in Adidoma."

I rode down here to the graduation from Accra with Reverend Pimpong and his wife Marion Pimpong. As we entered the hall, they asked me to take a seat onstage and make myself comfortable. As I took my seat, Reverend Pimpong began greeting guests at the entrance, and Mrs. Pimpong joined the women on the floor who were dancing and singing. When Mrs. Pimpong joined the dancers, more and more women began to enter the dance – mothers, aunts, grandmothers, the graduates and their friends. The room is filled with African music set to biblical stories of uplift and perseverance. The drummers are intensifying the jubilation of song and dance as they charge each note and step with their spirited drumming. The audience – performers are keeping step with the song: "The Lord is speaking to his followers, and they who hear his voice should follow him ... God instructed Jonah to go for him, and he disobeyed. The whale swallowed Jonah, and Jonah was brought to the Lamb." This dancing and singing is a necessary and communal acclamation that knowledge, skill, faith, and accomplishment will be rewarded on this day. Mrs. Pimpong told me this is a special dance in the Volta area called bobobo. The women now form a circle; they bend down and then rise up again; they take turns dancing in the center; all hands rise up high. Half the dancers are now in the circle singing, "My joy is like dust, flying up high in the sky." I am sitting quietly here at the table, but my impulse is to get out on the floor and join them. But I do not. I make the decision to remain at the table and observe. I worry a bit if I am denying the importance of the ethnographer as a co-performer,<sup>42</sup> yet I remain in my seat. I have not done the kind of work or entered into the kind

of membership that is required of this particular celebration. Experience and deep paying attention tell me that because I do not know this dance – the detail and intricacies of its timing, the songs, and the sincere faith of its meaning – in this exact moment and within this exact context, now is not the time to co-perform. Perhaps Reverend and Mrs. Pimpong had a particular reason for asking me to make myself comfortable at the speakers' table, perhaps not. But intuition and reason dictate that to join the dance is inappropriate and intrusive.

The drumming comes to an end and the audience–performers begin to take their seats. Marion Pimpong is introduced as “our mother to give us the opening prayer.” Marion leads us in a prayer to bless the ceremony and a special blessing for the graduates that they may continue their path in wisdom and faith. The invited guests and presenters are then introduced and asked to stand. At this point, Reverend Pimpong comes over to the table as the introductions are being announced and asks me if I would serve as chairperson of the graduation. The individual who was supposed to chair the event had an unexpected travel delay and cannot get to Adidoma in time. I ask Reverend Pimpong, “What is a chairperson supposed to do?” He tells me I am to give opening remarks describing the purpose and meaning of the ceremony. Although I am nervous at the prospect and do not feel adequately prepared to be chairperson, I cannot decline. Reverend Pimpong was both extending an invitation and asking a favor. I think quickly about what I should say. The master of ceremonies is about to call me to the podium in minutes. I think about the purpose of the ceremony and decide to say something about the importance of self-determination and African women. I suddenly remember a black-and-white print I purchased back in 1973 (long before my first trip to Ghana) that I hang on the wall of every home where I have lived since then. It is the silhouette of a tall woman with a wide rippling skirt; her long neck and uplifted chin balance a large round basket on the top of her head. The arresting black silhouette of the woman is cast against a stark white background, and written in faint white letters, as if woven into the garment of her skirt, are the names: Yaa Asantewa, Angela Davis, Queen Dahia, Harriet Tubman, Madame Tinubu, Sojourner Truth, Queen Nzingha, Shirley Graham Dubois, M'balia Camara, Nora Gordan, Assata Shakur, Hatshepsut, Miriam Makeba, Nefertiti, Fannie Lou Hamer, and other black Diasporan women. Along the border of her skirt in bold letters are the words: *African Women In The Struggle*, and directly beneath this is the caption: “The degree of a country's revolutionary awareness may be measured by the political maturity of its women,” by O. Kwame Nkrumah. I open my remarks with this quote

from Kwame Nkrumah and add that I believe this day is a testament to Nkrumah's vision. After my welcome address, Patience is introduced and comes to the podium to speak, then Reverend Pimpong, then the Australian High Commissioner, and then Mrs. Agnes Okudzeto as the former director of the ING school whom "the girls loved" and who is now the Minister of Women and Children's Affairs of Ghana. Following Mrs. Okudzeto's remarks are a series of brief introductions and statements by local government officials. All the words and speeches together become a proclamation to each woman that the Adinkra symbols printed on their dresses – hope, wisdom, strength, and acceptance of God – represent hard work rewarded and celebrated on this day.

We now come to the highest point of the program and the moment that everyone has been waiting for: "The Presentation of Gifts and the Resettlement Items to the Graduates." A few of the graduates rise from their seats and begin carefully placing items in front of the stage: silver pans, a wooden frame, folds of white cotton fabric, and weaving looms. The name of each graduate is now called. One by one they walk proudly to the stage. Each woman is handed a certificate of graduation and presented with one of the resettlement items along the stage. Those who completed their course in bread-making are given silver pans as a tool and symbol that they can now bake bread for a living. Those who learned batik design are given white fabric. Those who learned to weave Kente cloth, to make soap, to make dresses, or to style hair are each given a resettlement gift toward their new life and occupation. As each woman is called to the stage, the other graduates cheer her on.

*Interlude: a memory (2001) – the bank*

Wisdom arrives early this morning, about 6 a.m., with Patience and Eli. We are going to Adidoma to meet former Trokosis/Fiashidis who have recently been liberated from the shrine. As part of its poverty reduction program, ING helps women gain economic independence by setting up micro-credit schemes. The small income-generating activities will facilitate social and economic integration back into their local communities. These micro-credit schemes serve as "resettlement grants" for the former Trokosis as well as for the shrine priests. The organization feels it is important for both the priests and the women to begin a life toward income-generating activities or the underlying economic issues relative to poverty will threaten the security and well-being of this newfound liberation. These activities are far-reaching, from farming and fish processing to making bread, soap, sleeping mats, and

batik designs; weaving kente cloth; and dressmaking. The resettlement grants are provided, but not without knowledge and training in what the NGO calls “micro-enterprise development.” Capital is of greater effect if you have the skills and know-how to manage it; therefore, participants are tutored in the ways and means of gaining credit, budgeting, and saving. Reverend Pimpong said to me once, “You can’t have modernization without human rights advocacy, and human rights advocacy must be comprehensive. It must entail not only liberation for victims but rehabilitation.” I remember asking him what he meant by rehabilitation and he said it meant teaching people what they need to know to survive and to remake their own lives: “We teach skills so they can make a living for themselves. We teach them how to manage money and develop their small business, but we also conduct literacy training. What is more important than learning how to read and write?”

It is about a four-hour ride to the bank in Adidoma. The roads are extremely rough and bumpy, and we are relieved when somewhere along the miles of bad road we come to a smooth patch. Women and children walk along this road like familiar travelers and merchants, their steps out-manuever its timeworn roughness and dangers. The women carry large piles of almost everything on their heads, including wood, food-stuffs, assorted pots, water, and various products to be sold on the road or on a road nearby. They balance the weight on their heads and babies on their backs as they avoid speeding cars and the swirls of red dust left behind.

We finally arrive at our destination. Three women are standing in front of the bank. Eli, Wisdom, and Patience lead the way inside to greet the two men at the counter. I follow along behind them with the women. Wisdom introduces the women to the two bankers. He then introduces me. “Welcome to our little bank. It is not like the big banks you have in the United States, but we do our work here and we are managing well.”

Patience speaks: “Oh, you manage very well. Your good work is a blessing to the women.”

Eli says, “Yes, this is still a bank, large or small, and we are here to do business.”

Wisdom, Eli, and Patience work with the two men to set up accounts for each of the women. I notice how careful and calm they are in explaining each detail, switching between Ewe and English so that I can follow what is being instructed: “Yes, this is how you ....”, “Here is where you will sign for ...”, “This is the interest amount of ...”, “This is how much you will need to ...”, “You will want to budget for ...”

After the transactions are completed, one of the women takes her loan paper and smiles and shakes her head up and down. She points with pride to her signature. She is pleased to receive the money to begin her business and she is pleased about signing a document – the institutional status of a signature – with an actual bank. The transactions are now complete.

We all pile into the van, and Wisdom drives the women back to their village. They are laughing on the way home and joking with me about the bangles on my arm. Patience says they are laughing at my bracelet with the silver serpent head. I joke back with them by covering the bracelet so they cannot see the serpent. One of the women laughingly speaks to me as if I understand every word; and, suddenly, there is a thunder of laughter. I turn to Patience: “What did she say?”

“She said, ‘You better be careful, or that serpent will bite you.’” I pretend I am bitten and then take the bracelet off my arm and give it to her. Surprised, she looks at me and smiles. I put it around her wrist. We all have a good laugh.

We drop the women off at their homes, and Patience tells me the woman was boasting to the other woman that she has a silver serpent bracelet from America. I tell Patience that I bought the bracelet in Dakar, Senegal. Patience smiles and says, “This is good.”

### *Back to the graduation and the market*

As the closing prayer is given and the graduation ceremony comes to an end, there is one final act to be performed: the cutting of the ribbons across the doors of the marketplace. The Australian High Commissioner is to cut the ribbons, thereby opening the market to the public. This is to be a grand performance beginning with everyone from the graduation ceremony now walking across the road to the building where the market is housed. Standing at the entranceway in front of the door with scissors in hand next to Reverend Pimpong, the Commissioner announces, “The market is now open.” She grandly cuts the ribbon in a stately gesture. The market is now open for business, and the products made from the skills learned at the school are now ready for exchange. The school teaches the women to make products that are all at once beautiful, traditional, useful, and local. These products are tickets to independence for the graduates, and the ribbon ceremony is the announcement that they are all officially ready for purchase. The ribbon-cutting marks the first celebration of exchange for the graduates while it is also the promise of future rituals of exchange in the days ahead at everyday marketplaces throughout Ghana and, perhaps, beyond. When the

ribbon is cut and the doors open, the audience of friends and family is now invited to become conscious consumers. And as the doors open, there is a collective gasp. The crowd marvels at the bounty of so many beautiful things that fill all corners of the rooms: the vibrant colors of batik designs draping the walls complemented by original batik crafts, such as bags, T-shirts, dresses, and table-cloth sets; soaps of various sizes, shapes, and colors scented with natural ingredients of coconut, shea butter, peppermint, and lavender to soothe dryness and heal bruises; Ewe kente cloth woven to exact form where each thread creates intricate angles of colors and lines, of symbol and story; oven-fresh sweet bread, butter bread, and brown bread shaped in large, thick, soft loaves; posters of contemporary and traditional Ghanaian garb and dresses so you can choose a style that can be made just for you. Shoppers buy jewelry and household items and make appointments to get their hair washed and styled. The marketplace overflows with the alchemy of transactions that inspire and empower: transactions of pride and friendship, of lessons on how things are made and how to make them better and more; of local memories and future plans; of familiar jokes and high praise. The women that graduated from the INVTC school today are not all former Trokosis. They come from varied circumstances and communities in the area, but what they all have in common is that today they are really, really happy about their future.



1.4: Trokosis in sewing and dressmaking class at the ING Vocational Training School



*Coda: September 2008*

When I returned to Ghana in the summer of 2008 to give friends and consultants sections of the final manuscript, where they were represented, to read and respond, I visited the ING office in Accra for the latest updates on the Trokosi/Troxovi campaign. Reverend Pimpong was visiting the United States on ING business, but left instructions that I be given the most recent reports – Wisdom was completing a Ph.D. at Ohio University; Eli Azu was continuing his human rights work with another local NGO. However, Patience was in her office working. She remains the backbone of the campaign as the liberation ceremonies, graduations, and on-the-ground work continue. The latest report, “The National Dissemination Workshop on the Trokosi Practice in Ghana,” was conducted July 23, 2008 by a cross-section of representatives from government, the University of Ghana at Legon and members of the NGO community. The purpose of the workshop was “to share research outcomes with national stakeholders on the current status of the Trokosi practice” and the major aim was to determine the continuing “prevalence of the practice, the impact of interventions that have taken place, and to seek ideas from stakeholders on the way forward.”<sup>43</sup> The report concluded that ING was successful in mobilizing public opinion against abuses in the tradition and this has led to the enactment of two major laws: The Children Act, 1998 (Act 560) and The Criminal Offences Amendment Act 1998 (Act 554). The report also concluded that, to date, over 3,000 Trokosi “slaves” out of an estimated 5,000 women and children have been liberated “from Trokosi servitude in the Southern part of the Volta Region and the East Dangme District Accra Region” (ING does not conduct their campaign in Klikor).

A few days before my visit to ING, I traveled to Klikor with friends to meet the paramount chief, Tugbui Addo. It had been almost eight years since we last met. Much had changed since our last visit, infrastructure had improved with roads and transportation, more Fiashidi were being educated in the shrines, and some of the Fiashidi had organized a musical group. In a later conversation, after my visit to Klikor, over lunch with Kofi, he mentioned that during a recent festival in Accra several people commented on both the enormous talent and the bold gesture of a group of Ghanaian women playing drums in public, a custom usually restricted to men. Kofi said, “Little did people know that the women were Fiashidi from Klikor.”

I sat down to talk with the chief in his home. His linguist, his advisor, two other chiefs, and my friends Mawuli and Sika,<sup>44</sup> who traveled with me, were present. After the ceremonial greetings, I asked the chief about his dream to

build a library in Klikor. He said, "The library remains my dream. Every community needs a library. I have not given up hope. Perhaps we will build it near the secondary school or in the center of town, but one day it will be built. I hope to have a library in Klikor before I die."

On the drive back from Klikor, we passed the Volta River. Fishing boats were scattered along the shore. The water sparkled like glass beads under the sunlight. I remember when I first crossed the river and how it brought thoughts of what I might discover in this place called Klikor about the convergence of tradition, modernity, performance, and the bodies of African women. The image of the river, the boats, the glistening water, and the sunlight looked the same as it did when I first crossed the Volta, but it felt different. The distance between the past and present had layered the image with time-filled moments of discovery and stories spoken, heard, and performed. Mawuli stopped the car so I could take a picture. Although some things had changed, and some things had remained the same like the chief's dream of a library, the continuing work of ING to protect the vulnerable, and the exceptional status of the Fiashidi of Klikor, one thing that had forever changed was Dale Massiasta sitting outside his museum with his typewriter. Dale died on November 7, 2007. Standing on the bank of the river, I remembered Dale's words: "The way Trokosi is practiced and the level of abuse in certain areas is dependent on the economy of the place and the enlightenment of the people. Trokosi is not the same all over."

NOTES

1. The panties are removed to symbolize the transitioning of the Trokosi as wife to the priest/deity. The priest becomes a proxy husband for the deity in physically consummating the marriage, and the Trokosi is now procreator and cast in a sexual union with the priest/deity.
2. Non-Governmental Organization.
3. From *The Women's Manifesto for Ghana*, pp. 41, 42.
4. Gaonkar, "Alternative Modernities," p. 1.
5. Grossberg, *Caught in the Crossfire*, pp. 192, 205.
6. Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity*, p. 221.
7. This was taken from my interview with Reverend Pimpong in December 1998.
8. Conquergood, "Performing as a Moral Act," p. 11.
9. Ewes are believed to have migrated south from Nigeria in the thirteenth century. They are divided geographically between Ghana and Togo. Ewes have migrated to various areas of Ghana and the world; however, the Ewes of Ghana are traditionally concentrated in the southeast region east of the Volta River, known as the Volta region. Many Ewes speak their native Ewe as well as

multiple local languages including English and French. In traditional areas they speak the Ewe language which may also include the Gbe language of the Fon and the Aja of Togo and Benin. The Ewe are traditionally patrilineal with the supreme being or the creator deity referred to as *Mawu*.

10. Conquergood, "Performing as a Moral Act," pp. 9, 10.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 10
12. *Ibid.*
13. Muñoz, "Stages," p. 9.
14. Jackson, "Genealogies of Performance Studies," p. 79.
15. Two of the performers, Chritine Naa Norley Lokko and S. O. H Afriyie-Vidza, were students who were enrolled in several classes I taught at the university; two others, Florence Akosua Abea and Ekua Ekumah, were friends who were experienced performers – Florence was a dancer and Ekua an actor and director; the fifth performer, Jacqueline "Jackie" Afodemo Dowetin, was introduced to me by Ekua. Jackie was also an experienced performer and was working with Trokosi women on a theatre project in the Klikor region of Ghana. The cast was committed to the performance despite the pressure of final exams, the usual end of the year frenzy, and a limited and rather rushed rehearsal time period. The cast varied in their knowledge and perspectives on the debate and the Trokosi practice. The one male performer, S. O. H., was Ewe. He was adamantly opposed to the Trokosi practice because of experiences with family relations who were victimized by the system. Ekua – whose parents were Ghanaian, but who lived in London where Ekua was raised – was sensitive to human rights issues but also felt it important to honor traditional religious practices and not demonize Trokosi without reference to its history and context. To Florence, who was Ashanti, the practice was basically unknown, but she was curious about and attentive to what was constantly being revealed about the practice throughout our performance process. Christine, who was Ga, was active in a Christian-based performance group on campus. She had heard of Trokosi but was not familiar with the details of the debate and indicated that she was against cultural practices where women were subjugated. Jackie, who was Ewe, came during the third day of rehearsal. Based on her work with Trokosi women in the Klikor region, Jackie knew as much, if not more, than I did about the Trokosi system. She was a great source of information and inspiration during rehearsals.
16. Diamond (ed.), "Introduction," *Performance and Cultural Politics*, p. 5.
17. Wisdom provides an example by stating: "I am aware for instance, that the shrine owners of the Tsaduma shrine in Dorfor, Adidome near Juapong in North Tongu District of the Volta region must travel to the Republic of Benin to arrange consultations before they could move to the next level of the liberation process. According to their paramount chief Togbui Kormlaga IV, the shrine owners had to go to Benin because the Tsaduma Trokosi god was brought from their ancient home in Benin."
18. This was the approximate exchange rate at the time of the interview.
19. This is one of the identifying symbols of the Trokosi.

20. Horne, *The Great Museum*.
21. I discovered this from speaking with Fiashidi in the Klikor area and from discussions with Jackie Afodemo Dowetin, a cast member of *Is It a Human Being or a Girl?* who represented me onstage as the ethnographer/recorder. Jackie was conducting a Theatre for Development project in Klikor with Fiashidi.
22. "Christian Chauvinism" is a term used by traditionalists to describe those who want to reform the practice and convert the Trokosis to Christianity.
23. I am consciously using the term phallogentrism here to echo the notion of the phallic as sexually centered male domination over the female body – a more interpersonal male domination than that which focuses on the structural or material power or membership within the national or dominant political system.
24. Escobar, *Encountering Development*, p. 22.
25. Courville, "Re-examining Patriarchy," pp. 33, 34.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 42
27. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
30. *Ibid.*
31. Ake, *A Political Economy of Africa*, p. 32.
32. *Ibid.*
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 43–45.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
35. This discussion of "third space" is eloquently synthesized in Soja, *Thirdspace*. Soja quotes Homi Bhabha from "The Third Space," "The Other Question," and "Postcolonial Authority and Postmodern Guilt."
36. Lefebvre, *La Presence et l'absence*, pp. 225, 143.
37. Quoted in Soja, p. 61.
38. Pollock, "Making History Go," p. 38.
39. Patraha, "Spectacles of Suffering," p. 90, provides one of the clearest distinctions of "space," and "place," adopted from de Certeau: For de Certeau, the opposition between "place" and "space" refers to "two sorts of stories" or narratives about how meaning is made. Place refers to those operations that make its object ultimately reducible to a fixed location, "to the *being there* of something dead, [and to] the law of a place" where the stable and "the law of the 'proper'" rules. Place "excludes the possibility for two things being in the same location." "Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent way ... Thus space is crafted by the actions of historical *subjects*."
40. Soja, p. 10.
41. The acronym for the ING school – International Needs Vocational Trading Center.
42. I am referring to Dwight Conquergood's notion of "co-performative witnessing" as a more embodied, deeply participatory, egalitarian, and intimate

engagement with others in the field as opposed to participant-observation that suggests a distanced judgment.

43. This is taken from page three of the report.
44. Mawuli and Sika are two friends I met in 1998 when I was teaching in Legon. Mawuli is a professor in the English Department and Sika is a professor in the Language Center. They are both Ewes. Mawuli is from the Klikor area and a dear friend to Dale Massiasta.

ACT II

*Water rites/rights*

In Act II we will consider “water as life” and as a human right. We will enter acts of activism by water democracy advocates and their struggle to protect public water systems from corporate privatization. Woven throughout this section are excerpts from a staged performance in Chapel Hill, North Carolina that dramatized how water rites and rituals animate our daily lives across the globe.

SCENE ONE: “THEN DO IT!”

Upstage left and right are two large screens. Projected on each screen is the image of two Ghanaian activists standing with villagers at a locked water pump in a town in the Northern region of Ghana called Savelugu. The Recorder stands downstage between the stage right screen and a two-level platform where a man and woman representing water activists are sitting. The spotlight focuses on the platforms as the recorder takes a seat next to the activists and begins her interview.

RECORDER<sup>1</sup> What can people of conscience do about this water privatization situation in Africa and around the world?

MAN You so-called free countries are based on democratic principles, yet you don’t know what your governments are doing. I mean what they are really doing and the influence they have on these corporations and international financial institutions that push this privatization issue.

WOMAN You need to find alternative sources of information beyond your own borders and learn about yourselves; you need to stop saying things are so bad and begin to worry your politicians – call them, write to them, picket their offices, sign petitions, let them know you don’t like them, don’t vote for them, and campaign against them.

MAN If you want to do something, donate regularly to international rights groups and stakeholders in this struggle for economic justice and water

democracy – we all need your money to do our work. Better yet, get involved and join them. But the best thing you can do is to be informed and to teach – teach your husbands, wives, children, parents, friends ... It's those everyday acts of resistance that build and matter and make change happen.

WOMAN Don't let people say ignorant things to you about the world beyond your own borders. Correct them, teach them! You say you are going to do a performance? Then do it!

*(Blackout on the interview island. The lights now come up on three dancers and a man standing centerstage. The dancers perform symbolic movements to his speech in response to the controversial question, Why is Africa so Poor?)*

Inspired by my fieldwork in Ghana on the human right to water, I directed a performance entitled *Water Rites* on the campus of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Studio Six, for five nights in March 2006. The posters and announcements for *Water Rites* described it as “a multi-media performance on the politics and poetics of water.” *Water Rites* explored water democracy and our human relationship with water through a montage of digital imagery, comic satire, dramatic monologue, and stylized movement. *Water Rites* reflected how we all perform “water rites” in our everyday lives and how these rites variously pervade our lives and culture. *Water Rites* performed the questions: What is your first memory of water? Does anyone have the right to own water? Are water wars still taking place in the twenty-first century? What is the connection between local water and global profit? Included in the announcement for the show was the 1995 quote from Ismail Serageldin (former vice president of the World Bank, 1995): “If the wars of the twentieth century were fought over oil, the wars of this century will be fought over water.”

In weaving together performance, fieldwork data, personal reflection, and theoretical analysis, Act II becomes a multi-cited, multi-vocal, and multi-spatial account of the human right to water, water activism, and everyday water rituals.

### *The field – water is life*

I returned to Ghana five months after our performance ended, but while the performance ended, the fieldwork did not; the show was over, but the water struggle continued. One of the first people I went to see when I got to Accra was Al-Hassan Adam, a long-time friend and a water and environmental activist. I met him in his office at Civic Response.<sup>2</sup> There were stacks

of *The Insight*<sup>3</sup> newspaper on his desk and on the large table across the room. The newspapers were scattered alongside various files, pamphlets, and other documents. Batik curtains, framing the windows, were decorated in brown and black Adinkra symbols.<sup>4</sup> On a wall next to the curtains were a series of photographs from the 2003 World Water Council in Kyoto. Written on a board across from Al-Hassan's desk were sketches of an outline, and across the top were the words: "What are the main issues that concern the poor in health and health insurance?" Below it were written the words "quality," "attitude of staff," "cost," "distance," "information." On the wall next to the door was a large poster calendar with a picture of a Ghanaian man in a yellow uniform sitting on what looked like a blue tractor transporting a large cargo of white boxes on the back of the truck. Above the image was written: "Aviance: We take care ... you take off – Ghana LTD – An Aviance Member." On another desk under the window was a very old Dell desktop computer. Al-Hassan sat at his desk during our conversation and began by describing what first inspired his commitment to social justice.

"It was music. The music. Listening to Bob Marley shaped my ideas on society. It's all about the totality of the music," he said.

"It begins with Bob Marley ..."

"If you listen to Bob Marley's *Talkin' Blues*, it's all about complete struggle. He talks about freedom fighters and, when they come, who is going to stand up. I mean *Talkin' Blues* is a whole picture. It's a complete picture of living a life of resistance. It's inspiring."

Al-Hassan continued to express how living inside the lyrical content of music becomes a powerful force in shaping our thinking about life and politics, and then he added a second influence that inspired his activism – his teacher. His secondary school (high school) teacher was a "very different kind of teacher." He taught his students about social movements and the relationship between theatre and public protest. While most of the other school groups were based on "fun clubs," his teacher was staging political plays and encouraged the students to read about the politics and liberation struggles in various countries.

Al-Hassan smiled and said, "My teacher is your namesake. His name is Suhuyini Mbang-ba.

Although my name is spelled *Soyini* and Al-Hassan's teacher's name is spelled *Suhuyini*, it is a male and female name that is pronounced the same and meaning "one heart" in the Dagbani language.

"He is one of the people who openly denounced religion; then he changed his name to Suhuyini. His name was Mohammad Yakobu – that was his Islamic name. He changed to Suhuyini Mbang-ba through his



self-development and realization. He no longer identified with a religious name. He needed to have his own identity.”

I asked, “Was it difficult for him? Did many people resent him for changing his name?”

Al-Hassan smiled and said, “My teacher was an interesting character; although he personally rejected Islam . . . in terms of community, he was the fellow who helped the most to shape his Islamic community. He had the respect of the community. He was the first elected assemblyman. And he won. He set up women’s groups in the community. He also set up drama groups in the community and started a drama group in the schools.”

Impressed by Al-Hassan’s affection for Suhuyini, I commented, “He sounds like such a remarkable individual. I can see he means a great deal to you.”

“I mean he is an amazing fellow. He’s a friend and a teacher I really cherish. I am who I am today because of that guy. I remember how his house was my second house. There were all kinds of books there. The guy invested all his money in buying books. His colleagues had all kinds of electronic gadgets and stuff like that. But he had his books, and we would go to his house, and it was a library. So I had access to all these books. So I was just privileged to have met him. He lives in Gambia now and is still active writing about political issues for international magazines. He speaks Arabic, French, English and several African languages such as Dagbani, Twi, and Hausa.”

“Suhuyini was a high school teacher,” I said, “who changed his name against the status quo because he had his own sense of identity, but at the same time that didn’t mean that he didn’t respect Islam. He sounds like a remarkable person.”

“Yes,” said Al-Hassan, “He absolutely respected Islam. He was one of the major contributors to the mosque.”

“And he was a dramatist,” I said.

“Yes, he was a dramatist.”

Al-Hassan then expanded on the idea of drama relative to social justice by recounting a different place and time: the international stage at the 2003 World Water Council in Kyoto, Japan. Al-Hassan attended the forum to represent Ghana and its coalition against water privatization. There was scheduled to be a very important keynote presentation given by the former IMF Managing Director. The representative was scheduled to launch a report that basically explained, according to Al-Hassan, “how to finance water.” The report was intended to focus on “how the private sector can now go to public funds and then use public funds to finance water.” There were anti-privatization activists from all over the world – Asia, Latin

America, Africa, and the United States – who, when they found out in advance about the report, decided they must do something about it. Al-Hassan said, “We were really a rainbow.” On the eve of the keynote address, the activists held their own meeting and decided to protest the World Bank report.

“How were all of you going to protest against the report?” I asked.

“In the big meeting hall where the report was to be given, there were going to be high officials and important people. It was organized by the World Water Council. One of the Japanese ministers for water was there, the South African minister for water and forest, ministers and development ministers, and everybody was there who is supposed to matter – the water chief executives, water activists, water technocrats – everybody was going to be there. So we activists had to dress well so we could get into the hall and not look suspicious. We did not want them to be aware of our plan.”

“So you dressed up like them, and it was a disguise so they wouldn’t recognize all of you as activists?” I asked.

“Exactly! We made ‘lie meters’ to stage our protest. We hid them under our coats so, as we entered the hall, no one could see them.”

I was amused. “Lie meters?”

“Yes,” said Al-Hassan. “The lie meters were made out of cardboard . . . we painted a red, orange, and brown arc. Attached to the bottom of the Meter were small bells. There were about five of us who went into the hall with the lie meters under our coats. We stood in five different sections so that we would be at strategic points in the room. When the World Bank fellow read his report and each time he told a lie, all of us would shake the meter and point the arrow in the direction of one of the colors. For the small lies, the meter would shake and go to brown; for the bigger lies, the meter would shake and go to yellow; for the biggest lies, the meter would shake and go to red. We had a fellow who signaled the color and the time to point in order to be sure we were all shaking at the same time and on the same point. One of the protestors would shine a light on him; he would then signal us to shake and move the meter on a color. All five of us would move the meter at the same time and on the same color.”

“Did anyone try to stop you? Did the speaker try to stop you?”

Al-Hassan shook his head, “No, he couldn’t. He was shocked. They all were absolutely shocked.”

“Did he finish his speech?” I asked.

“He started to fumble. The Japanese minister tried to persuade us to stop. We said we must speak to the issues. We spoke into the microphones and began asking questions and speaking to the issues of privatization. We had

six people stationed and there were two mikes: three people at one side of the mike and three people on the other side of the mike. We really prepared and did our homework for this. We knew what we were doing. We had met and we had planned and rehearsed our presentation very carefully. We let them know that all of us there ... we represent so many people and you people are not representing anybody anymore on this count of lies. We want to have a dialogue – we did not come here to just listen to a report being read to us. After all, this report took one year to prepare, and this is the first time we are hearing it, so we want a dialogue. They said they would give us fifteen minutes! ‘We are giving you fifteen minutes.’ We said, ‘You can’t use one year to write a report and give us fifteen minutes to respond to it; so this is not fair and this is not democratic! We denounce this meeting and we denounce your report! We don’t recognize your report!’”

“This was a historic moment,” I said. “What happened next?”

“We had two big banners that said, ‘People Before Profit!’ and ‘Water Cannot Be Sold!’ We went to the stage and covered the front of the stage with the banners and we started chanting ‘Water for life, not for profits.’ And then we just covered the whole platform. Nobody sees them again.”

What lingers and remains in our stories and lives when our clearest and most important memories of social justice are inseparable from performance? When performance is political and politics is defined and ordered through art? The beginnings of Al-Hassan’s commitment to equity and activism were through performance – reggae music and Bob Marley, school dramas and his teacher Suhuyini Mbang-ba.

The protest at the World Water Forum becomes a genealogical thread and testament of political beginnings expressed through performance and as a method of intervention and praxis. Al-Hassan’s narrative is another contribution to how performance and politics become reciprocal partners in generating and nurturing the social consciousness of a community of individuals, and how, in turn, these individuals and communities make more performances in the continuum and spiraling forward of social justice.

The performance at the World Water Forum was powerful because it was tactical at several levels. First, it relied heavily on *surprise* for its effectiveness. Surprise held a twofold purpose: it was both a maneuver to assure the activists would get into the space of the hall, and it was also a means to shock and therefore to bring greater attention to themselves. Surprise also served as an important device because it added to the quality of spectacle by startling and jolting the audience. To enact surprise is to harness attention. You can hardly look away at a surprise. When you are jolted, your attention

is focused and captured by the jolt. They needed to shock the audience into an entirely unexpected register and mode of attention, quite different from what was happening before they entered the hall. Without this initial shock, it would have been more difficult to punctuate the moment. As Al-Hassan stated, the activists wanted the “big shots” attending the meeting to be caught “unawares” to ironically provoke them into the greatest possible awareness of their presence.

Second, in succeeding to surprise the audience, the element of shock was complemented by a theatrics of *inversion*. The group of activists literally created a reversal of positions relative to controlling the discourse of water privatization and how that discourse was now framed. The gentleman from the World Bank who represents the most powerful economic institution in the world was now usurped by people who most likely will never possess, control, or manage an iota of the amount of capital he dealt with at the Bank. The tenacity and will of the activists displaced the speaker in an act where subaltern voices silenced – in a particular moment in time – a voice from the high ground of world finance. This inversion that contributed to “globalization from below” was no small inversion maneuver. The tactic also inverted the form and content of the discourse from speaker – audience to agitprop performance happening, full of the theatrics of costume, props, cues, dramatic effect, and the passion to reverse and reinvent power arrangements.

Third, inversion was enabled by *design* – a well conceived plan for a specific function and purpose. The performance was methodically arranged: from the coordination of what would be worn, the graphics of the “lie meter,” the synchronization of the ringing bells, the timing of the flashlight cues, to the climactic moment of mounting the stage and dropping the banner to literally and figuratively mask the panel as they “disappeared” from sight and hearing under the excessive appearance and boldness of the banner as both prop and signification of “water cannot be sold.”

The event and its components of *surprise*, *inversion*, and *design* transformed a diverse group of internationalists’ activists into a momentary community of mutually empowering comrades. The privatization ideology, by the sheer force of the performance, was suspended, relinquishing the last word to the activists. The event unleashed the possibility of more performance from below to be remembered and revived.

*Bowan Mubarak, political economy, and everyday water rituals*

My friend Bowan is to meet me in front of the ING office after my visit with Patience. I’m sitting on a concrete bench waiting for him to come up the



2.1: Al-Hassan speaking at a water rights meeting

road. It is a very clear and sunny day – not too hot – and my view from the bench is a typical admixture of sights and sounds for an Accra afternoon. A small lizard, her back a rainbow of orange, red, yellow, and brown stripes, keeps me company as she hurries back and forth playfully along the edge of the bench, stopping and starting again to look back at me. The yard in front is a spectrum of green light from the trees and bushes wrapped around the red dirt road leading out to the street. Across the street, towering above it, is a larger-than-life billboard sign of a black woman with long straightened hair and bright, pearly teeth. She is smiling and advertising hair relaxer. The street below is thick with traffic. Timeworn trucks, trotros, and taxis join old dilapidated cars and new expensive ones to meet at the stop light where street vendors and beggars converge hoping the riders will be generous enough and patient enough to spare them some change. I see Bowan walking up the road; I wave to him. It has been a while since I last saw him. Six months is too long to be away from Ghana. Bowan has casually told me his history before, but today we will talk in more detail and I will put his memories of water on tape. He takes a seat along the bench and we decide to remain outside under the backdrop of the shade trees, the little lizard, and Accra traffic. Bowan begins his water story with the death of his father in November 1982 and then his move shortly after to live with his grandmother.

“I lived in a house in a neighborhood where there was no running water. We had no running water in the house. We had no running water in the neighborhood. So we had to walk probably thirty minutes to get water. So every morning, as a child, I remember we would be woken up at 4 a.m. in the morning to go fetch water for the household. And getting to the point of water did not guarantee access to water.”

“How old were you when you had to get up at 4 a.m. to fetch water?” I asked.

“I was about nine. We withdrew water from a dam, an open dam ... an open dam which is open to cattle, open to pigs, open to all kinds of insects and reptiles, open to kids swimming in it. The water was treated with chlorine and chemicals. So that was the water we used to go fetch. You were just lucky that people who fell into those reservoirs from time to time did not have guinea worm. There are still people today that must walk to the dam and get water ... And it becomes more difficult during the dry season; the dry season is hot, less moisture is in the atmosphere, and sometimes these dams just dry up. So you must walk long distances to other dams that still have water in them. You fetch water from these dams, and it's like coffee with cream!”

“What do you mean?”

“It's like coffee with milk added.”

“It is brown water?”

“Yes, it's brown.”

Ghana is second only to the Sudan for guinea worm infection, and therefore it is an ongoing distress for people who fetch untreated water. This small parasitic worm, *Dracunculus medinensis*, grows and matures under human flesh. People become infected when they come into contact with water that contains a tiny flea infected with the larvae of the guinea worm. Immature worms pierce the intestinal wall and grow into adult worms and mate. The male worms die after mating, and the females travel through the body, maturing to a length as long as three feet. They usually research the lower limbs and settle just beneath the surface of the skin. The worms cause burning, swelling, and painful blisters. Those suffering with guinea worm will go into the water to ease the pain of the blisters, where the blisters burst releasing millions of larvae and another generation of worms. In the water, the larvae are swallowed by small water fleas, and the cycle is repeated.

In this water that Bowan walked miles to fetch were chemicals to treat bacteria from animals and waste matter, but the chemical treatment did not guarantee the absence of guinea worm. Sanitized water was pumped to

certain residential areas, but it usually did not reach all the areas due to the distance from the water source and the low pressure level of the pumps. As a result, some people walked to the central water-processing point to fetch water, where there was always a very long queue at the standpipe, even for those who arrived as early as 4 a.m. Many people spent their entire day waiting and did not get a bucket of water. Bowan did not want to miss school so he, like so many others who could not wait half the day for water at the central processing point, traveled to the reservoir to dig out buckets of “brown water.” The water problem was further compounded because many of the children could not reach it. They relied on adults who were willing to rope the buckets and take time to draw water for them. The reservoirs resembled large concrete boxes with a large opening at the top that were open to just about everything, even falling children.

“Children were always falling into the reservoir. Grownups that could see them jumped down and brought them out. I witnessed many kids of my age, at that time between nine, ten, eleven, twelve, and many adults falling in because you are bending over, struggling to draw water.”

“Yes and then those who fell would climb out and people still fetched water from the same source,” I said.

Bowan shook his head, saying, “People still fetch water from it and go home and this was the water we drank, this was the water we used for washing, this was the water we used for bathing, everything ... I couldn’t get morning sleep. I went to school very tired. The afternoon, when we closed at about one o’clock from school and went home, we went back again for water.”

“You’re going back to get water again the second time?” I asked.

“Yes, because you need to get water for the household and to live.”

Bowan was fortunate because he only had to walk about two miles back and forth twice a day. The journey to find water for many others across the global South is much further. This all changed for Bowan when he reached twelve years of age and went to live with his mother, a community health nurse and midwife in Paga. Bowan was relieved because there was a borehole nearby.

“I was so relieved, so, so relieved when you could just walk out and then draw water, come in, no queue, no struggles, and that was very comforting for me.”

But Bowan’s comfort and relief changed when he had to leave Paga and attend secondary school further away. There was only one borehole near the area of the school and all the students and the community members drew water from this same borehole. Other boreholes that were further away

from the school were not working, therefore all the residents were forced to go to the school's boreholes to fetch water. This meant 600 to 800 students drew water from the borehole as well as residents from the surrounding area. Bowan went back to the routine of his childhood. He would go in the early morning to queue and draw water or wait until midnight or past midnight when everyone else had gone to sleep.

"What made it even worse," said Bowan, "is that at the junior level in school you have to fetch water for your senior who is in the upper class and you have to fetch water for yourself. So at night, midnight, you had to go to the borehole, fetch water, come put it down for your senior, and then fetch one for yourself, and there were times the teachers would require that you fetch to their houses. So, after classes, you could fetch water to about three teachers. And each bucket of water you spent about an hour or two hours getting to the house of the teacher."

But everything changed for Bowan years later when he attended the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Kumasi. It was a different experience. He had running water *inside* for the first time.

"You could go to the shower ... shower in the morning, shower in the afternoon. Showers inside!!!! So we had running water and it was just amazing," said Bowan.

"You had a shower, but you didn't have hot water. You didn't care about it being cold all the time," I said.

"No. We didn't care that the water was not regular either. There were times when there wouldn't be any water for a day or two, but it was still an amazing experience to have flowing water inside. Getting water to run four days in a week was great – Ah, just like being in heaven."

I asked Bowan about harvesting water. He said he remembered during his childhood when his grandmother and many others tried to harvest water.

"We didn't have big reservoirs to store water that could last for even two weeks. We had smaller drums or containers in which you store water and we used this water for about a week or two. Then it would run out after that."

If you wanted to harvest the rain, it meant constructing a reservoir and many small families did not have the resources to build a reservoir that could hold water until the next rainy season. These families, if they could afford it, purchased several small drums that stored enough water for two weeks to a month, depending on the size and number of the drums. But they still worried about the dry season when they could not readily replenish the drums; moreover the drums could not hold the amount of water needed. There were a few families with roof gutters that collected water for storage



for six months, sometimes up to a year. The few families that had the resources for roof gutters sometimes sold their water to others who did not have the resources. But as Bowan said to me, “If they can walk within thirty minutes, a mile or two to get water from an open dam, ground water for free, why wouldn’t they walk? They would.”

*A reflection ... a political economy of water*

There are two questions that consistently arise when I talk about water in Ghana. First. What is government doing with all the money given to them in aid to provide water for their people? Second. Since the public water system is doing such a poor job in getting clean potable water to all its citizens, why shouldn’t they privatize? What must be understood is that public water systems are not without their own levels of corruption and incompetence, but these problems have been perpetuated and exacerbated in the push for privatization. It is a tragic contradiction that with more money and with more aid problems that were supposed to be solved have conversely magnified. I remember being in Ghana a year before I began preparations for *Water Rites* and asking Al-Hassan about the problem with the Ghana Water Company (GWC). For Al-Hassan and many others, the Ghana Water Company is not completely to blame. The problem can be traced back to the mid 1980s and early 1990s. The water company was in such debt from international loans it could not match the devaluation of Ghana currency with the interest from the loans – hundreds of millions of dollars. The government and GWC were so burdened by the loans, they could not invest the capital needed to develop and sustain the personnel and infrastructure to provide an effective water system. The government and World Bank called in a private company to manage water. “They made a bad situation worse,” according to Al-Hassan. GWC had its problems, but it was still coping, beginning to make progress step by step, despite its problems. But, through the conditions of the World Bank, the private company was called in to manage water. I remember Al-Hassan saying once, “They failed miserably. You give the public utility a bad name and then set out to hang it.”

When I asked why the private company failed, the general response was that they didn’t know what was needed or how to properly manage it. It seems that GWC may have had its problems dealing with training and expertise, developing infrastructure, and combating corruption, and certainly all this made progress slow, but they were still on a path, a path that was filled with obstacles but a path nonetheless that was building toward

something. But the privatization ideology intercepted progress in the name of “management” and it not only did not work. It made matters worse.<sup>5</sup>

Al-Hassan and other friends in the water movement feel the government under debt relief is creating a better situation in that they are coming clear of some of the strain and are therefore able to absolve some of the debt from GWC. However, they fear the conditions of much of this relief are to privatize through companies associated with the World Bank.

I remember saying to Al-Hassan that although debt relief is a good thing and a hard-won fight, the cynic in me can't help but feel like it is still so little so late. Al-Hassan replied by saying that “What is baffling is that this relief wasn't offered when the public company was struggling to manage the water system, before private companies with a World Bank mandate came in and made bigger problems. It is speculative economics; that is all it is, speculation.”

“Speculation,” I said, “isn't that a bad word?”

Al-Hassan took a deep breath and shook his head: “Running down countries and then turning around and trying to privatize. Privatization will work. It will work, and it will work very well, for some. The middle class and upper classes will get water seven days a week. The poor will not.”

The water activist Maggie Black states:

Public utilities have a poor record in the developing world for delivering water supplies and sanitation. In the early 1990s the idea that “water is an economic good” was co-opted by international exponents of the neoliberal agenda and their corporate allies. Privatization of utilities – and contracts to the burgeoning water industry – was supposed to make water services efficient and expanded to the poor. The strategy failed.<sup>6</sup>

What is a political economy of water relative to neoliberal policies? The ideology of neoliberalism is a belief system, a philosophy, and a body of ideas that neocons hold as right, true, and genuinely in the best interest of society. It is the way the world should work for all. It is the means to a better future for all. The ideology of neoliberalism is not intended to foster discrimination, oppression, or make the poor poorer. However, the problem is that the policies have done just that. The belief that rugged individualism and free markets will extend their reach and wealth will trickle down to those deserving and hardworking poor has not come to fruition. As neocons hold small government sacred, health, education, and subsistence for the poor are cut; as they revere private profit, industries are denaturalized, and protections for public utilities and native industries are deregulated; as they are devoted to free trade, the result is that corporate

monopolies grow while fair trade and tariffs that protect poorer countries are abandoned. There are three primary factors that undergird a political economy of water and become core issues for water democracy activists.

First. In the past, local water services used by the poor included small-scale, informal entrepreneurs such as donkey-cart sellers, flatbed water transporters, and various forms of communal water distribution. These modest means served local people long before structural adjustment programs and the push for corporate privatization; however, they are generally invisible and discounted in favor of an ideology of price-driven efficiency that promotes private ownership and good governance.<sup>7</sup> Maggie Black asserts that “for all the billions of dollars the World Bank has invested in water supply and sanitation – about 14 percent of its budget since its inception – most of the benefits have accrued to transnational construction companies and the largest local industries.” She goes on to note that about “less than 1 percent has gone into small-scale ventures that do something for the seriously water and sanitation deprived.”<sup>8</sup>

Second. In the neoliberal push for good governance, a contradiction arises in that good governance “requires transparency, accountability, technical and bureaucratic expertise, as well as the power and authority of the State to regulate private companies in the interest of public good.” This is all obstructed by the machinations of corporate capital and its practices of rewarding certain amenable state officials and “undermining the State as guardian, regulator, service provider, and manager of its public water system.”<sup>9</sup>

Third. The poor and most deprived of water and sanitation have suffered the most over the past decades because, with increased cost recovery as a mandate for regulatory reform under privatization, profits must be made conditions of capitalism. Conditions under World Bank lending led to a 95 percent increase in water tariffs in May 2001.<sup>10</sup> Tariff increases greatly affect poorer populations because their incomes already go disproportionately to pay for water. This increases the fear that unregulated privatization will result in water being denied the poor through profit-driven tariffication.<sup>11</sup>

*Planning the performance – Chapel Hill, North Carolina – March 2006*

I hoped the performance would be one that inspired as well as disturbed how we think about water, the worldwide quest for water, and how the lack of it pervades the everyday lives of countless individuals on this planet. I hoped the performance would evocatively represent a semblance of what is felt, lived, and expressed through the narratives of Bowan and Al-Hassan

and so many others I met during my fieldwork. I hoped the performance would shed light on the forces of neoliberalism and local struggles for water justice. And, finally, from a group of students, I hoped to build a performance community. *Water Rites* was as much a pedagogical experiment for this group of students as it was a staged performance for an audience. My aim was to develop a performance community as they built a show. It was again the process/product dyad where the process is more the point – the journey over the destination. Therefore, the end product of the show would be only as good as what my students *learned* about water and how well and deeply felt they learned it *together*. Instead of director, I saw my role explicitly as a teacher–director. For a start this meant students must have a love affair with water during this process. They must acquaint themselves with water anew and differently with feelings of reverence and believing that water is precious. They must emotionally learn to love water. And, even more, they must care about how *each other* learns to love water before they can truthfully perform what is ultimately about the political economy of water: public water over private water; water as a human right over water as an economic good; the local donkey-cart seller over corporate business. Furthermore, I wanted the students to take a step beyond the “resource identity” attached to water in order to convey the view expressed by some water advocates that the discourse of resource with its history of conservation often neglects concerns of community access, questions of ownership, and the cultural practices and symbolic meanings of water.<sup>12</sup> Resource identity has become more and more problematic, particularly as it relates to water. We need to embrace water beyond the language of conservation.

The argument, according to Linton and many others in the water justice movement, is that water as resource grew out of the conservation movement and is therefore grounded in technical efficiency or the “gospel of efficiency” such that its disposition was rendered a technical rather than a political problem.

The ideology of progress dictates that what is seen as a more culturally sophisticated use of nature always trumps a less sophisticated use. This has two aspects: First, *when something is recognized by “us” as a resource, it gets taken away from others who are not smart enough or sophisticated enough to recognize its value in the same way that “we” do* [emphasis mine]. Second, when something is recognized as a resource, it is understood ... and the practice of resource management is meant to ensure that it gets put to its most “economical” use.<sup>13</sup>

The students would enter the fuller realms of water beyond resource identity because they must enter the politically volatile machinations of water that are so often hidden by such discourse. But, even before the

politics and economy of water justice and injustice could be felt – embodied and performed – for the stage, I also wanted to offer another idea. It is the idea of water as sacred because, as Linton states, “if water is a sacred substance, a gift from God, a human right, lifeblood of the environment, it is likely to be respected and treated in a manner quite different from its treatment as raw material, a commodity, or a resource.”<sup>14</sup> Margaret H. Ferris, the theologian and environmentalist, extends the idea of the sacred through her description of “Blue Theology,” stating that as Ecotheology asserts “the whole world is important and loved by God, Blue Theology identifies water as important and loved by God, both for its intrinsic value and also for its instrumental value to all creatures and ecological systems on Earth.” There are over 600 citations of water in the Old and New Testament in accounts of creation, flood narratives, the Exodus, the blessing of Baptism, women at the well, wanderers in the wilderness, and purification. As water is recorded as a blessing, its withdrawal is recorded as a curse or punishment. As a blessing, God provides water to the Israelites in the desert by commanding Moses to strike a rock so that water will pour out and save the people. Water is God’s gift that saves the people from certain death.<sup>15</sup> However, the absence of water becomes a curse; if the Israelites betray God, he will “shut up the heavens so that there will be no rain and the land will yield no fruit; then you will perish quickly off the good land that the Lord is giving you.”<sup>16</sup>

In West African and black Diaspora beliefs of Yoruba religious tradition, water is to be revered as it holds all of creation in balance. Water is the perfect element in its power to sustain life, destroy life, and renew life. Water *is* life in Yoruba tradition and is characterized by the female energy and fecundity of specific orishas (or female deities). Angela Jackson beautifully illustrates the power of water, relative to Yoruba religion, in the play *Shango Diaspora*. A demoralized young woman named the “Water Girl” feels diminished and hopeless because she allowed herself to be overtaken by her love for Shango, the god of fire, who burned her, took her power, and left her broken and lost. The “Sisters of Sympathy” nurse her wounds and lead her on a journey to meet the “WaterMother” who is Yemoja. It is the WaterMother who reminds the Water Girl that she has a name and her name is Water, the Water names of the orishas: “Oba. Water. Oya. Water. Oshun. Water. Omi.” Yemoja, WaterMother, reminds the girl that she is water and can be more powerful than all the elements, even fire. Yemoja’s water awakening ceremony is also a naming ceremony. The Water Girl now knows herself and can claim the strength of her name: “Oba, Oya, Oshun, Omi or Ms.Waters!” As the ceremony comes to a close, the

transformed Ms. Waters turns to the WaterMother to claim her power, the power of water:

I am as you are. My face is your face. Your face is my power and my grace. I am a simple being believing in small rituals. Bathwater flung out of tubs into the streets of Soweto. The child's Saturday night gaiety, a lake in a cold flat. I am a simple being believing in small rituals. Lovers who bathe after Creation. Mine is a merciful killing/the cotton chillsoft cloth, unwanted kittens hidden in my blue velvet gelee. Out of each family I have taken a son, testing his method, his trim muscle against the drift, I taste his marrow. And hold his music in my eyes. Until I untie the tides and old slave bones sing while scavengers swoop and swallow songless air. Mine is a merciful killing. The serious suicide's quiet celebration. Ballooning lungs that fatten the chest to bursting. Feel the water fill the mouth. Feel the water fill the nostrils. Feel the water rise, cover the black iris of the eyes.<sup>17</sup>

This passage reflects black Diaspora life in relation to water as creation and death. Water is both minute and monumental in the everyday rhythms of black narrative and history. Jackson is marking water rites across time and geography: from the small innocence of urban child's play where bathwater becomes a lake in a cold flat to the monumental and "merciful killing" of Africans on trans-Atlantic slave ships. Water is mythic and water is life. The challenge is to teach about water as politics and survival as it resonates through the deeply spiritual and existential.

*Performance journal: teaching about water*

My fieldwork is based on the political economy of water in the context of the developing world. But the politics and economics of water are inseparable – in the field and on the stage – from water's mythic proportions within rituals of human survival and within ceremonies of cultural beliefs. In order for the performance to embody and perform the polemics of water justice, my students must begin by engaging the spirituality of water. They must begin by loving water.

*Performance journal*

*January 17, 2006 – Tuesday evening at 12:40 am – after the second rehearsal*  
Before I can teach about the politics of water – I must teach about the spirit of Water. Before there is politics, I really believe there is the soul.

We are all water and water is all of us: water is living, changing, and responsive.

To believe this was the purpose of tonight's rehearsal.

*A reflection ... the circle*

There are eighteen of us. We are all sitting together on the floor in a large circle. The room is dark. On the floor in front of each of us is a candle. The only light in the room is the flame from each of our candles. I ask the performers to breathe deeply and look into the flame. I say to them: "Feel the quiet in the room and focus on the flame. Look into the light of the flame and how it moves against the darkness." I stop speaking and the room is quiet. We enjoy the quiet and the flame for a few more moments. I look around and the students are all focused, making the transition from the noisiness and busyness of the day into this temporality of a water rite rehearsal.

*A reflection of a reflection ... what we must know about water*

*First:* Water is ancient. Water is life. Water has a history older than humankind. We must never know a world without water.

*Second:* Water has long held spiritual value – rituals, ceremonies, and worship practices – the poetics of water to bless, to create, to change, and to transform. Water practices mark and generate cultural change.

*Third:* Water destroys: the flood, the storm, the oceans, rivers and lakes – water is to be feared.

*Fourth:* Odorless, colorless, flavorless. Two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen. Human beings cannot make water without the causes of nature. What other element can change itself into so many forms: vapor, ice, rain, snow, steam, crystal, fog, water ...

*Fifth:* The divine circularity of the hydrological cycles – the sun, the rain, the clouds, the earth, the rivers, the oceans in perfect rotation – if this perfect cycle were disrupted, it would destroy the planet more completely than the explosion of any nuclear arsenal.<sup>18</sup>

*Sixth:* Water is responsive. Water responds to human emotion.

In order for my students to care about water as a human right, in order for them to grasp the political economy of water, and in order for them to realize that water relates to the macro processes of nation states and global flows, they must value the small story. I want them to value how macro structures are so fully evident in the small stories that we tell of our lives. For this, politics must partner with emotion. To make a performance about the global politics of water, the cast must first enter deeply into the small stories and believe that water intrinsically matters.

*From rumination back to reflection ...*

I break the silence: "Please, look into the flame, be still, and feel quiet. Now close your eyes." Two advanced graduate students in performance studies,

Annis Clark (technical director) and Elizabeth Nelson (assistant director), were invaluable to the making of the performance read from Masaru Emoto's *The Hidden Message of Water*. I marked the section and asked them to alternate lines and passages.

ANNISSA Water takes in information. Water responds to information.

ELIZABETH The adult body is 70 percent water. At human conception, a fertilized egg is 96 percent water. At birth, the baby is 80 percent. As the child grows and develops, the percentage drops and stabilizes at 70 percent.

ANNISSA The fundamental principles of Hado medicine are vibrations and resonance. When the cellular vibrations in different parts of the body are disturbed due to various reasons, our body can make a wrong turn. When this situation occurs, a new external vibration can be given to the disturbed cell so as to resonate with it; thus, its intrinsic vibration is restored. This is Hado medicine in a nutshell.

ELIZABETH Water carries vibration, the source of energy.

ANNISSA A human body has many organs, which are made up of cells. Cells are made up of molecules, and molecules are made up of atoms, and atoms are made up of subatomic particles.

ELIZABETH A person is pronounced dead when the heart stops beating ... vibration is life itself.

ANNISSA In Japanese the KANJI character for life includes the part meaning "beating" connoting rhythm, vibration, wave fluctuation.

ELIZABETH Giving Attention is a Way of Giving Energy.

ANNISSA The hardest thing for life is to be ignored and given no attention.

ELIZABETH KOTODAMA – spirit of words.

ANNISSA MUNTU – power of words.

ELIZABETH Water is sensitive, and it responds to what we say. When we send good Hado to water by saying positive words to it, it will show us beautiful crystals. Also, our prayers send out energy and change the quality of the water. By offering prayers to water, we send Hado to the water, and such water gains the power to potentially answer our prayers.

ANNISSA Imagining means that we are praying for the final result. The image I am discussing here is our hope. It is a form of positive information. As we repeat information with strong words, water will naturally help us.

ELIZABETH I am not a man of religion, nor do I want to praise religions unnecessarily. However, the prayers used for a long time by a religion have strong Hado energy. If we pray and affirm undoubtedly, we will be blessed with a strong power.



ANNISSA Sound and Water – We are all water. Music affects the frequency (current, fluctuation, vibration) of water, this means that sound affects the frequency of water – sound affects the cells in our body that are made up of water.

ELIZABETH We must recover our desire to treat water with Respect.

ANNISSA If we dialogue with water lovingly and with respect, water will change. Water in your body will change.

ELIZABETH A woman named Kazue Kato was known as an activist of women's liberation and a politician in Japan. She lived to be 104 years old. In an interview on her hundredth birthday, she was asked, "What is your secret to longevity?" She answered, "I have ten experiences a day that touch my heart. That is my secret to longevity."

ANNISSA We must pay respect to water, feel love and gratitude, and receive vibrations with a positive attitude. Then water changes, you change, and I change. Because both you and I are water.

*A transgression ... the field – Tamale, December 2004, with Iliasu Adam*

I'm in Tamale, Northern Ghana and Iliasu has just arrived for a visit and to talk more about his development work building boreholes in communities across the Northern region. Yesterday evening he told me about the process of building boreholes and how his NGO employs the services of people with a special gift who communicate with water.

"Iliasu, tell me again about the water finders? Before you begin building pumps, you will employ the services of a waterfinder?"

"Yes, before we can build boreholes, we must locate the water underground. We ask the community about previous sources and then we rely on those individuals with natural body chemistry – those who respond to water. They hold a pendulum and find the water. They walk with a pendulum, and when he gets near water, the pendulum starts dangling; when he gets closer, it dangles more. When he reaches the nucleus of the water, it moves the fastest."

Intrigued, I asked, "A pendulum? How would you describe it?"

"It's a string with a small rock tied to it."

"A string and a rock."

"As far as I know," said Iliasu, "it is beyond scientific understanding, at least for now. There are some who don't use the rock and string. They use two sticks that they hold to their chest. When they come near a water source, the two sticks begin to move together ... when they walk closer and closer to the water, the sticks move closer together until they come together."

"This is extraordinary," I said. "This is the method you use to locate water for the boreholes?"

Iliasu said gently, “Some people have natural body chemistry. Water responds to them.”

“Water responds to them,” I said quietly.

“Yes,” he said. “Water responds to them and they respond to water.”

“This is the method that has worked through time,” I said.

With calm reassurance Iliasu said, “It works for us. We have built forty boreholes so far and it has worked thirty-nine times out of the forty. Some people have a God-given talent to communicate with water.”

“Yes,” I said. “I’m beginning to realize this.”

With a half-smile he said, “This is not science fiction. There is nothing supernatural. You must have the body chemistry. It is what some people do.”

*An assertion ...*

The performance must be a process of putting flesh onto the issues of water. We are performing embodied knowledges about water. This asserts, according to Bryant Alexander, “the body as a conduit of being, the body as the materiality of presence, the body as the nexus of need, and the body as a site of knowing.”<sup>19</sup> Therefore, water as a resource is too incomplete to perform; water as politics needs beauty.



2.2: On the way to Savelugu

For performance, we must emotionalize water. Whether there is scientific evidence that water is responsive to human beings and language is not the point. Whether learning to love the intrinsic value of water is New Age or what some consider “tree-hugging silliness” is not the point. The point is for a political and beautiful performance about water, for all that water is inherently, in the course of human history and existence. The performance must capture water as life and that to love life is to love the divine gift of water.

End of journal.

*A reflection ...*

In the contested space of ethnographic inquiry there is a myriad of small stories located in the “everyday” and constituted by a political economy that cannot be ignored. These micro moments within the everyday – rituals of belonging, symbolic acts of resistance, customary gestures of affection, and the small stories circling within other small stories – ancient and new, written and told – bring not only flesh, blood, and bone to discourses of democracy, globalization, and empire, but they bring extended dimensions of accuracy, specificity, and passion to the macro economies of global networks. The performatives of feeling – sensing bodies and small stories can unlock the truths of material reality as much as (sometimes more than) focused examinations on the superstructures of state and nation. Therefore, in this sense, a political economy of water resonates with Foucault when he stated: “The control of society over individuals is not conducted only through consciousness or ideology but also in the body and with the body. For capitalist society biopolitics is most important, the biological, the somatic, the corporeal.”<sup>20</sup> He goes on to state, “The social body is comprised by power’s machine and developed in its virtuality.”<sup>21</sup> The creation, accumulation, and distribution of wealth affects not only the operations of nations and states but the small, intimate spaces that shelter us, how we make culture, remember our past, and create our futures. In this day and age, can you be an economist without some basic understanding of culture and how it is produced? Can you be a cultural critic without some basic understanding of economics and the processes of political economy? Amílcar Cabral reminds us there is a “strong, dependent, and reciprocal relationship existing between the *cultural situation* and the *economic* (and political) *situation* in the behavior of human societies. In fact, culture is always in the life of a society (open or closed), the more or less conscious result of the economic and political activities of that society.”<sup>22</sup>

Foucault and Cabral, biopolitics and embodied realities, culture and economy lead us to certain facts that are both political and emotional – macro and micro. The fact is that more than one billion people lack access to clean affordable water and about two billion lack access to sanitation. The fact is that in the urban areas of Ghana, only 40 percent of the population have a water tap that is flowing; 78 percent of the poor in urban areas do not have piped water. The fact is that treated water is available only to about 65 percent in urban areas and only about 35 percent in rural areas. The fact is that water-borne diseases kill one child every eight seconds and that in sub-Saharan Africa, 70 percent of deaths and diseases are due to the lack of clean and accessible water. The majority of women and children in rural areas travel miles in the morning and evening for water that remains infected with water-borne diseases. The World Health Organization reports that the daily requirement for water is twenty to forty liters a day per person. In Ghana, for those without a piped water system, purchasing three buckets or eighteen liters of water a day can cost between 10 and 20 percent of their daily income. The fact is that over 5 million people a year die from illnesses linked to unsafe drinking water, unclean domestic environments, and improper sanitation – they are mostly under five years of age. At any time over half the population of the developing world suffers from diseases associated with water and sanitation.

*The field – the small story – December 2004 – Tamale, Ghana*

Issah said he would pick me up from the lodge at about 9 a.m. so we could make our trip to Savelugu, a town about a thirty-minute drive from where I was staying in Tamale. Issah is always very prompt, so I rushed back to the lodge from my morning walk through the familiar roads and markets of Tamale to meet him. I got up early that morning. It had been over a year since I was in Northern Ghana alone. This is the part of the country I most want to return to when I am away, yet the people of Tamale and the Northern region are also the most disparaged of all the regions where I have worked, traveled, and lived in Ghana. The Northern area is known as the most economically deprived because of its history of being a labor camp during the colonial period where education, infrastructural development, and social services were nonexistent. The marginalization of the North and Northerners continued long after colonialism in the hearts and minds of what many Northerners refer to as “our friends in the South.”

When Issah arrived he was smiling. He had brought wedding pictures of him and his wife Rashida. They had been married for over a year and

although I had spoken with Rashida by telephone on several occasions, I had not met her in person. Issah was very proud to show me pictures of his wedding and his beautiful wife. His married life had not slowed down his activist work or his studies, but inspired him even more. Rashida was also committed to human rights work and was completing a Master's degree in Development Studies. Issah was still directing a steadfast and relentless campaign on the human rights of women and girls, teaching human rights awareness in the elementary and high schools to young children, intervening in domestic disputes, taking abusers to court, and completing his law school degree so he could better serve, as he says, "the rights of the most vulnerable – woman and children." I asked him how he was balancing being a relatively new husband, his activist work, and his law school studies. He said, "We must do what is needed." I remember speaking with Issah on my last trip to Ghana about his fight against female incision. Although rarely practiced in other parts of the country and outlawed by the state, there remain sections of the North where babies, young girls, and women are still being incised. Issah's first response was: "Female genital mutilation is what it should be called because females are being mutilated with such a practice."

I commented, "I know you are working hard to put an end to it."

"It must be stopped now. It is very, very painful. It does great harm and damage to the body. Some have gotten very, very sick and died."

"But how can you really stop it?"

"We live here. We are from here and because the community knows we defend the rights of women and girls, they will come to us for help when these mutilations occur or when they are about to occur. We also actively seek the people out who are doing this."

"What happens to them?"

"We try to talk to them. We try to teach the families and the practitioners about the harm caused. We wage a campaign to enlighten the community. But you must understand. FGM is against the law."

"Have there been cases where people went to jail?"

"If those who practice it refuse to listen and will not be convinced they are wrong. We report them to the authorities and seek justice. We try to teach them and indoctrinate them into a new understanding, but if they continue to mutilate females, then they must be punished."

"Can you remember a specific instance?"

"Yes. There was an old woman about seventy years. She had been mutilating females all her life. She knew no other way. It was tradition. For her it was the right thing to do. We tried and tried to enlighten her, but

she continued to practice FGM. We reported her, prosecuted her, and she went to prison. She was old, and didn't know any better, but she had to be punished because what she was doing is very harmful to females, to our culture, and the practice must be stopped."

"What happened to her?"

"We kept up with her in prison. We watched over her and continued to visit with her and rehabilitate her regarding FGM. She finally realized she must stop. The practice is against the law, and she had no other choice. She works for us now in the campaign. She is very good and credible in convincing other older women to stop the practice. We were successful with her in this instance, but we are not successful every time. There is much work to be done."

I gathered my bags and we headed out for Savelugu. The Northern region of Ghana is plagued with water problems related to sanitation, access, and distribution. The town of Savelugu has a population of about 20,000 and holds the highest infestation of guinea worm in the country. Guinea worm and other forms of sickness, death, and disease associated with water motivated the citizens of Savelugu to make a bold and courageous stand by taking control of their water system. This stand resulted in the people of Savelugu managing and distributing their own water. During the drive, I thought about the attention and international acclaim Savelugu had recently received for uniting their community and taking control of their own water distribution system. The Ghanaian cultural critic and documentary film-maker Kwesi Awusu had just completed a documentary commissioned by Oxfam International entitled *Water is Life*, examining the water crises in Ghana where the Savelugu story was prominently included. The film exposed, with clarity and force, the struggle for sanitation and for clean potable water in Ghana and included selected individuals who are at the forefront of the water struggle. When I spoke to Kwesi about the documentary, he told me that it was not an easy film to make because he wanted to tell a comprehensive story about water in Ghana that necessarily carried him to different parts of the country. He wanted the documentary to tell the urgent story, but it also needed to be hopeful in communicating the need to respond and effect change. He was inspired by what happened in Savelugu and wanted to present Savelugu's story of self-determination.

As we were nearing the town, I saw a hand-painted sign on the side of the road: "SAVELUGU." I asked Issah if we could stop so I could take a picture of it. As I was getting out of the car, an old man on a bicycle passed by; a child was riding on the handlebars. They waved and said "Savelugu." I wondered how many "abrunis" before me had stopped on the side of the

road to take a picture of the famous town that beat the system and, against all odds, took control of its own water. When I got back in the car, Issah told me we were going to the council hall to meet the head of the Water Board. Issah had also arranged for me to meet the rest of the Board members and the women who were in charge of distributing water at the standpipes.

“Don’t worry, I’ve arranged it. You will meet with all the people who had a major part in bringing water to Savelugu.”

When we reached the council hall we met the chairman of the Board, who greeted us. The chairman led us to a room where Issah and I were to meet three other members of the Water Board. The room was sparse, with one desk in the center of the floor and a few chairs. The electricity was not working that day, but the sun from the windows brought in a natural warm light. What I learned was that Savelugu did what so many other communities around the world hope for, and that is to control their own water. They mobilized themselves and formed the Savelugu Water Board, making sure community members were represented from all areas of the town to influence decisions and shape policy. After a decision is made, the Board must present it to the citizens for a vote. The Board developed a proposal and a clear design of how they planned to distribute water. They went to the Ghana Water Company and made arrangements for training and purchasing water in bulk. The Water Company benefited because they were getting paid up front while community members were responsible for their own distribution and pipes. All the Board wanted from the company was the water and the training. The next step was to make sure the pipes were built in very strategic locations to assure fair distribution. The local NGO Institute for Policy Alternatives<sup>23</sup> as well as international charities, such as UNICEF, GLOBAL 2000, and World Vision, were instrumental in obtaining the infrastructure the town needed to build the piping and the pump connecting the main water source to Savelugu. The charities also helped pay for the water company to train community members in the technologies of water and distribution. The Board then set up an “order of payment” to guarantee that everyone paid a small sum for their water and all monies paid went back into the system to sustain it. By taking over distribution, the people of Savelugu were able to save water and reduce waste. The Water Board, with community input, determined tariffs; moreover, the tariffs were cross-subsidized, making water affordable for everyone, even for the very poorest in the community.

I was told that their water distribution system was successful. But I must keep in mind that sometimes even with the standpipes there are times when the water does not flow.

This was startling. "I thought water flowed in Savelugu all the time now."

"No," said the chairman, "it only flows from the pipes at certain cycles. When it is our turn ... It is still better than it ever was before because before we relied only on the ponds for water. Now we can expect to get water from the pumps at least a few times a month and try to store it or harvest it from the rain when the pumps don't flow."

As the men left, three women entered. They had been waiting outside on the veranda. Mariama Alhassan, Mariama Seidu, and Afishetu Alhassan. Issah explained my work to them in Dagbani and why I was there in Savelugu.

"How is water distributed in Savelugu?" I asked.

Mrs. Seidu was quick to answer, "We have pipes placed at certain areas in the town. People have a schedule and a certain time that their family or a representative of their family can come to the pipes for water. Each family is allotted a certain amount of water, depending on how many of them are in the household. We must do this so everyone will have his or her fair share of water."

When community members come for water they are charged a specific tariff for the amount they need. Tariffs are then collected and recorded in a water accounting ledger. The family must then sign off for the water next to their name or mark. This procedure is to verify with the inspectors and the Water Board that the family has received their water and paid for it. To double-check the transaction, there is also a meter on the main pump into the town that indicates how much water has flowed from the pumps and how much money should have been collected.

"The three of you work at the pumps throughout the day?" I asked.

"We have shifts," said Mrs. Alhassan. "We are at the pumps for half the day and then the next half of the day the next person comes. We work in shifts and each distributor is responsible for the people getting the proper amount of water they need and paying the right price for it. We must make sure our books are accurate and true and that water is not wasted and that everyone who is supposed to get their water from the pipe, gets the water they need."

"Are there ever any problems with people not wanting to pay for water or trying to get more water than they are supposed to have?" I asked.

All the women then began looking at me amused and started shaking their heads: "No, no, no!" they exclaimed with humor and surprise.

"I know the tariffs are small but what if someone cannot afford to pay even the small price of the water?" I asked.

"They get the money from someone," said Mrs. Seidu. "Somebody will have it for them or they can get it from the Water Board ... this is not a



problem. It has not been a problem. People will pay for the water because the price is small and they budget for it.”

“What was it like before the pumps and before you distributed your own water?”

The women start laughing and shaking their heads. Mrs. Alhassan throws up her hands and speaks: “We spent all our time thinking about water. In the dry season, it was bad. We must worry about where to find it and how far we must walk to get it. We fetch water from the pond in the morning so our children can bathe and we can cook and clean for the day. We then go back to fetch at night so we can have it for the evening, for dinner, and for wash up. We worried about getting water all the time.”

Mrs. Seidu raises her skirt and shows me her guinea worm scar. I lean over and rub my hand against the scar. It has partially healed and left a raised discolored mark, like someone who has been deeply cut on the leg. She tells me, “I had guinea worm. Too many people around here get it from the pond water. I was sick for a long time. I got it from fetching water. We worry all the time about the children.”

Disturbed by the mark on her leg, I asked, “What would it be like for you if you had water *inside* your house all the time and it flowed hot and cold, and you could reach for the tap anytime you wanted it and get as much water – even hot water – whenever you wanted, right inside your own house?”

The women started laughing and clapping their hands. Mrs. Seidu stood up from the table and starting dancing. Mrs. Alhassan raised her voice and said, “I would not be sick! I would feel too good. No headaches, no worries. We would be too happy! Hah! Too happy, like the people in the city!”

#### SCENE TWO: THE SENSE OF BEING PRESENT

A way of life for the 20 percent of the earth’s people who use 80 percent of the planet’s resources will dispossess 80 percent of its people of their just share of the resources and eventually destroy the planet. We cannot survive as a species if greed is privileged and protected and the economics of the greedy set the rules for how we live and die.<sup>24</sup> (Vandana Shiva)

To create for the stage the living performances of everyday remembrances, imaginings, and deeply felt encounters of ethnographic fieldwork is a radical act of translation.<sup>25</sup> Doing performance ethnography is a radical act of translation because it not only constitutes the ethics and the responsibility of representation – “how a people are represented is how they are treated”<sup>26</sup> – the symbiotic relationship between macro and micro forces, the always

unresolved engagement with “Otherness,” the geopolitical gap between those of us who freely come and go and those who stay, but all this and more must be translated multi-dimensionally for the stage, in/for the public – a public translation which “the Other” more than likely will never cross the ocean to see. And at still another level of translation is the factor of verisimilitude. In the labor of staging ethnography, verisimilitude by replication is not the goal, but how well the enliveness of the metonym works, that is “reasoning part-to-part over synecdoche, reasoning part-to-whole.”<sup>27</sup>

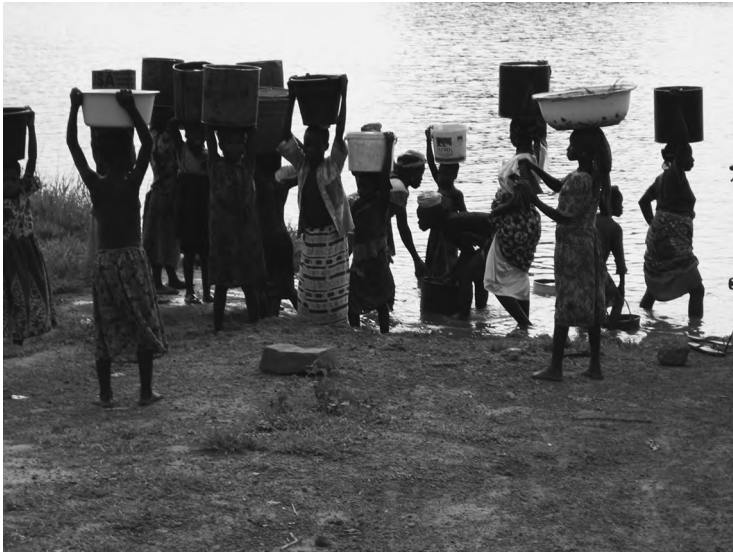
This means the idea of replicating what happened in the field must be replaced by the idea that the performance is actually comprised of and, in fact, can be understood as a metonym – I present to you but an element to represent a greater whole that is but a part of an even greater whole that is the world of the field. It is really about the metonym and how well we can re-present, embellish, and honor *elements* of that world – encapsulations and their reverberations – to make the audience feel a *sense of being present* within a greater part of a whole that is the dynamic experienced in the field. Therefore, my deepest ethical dilemma in staging ethnographic data is not the absence of the Other who cannot be there to see the show but how and by what means I can make the audience that *is* there feel a *sense of being present* with the Other in the Other’s actual absence. What metonymic elements within the thick description of ethnographic habitation and co-performance from a field far away can I create and stage to form a metonymic expression – a part of a world – that re-presents and represents the Other’s subjectivity and the social/political/psychological formations of that subjectivity beautifully, memorably, and disturbingly to the point where my audience feels present with Others in their world – in performance? Moreover, how can I create a performance where the audience is both inspired and disturbed by feeling/being present in that world? This ethnographic *sense of being present* is not the same but a complement to “theatrical presence”<sup>28</sup> – a shared temporality, an “aura” and vulnerability of aliveness, of being there together with the performers – this ethnographic presence is adding a *reversal* to theatrical presence. The live performance thrives on the shared space and time and the living moment between spectator and performers: *You are right here with me now, before my very eyes.* It also thrives on the transcendence of that very sharing of space and time: *You, the performer, exceed this common aliveness we share in space and time to become something and to do something extraordinary within the distinctive frame of a performance – the song, the dance, the story, the joke, the tightrope, the character – you are both here and not here.* And, finally, the live performance thrives on vulnerability and risk that the tension of the “here/not here” will

be shattered by the *mistake* – and therefore leaving us nervous – embarrassed – with only “the here.” *You cannot fumble a line, miss a step, forget the joke, fall from the tightrope, because you will shatter the “not here,” i.e., the extraordinary, the heightened mode of performance. We are spectators to the distinction of the “here/not here” and the promise that the distinction will remain intact, in place, and undisturbed.*

The reversal of theatrical presence is an ethnographic presence that brings to the “here/not here” the added spatial dimension of the “there.” The simultaneity of here/not here is augmented by another simultaneous aliveness of a shared time but of a different space, a space that is “over there” far from the theatre hall: *Your living world is represented here with me at this time and exists at this time that I sit here watching the performance; but you are not here in this space, you are there in that space – the there space of Ghana.* In other words, it is the theatrics of live performance that are employed to bring the “there” *here* so the audience may feel a sense of *being there*. *You are there far away right now; but, I feel a sense of being over there with you and being present there in your world as you are absent in mine.*

*Being present*, in this ethnographic sense, intensifies empathy by adding something more to “I feel your pain.” It is the sense of being transported to a place where you begin to feel the pain of a *location* – an affect of space. Because ethnography is always grounded in a specific “location” and what goes on inside that location, the place of that location becomes a “practiced space.”<sup>29</sup> From location to place to space comes a range of experiences, inventions, memories, and desires where human beings make a place into a space – a living organism comprised of immeasurable meaning and emotions.

In performance ethnography, we empathize with individuals in the spaces they help make and that in turn help make them. The ethnographic sense of presence is empathic in that you feel the joy and pain of individuals. Others are always and already attached to a space, the space that generates, affects, and harbors emotion. The space, therefore, is not a neutral place but an emotional landscape, an organism of human activity and emotion. To feel a sense of presence is to enter the myriad of yearnings that constitute a space. Also, this ethnographic *scene of being present* is not a move toward Derrida’s “metaphysics of presence”<sup>30</sup> as a hierarchy of truth, but toward an ephemeral moment where distinct pieces, distinct phenomena – metonymic ontologies – combine and converge to momentarily transport you to a time and space you have never been before and in a way that haunts you – in a way that impresses you.<sup>31</sup> Epiphany is key here; *presence* is impressive because the convergence and arrangement of all elements in this moment



2.3: Women and children at pond fetching water in Savelugu

create a phenomenon – a complex of signification – that is particular to this convergence/arrangement, thereby invoking a new experience, a sudden understanding or realization that is quintessentially geographic. In the ethnographic sense of presence the realization is always linked to a new and different space, a different geography.

#### *The performance – short of water*

It was August 2005. Eight months had passed since my last visit to Savelugu with Issah in December of 2004. I returned to follow up on the progress of the water distribution system and to speak again with Mariama, Afishetu, and Mariama. Issah picked me up as usual that morning from the lodge. He had an even brighter smile on his face than at our last meeting in December. He told me the news that he and Rashida were expecting a baby.

With the good news, we set out for Savelugu. On the drive, we began talking about our last trip and the pride of the Savelugu community in managing their water system. We were both very interested to get back and witness how the town was succeeding since our last visit. When we finally arrived, we were told that “all the pumps were locked.” The water was not flowing from any of the pumps. People had gone back to the pond to fetch

water. What Issah and I discovered that August day when we arrived in Savelugu is captured in the following segment of *Water Rites*.

*Staging the scene*

Live footage and enlarged images of men, women, and children in action and fetching brown water from a pond are projected on the two large screens hanging upstage right and left of the stage. The footage being projected is the video recording I taped that day in August when Issah and I visited a pond in Savelugu. The large screens give the appearance of “framing” the stage and wrapping the audience inside the moving images so the audience feels the pervasiveness of the projections as if they are nearly inside the screen, inside the images and action being projected, giving them a *sense of being present* inside the pond.

There are two Recorders, R<sub>1</sub> and R<sub>2</sub>, who narrate the actions unfolding that are simultaneously projected on the two screens.

- R<sub>1</sub> Issah and I are leaving Tamale on our way to Savelugu.
- R<sub>2</sub> The last time I was there it was still a model of community control. The people had negotiated with civil society, the public water company, and the government to take control of their own water.
- R<sub>1</sub> I am coming back now to see Mariama, Afishetu, and Mariama, women who worked at the pumps, overseeing the distribution of water.
- R<sub>2</sub> Issah and I arrive. The women have been waiting for me, and with smiles and laughter, they come to the car. We greet each other with warm embraces.
- R<sub>1</sub> In this moment it feels like there has been no passage of time between now and when I last saw them. It feels amazingly empowering to be here, with them, now.
- R<sub>2</sub> They want to take me to the water pumps right away.
- R<sub>1</sub> It is a bit odd to see the pumps before sitting down to talk. But I follow.
- R<sub>2</sub> Now I realize the urgency. The pumps are locked. There is no flowing water in any of the standpipes of Savelugu. The only available water is from the nearest pond or dam.
- R<sub>1</sub> We will go: Issah, Mariama, Afishetu, Mariama, and Mariama’s son Ibrahim – we will go to the pond. I want to see for myself how they collect their water – most of the people of Savelugu never had tap water in their homes or private bathrooms with flushing toilets.
- R<sub>2</sub> We arrive. We walk a small distance to the pond.
- R<sub>1</sub> On the way, I see a woman scooping water from a hole in the ground.

- R2 She has been scooping water from this small hole with quickness and determination, all the while being very careful not to spill the preciousness of her labor.
- R1 We walk further down the path and come to the pond. There are men, women, and children all gathered.
- R2 Three boys on a donkey are working feverishly hard filling large barrels with water they've tied to the donkey's back. They are going to sell the water for a small and reasonable price.
- R1 Enough for their labor and their lives and for those who do not come to the pond.
- R2 These boys fetch water from the pond six times a day.
- R1 When all the barrels are finally filled to capacity, they begin to pull the donkey out of the pond.
- R2 But the donkey cannot withstand the weight.
- R1 The donkey falls forward.
- R2 Water pours out from all the barrels.
- R1 & R2 (*Repeat in succession.*) The boys start again.
- R1 People gather at the pond: women with large buckets and plastic containers – some balancing the water on their heads, others on a long wooden cart –
- R2 There is a man with one arm who steps behind a container because he doesn't want me to see him fetch water –
- R1 There are small children who carry buckets half their size and double their weight – one child on one side of the bucket, another on the other side.
- R2 This water, here where I stand, every drop is a necessity for life.
- R1 This water that is valued here – that is the arbiter between life and death – is not clean.
- R2 It is mud-brown.
- R1 This water requires sterilization under fire in a large metal pot before it can be consumed.
- R2 Over 5 million people a year die from illnesses linked to unsafe drinking water, unclean domestic environments, and improper sanitation.
- R1 They are mostly under five years of age.
- R2 At any time over half the population in the developing world suffers from one or more of six diseases associated with water and sanitation.
- R1 Diarrhea.
- R2 Ascarsis.

- R1 Guinea worm.
- R2 Hookworm.
- R1 Schistosomiasis.
- R2 Trachoma.
- R1 Later that day, Iliasu came by my flat in Tamale.
- R2 I told him I had been to Savelugu earlier. I told him about the scene at the pond.
- R1 I told him that as we were leaving the pond – the irony of cosmic opposites boasted and teased because all of a sudden it began pouring down rain – loud and torrential rain.
- R2 Iliasu took a deep breath. He spoke about harvesting rainwater and the initiatives he and others were making to preserve water and build hand pumps.
- R1 I asked him what happened to Savelugu. During my last trip, the standpipes were flowing, but now they are locked. What happened to the local control and distribution of water that international water activists fight for and that Savelugu made happen? Is this what the down cycle is like when it is not Savelugu's turn for water?
- R2 Iliasu said: "It is not just communities, municipalities, and nation states gaining control and efficiency that are at the root of this problem of water.
- R1 The problem is Development and the effects the global economy has on Development.
- R2 You can't talk about getting at the root cause of water unless you are ready to talk about global capitalism.
- R1 And about ownership, distribution, and profit on an international scale.
- R2 Iliasu said: "We don't have water in Savelugu because to service this region of Ghana equitably and fairly
- R1 it will take 14 million gallons of water a day
- R2 and three major artery pumps connected to one of Ghana's main water sources.
- R1 Right now he said:
- R2 Two pumps together supplied 4.5 million gallons of water (*Pause*) but only one pump is working.
- R1 We are one pump
- R2 and over 2 million gallons
- R1 short of water
- R2 short of water.

Both the images and sounds from the pond filled the theatre. The voices of men, women, and children were heard as well as the sounds of water splashing and being scooped and poured. The projection of the boys at the pond that day with their donkey filling up large barrels of mud-brown pond water was displayed larger than life on the two screens. As the audience listened to the varying sounds of the pond and the narration of that moment by the Recorders, they also watched, on screen, the three boys struggle to steady the donkey as they tied large barrels on the donkey's back. They saw the boys cover the large barrels with plastic and tie a string around them. They witnessed the boys struggle to pull the donkey out of the water. Then the donkey's leg buckled under from the pressure and he fell as water poured out from the barrel. They witnessed the boys start all over again. Watching the audience watching the pond at Savelugu felt surreal as though I was not only "here/not here/there" but also "here again" inside the "there" moments of the pond – in addition to the "here/not here" of live performance, and *a sense of being present* in the "there" moments of the pond at Savelugu, I kept remembering back to the day I was *actually there* and how it felt to be there for the first time, in that original moment. It was during the final performances when I began to realize and pay attention to the double sensation of *a sense of being there*, both within the immediacy of the audience and the *remembrance of being there* at the pond. I also realized that what I hoped for the audience is what we hope for in the work of performance ethnography, is that the audience feels some semblance, some fragment, some *sense*, of what it felt like for you when you were *inside* the "there."

*The field picking up where the performance ends – August 2004*

When we all returned from the pond and the rain started to pour, Mariama, Afishetu, and Mariama told Issah and me to go on ahead; they would meet us back at the center shortly. There was something they needed to do. Issah and I stood at the door. It was raining down sheets of water; you could hardly see in front of you because the pouring rain cast a blurry haze upon everything. The irony of fetching water from a dirty pond and floods of rainwater unabashedly pouring down before me was incomprehensible as we stood at the door. The rain was loud and angry and seemed to beat down on the concrete surface of the veranda with a vengeance.

On the drive back from Savelugu, Issah looked straight ahead at the road. We were both uncharacteristically quiet on the way back to Tamale. When there is so much to consider, when an experience catches you off guard and expectations have turned into a lingering and sad wanting, sometimes the



weight of quietness grips you and it is all that you can give in those moments. Issah was deep in thought at the wheel of the car. We had been riding for about ten minutes without speaking when Issah softly spoke as though we were in the middle of a conversation – the silent conversation we were both having in our heads:

“Water is rationed between Savelugu and Tamale, and it’s being rationed between the surrounding towns. There are competing demands for water. Savelugu can claim some amount of water but not enough for everyone. Each town and community is rationed a portion of water. They give a portion to one place at one period of time and another place at a different period of time. The places take turns for water. It is a problem of low pressure. Those areas that are uphill and further away from the booster station are suffering. It is difficult to pump water to those areas. The pressure is too low. The machinery does not have the capacity to pump enough water to those areas.”

“What will it take to get the infrastructure or the machines that are needed?”

“It will take the will of the government to do what needs to be done. They need to set priorities. Water needs to be a priority.”

“Do you think if they privatize people of Savelugu will get water consistently?”

“No. The people of Savelugu will not be able to afford the tariffs private companies will charge, besides government must be made to do what is right and necessary to provide the people with water. Water is a human right. Nobody should take over the public access and management of public water but the public. The government must assure that all of its people have the right to water. Water is life and not a profit-making commodity.”

As we were pulling up to the lodge, it was still pouring down rain, and I suddenly realized why the women had asked us to go on ahead. It was so they could gather buckets to harvest the rain water.

### *Iliasu’s visit*

Later that night, as I was waiting for Iliasu to come for a visit so we could talk more about water, I was still thinking about the difference between my very first trip to Savelugu and the irony of the rain that morning. I wrote my thoughts in my field journal:

Savelugu won their water battle, it was proof that privatization was not the ultimate remedy for efficiency and getting water to people, but today people were at the pond fetching dirty water ... two pumps and 10 million gallons short of water is yet another world water travesty. The people of Savelugu did all they could do to get water to their town. They did it step by step, methodically, and they put their plan

in motion. It was like clockwork and people were getting the water they needed. Something is very, very wrong.

When Iliasu finally arrived, I shared the thoughts of my journal entry with him, and he calmly responded by saying “Yes. This is why you cannot separate water from the politics of development.”

“What do you mean?”

“First, as a nation we must stop dealing in party politics – partisan politics. One president gets in office with his people and he changes the plans and operations of the fellow before him. We cannot make sustained progress if we do not have stable governance to address issues like water. This party rivalry is making our people suffer and the government useless to the people whose security depends on it, like the security of access to water. We need continuity and a consistent commitment to set forth a development agenda. Not a government in flux with plans that is here today and gone tomorrow. Government must make a serious long-range commitment to issues of development in this country, and water is just one of the issues.”

“How is this done?”

“We need experts from all the parties to come together. Experts must come together in specific fields such as health care, education, and water. Each field meets and shares ideas with other experts in that field – no matter their party affiliation or what region of the country they come from. They must all bring their knowledge together at the table and develop a plan. They must then develop a course and strategy of how the plan will be implemented. If they need more experts to do this, then they seek greater advice and counsel. But all this takes people coming together with the expertise and crossing party lines.”

“Government needs to bring experts together like the people of Savelugu did when they planed their agenda for water?”

Iliasu is adamant, “It is a development problem. Government must address it within a larger development agenda.”

“If they don’t get it right, would you be in favor of privatization?” I asked, knowing the answer but wanting to hear it in Iliasu’s own words.

He spoke strongly, “Privatization will never work in Ghana. It has failed in other parts of the world. It is not an option. We have a government and a public utilities system that we must make accountable.”

### *The performance – the donkey-cart seller*

The performance intends to personalize young men who sell water by situating them as subjects within their own story and narrative history.

This donkey-cart seller is a composite character named Ibrahim who gives us a glimpse of what it means to sell water from the back of a donkey. I wrote the Ibrahim monologue from information and experiences gathered in the field over the years pertaining to donkey-cart sellers, guinea worm, and how families manage through the perils of water access. The small story of Ibrahim brought a name, history, desire, and specificity to the prior image of the boy on screen. It was intended to more fully narrate and imagine the inner lives of those who sell water off the backs of donkeys and the consequences of their labor.

*Staging the scene*

Projected on the two large screens are four sequential images from photographs I took that day at the pond of a young donkey-cart seller. He is a boy about the age of fourteen years. In various images he stands with his donkey. Each image fades into the next as the following monologue is performed. The character, Ibrahim, stands on a platform just below the screen. His shadow is cast over half the screen. The second screen projects the same sequence of images, and seated below it are R1 and R2 focused on the screen as they take notes in their journals. The boy Ibrahim enters the platform upstage left and speaks.

My name is Ibrahim, I'm from Savelugu,  
 I'm fourteen years old and I sell water.  
 I'm what the people call a "donkey-cart water seller."  
 I go down to the pond every day with my donkey and I fetch water.  
 My younger brother goes with me.  
 We travel about five miles every day, back and forth, to the pond.  
 We sell water to the people here.  
 There are other donkey-cart water sellers, but *we* are the best!  
 Some of the old people and the sick people can't carry the water or walk to  
 fetch it;  
 And the people who take care of them are too busy – the pond is too far!  
 Sometimes the pond will dry up, and we have to search for water.  
 My brothers and me are very, very happy because we have our own donkey.  
 We are blessed to have this donkey.  
 We get up in the morning before the sun and we get a rope and we tie the  
 rope to many, many buckets around the donkey's back. Then we start  
 our first walk to the pond.  
 Me, my brother, and the donkey get inside the pond where the water is full  
 and plenty.

My brother fills up the bowls and pours water in the buckets that we have fastened to the donkey's back. I hold the donkey very, very carefully so the donkey won't slide and fall down and spill the water back into the pond.

The water is heavy.

My brother pours and pours and I hold on ...

When the buckets are all filled and my little brother's back is tired, we leave the pond.

We start the journey with our donkey to sell water to the people who need it.

When the water is sold, we go back to the pond and we start all over again ...

I hold onto the donkey and my brother fills up the buckets.

We fetch water from the pond six times a day.

My mother worries that my brother and me will get the guinea worm from the water.

Many people around here have gotten guinea worm from the water.

But we have not gotten any guinea worm, not yet.

My mother has guinea worm and my little sister.

My little sister was sick for a long, long time.

You are very blessed when you don't get guinea worm because you can keep working and fetching water and making money to live.

They pulled the worm out of my little sister's leg and in a few days she felt better.

Oh, it was a big, long guinea worm.

It looked longer and bigger than my little sister's leg.

My mother said she could not fetch water anymore. So, it's just my brother and me.

If I get guinea worm, I will worry.

Who will hold the donkey?

My mother told me that when she was a young girl they had plenty, plenty water –

Water flowed from the pipes. Oh! From the pipes, everyday!

They bathed, and washed, and drank, and never got sick –

No tired back, no guinea worm, no worry.

When my mother was a young girl fresh, clean water flowed from the pipes.

Not any more.

The pond scene was a community water rite. It was embodied and embedded in the practices of daily life. It was simultaneously routine,

extraordinary, ludic, and tragic. One must fetch water every day – several times in a day – because one must also stay alive. This is not a matter of choice, and, as a result, it is both routine and monumental. The pond is a survival point, and its extraordinary routine-ness requires daily rituals where friendship, familiarity, and play take form. I witnessed children playing together, women joyfully sharing local stories, men jokingly competing for the attention of women. In this presence of the ludic is the tragic: guinea worm, the dry season, brown water, and the endless burden of worrying about access to water and the toll it takes on one's body and one's mind. It brings us back to the small and monumental story in performance that serves as the metonym for the weight of water in Savelugu and the innumerable ponds across the globe.

The day Issah and I went to the pond there was a group of women that arrived with a flat-board wagon they pulled to the pond, carrying two large metal barrels of water. As they pulled the flat-board closer to the edge of the pond, two other women spotted them ahead. They waved to the women pulling the load and began laughing and talking. The two ran to the sides of the board to help the other women bring the barrels in closer to the water. All the women were laughing and talking as they pulled the flat-board along the water's edge. Two of the women who pulled the flat-board wagon climbed up on the board and circled around the larger barrels on top. The other two women went knee-deep into the pond each with plastic buckets they filled with water and then handed them to the women standing on the board. The four women, in repetitive and rhythmic motion of bending, filling, lifting, and pouring, were talking and laughing with each other throughout their labor. They spotted me with my camera and then started shaking their heads and pointing with more laughter, in a gesture I interpreted as, "Isn't she silly." I smiled at them, shook my head, and shrugged my shoulders in a gesture of "Yes, I do feel silly with this camera and these bags, losing balance and tripping over my feet with every step, as you work pulling flat-board wagons and pouring water to live." I shrugged my shoulders and put the camera down. They saw my embarrassment, then waved at me, smiled, and immediately went back to their lifting, pouring, and conversation. When the man with one arm saw me and hid behind a cart, I put my camera away and asked Issah to let him know the camera was now packed away. He came out from behind the water cart and began fetching water with the other men who then started joking with him for hiding from the camera. He began laughing with the men, then he smiled and nodded his head at me in appreciation for putting away the camera. It was one of those moments where the ethnographer feels foolish and small

and foreign against the magnitude of what Others must do within the challenges and demands of their home places. At this writing, the man who did not want to be seen on camera is more than likely still fetching water from the pond, and the women are more than likely still pulling enormously heavy flat-board wagons, and the donkey is more than likely still stumbling under the weight of water when the pipes are locked in Savelugu. Or am I guilty, in the sentiment of Johannes Fabian, of *fixing the Other in Time*? The imperialist gaze that denies coevalness, agency, and a living dynamic presence of the Other is beyond the stagnant moment of the ethnographic report and observation. Right now I might also discuss the noble purpose of my work that requires that I carry a camera, or I might write on and on to demonstrate how self-reflexive I am about my positionality and the very, very fraught and complicated presence of “the camera” in fieldwork, but I cannot because who I am and why I was there on that day still feels small and awkward – even now in the memory of that very particular moment as people fetch and worry over water for their survival.

My *sense of being present* at the pond, when the women pointed and laughed and when the man with one arm hid behind a water container, was overcome by feelings of awkwardness and embarrassment for what felt like the spectacle of my video camera and the canvas bag dangling across my shoulder bursting with field journals, tape recorders, sunglasses, maps, and insect repellent – the intrusive voyeur making exotica of a people’s everyday survival practices. As the donkey could no longer hold the weight of the water and the barrel spilled from the wagon, the only assistance I offered was to tape-record it for visual consumption for an academic audience thousands of miles away.

It is the body-to-body engagement in the field that is the mark of ethnographic method in all its entanglements of necessity and purpose on one hand and awkwardness and shame on the other. I did feel shame when the man seeing me wanted to hide: it was his shame for having one arm to fetch water, and it was my shame for making him feel ashamed. As ethnographers we understand we must carry our camera and our fieldwork gear on our body. It comes with the territory. We are in the field to do good work. We want to feel that our work matters. But those moments of “feeling like a fool”<sup>32</sup> always slip in and out of our work, just as those slippery moments of inspiration and purposefulness do. Feeling like a fool and feeling purposeful will alternate like waves, in varying levels and tensions, one upon the other. But what is for sure is that in fieldwork one must live with both – feeling foolish and feeling inspired. The tension must always remain unresolved because it is that very tension that keeps us circumspect

about our intrusions, and concerned that our voyeurism is not gratuitous. Feeling like a fool and shame prevent our purposeful aims and our heartfelt inspiration from being grander or more sought out than the well-being of the Othered lives we interact with body to body.

The very tension between shame and purposefulness that is not simply unresolved but required for the ethnographer is the opposite case for the audience and reader. Because, in the ethnographic *sense of being present*, we hope to “transport” the audience from here to there, we do not want them to feel like fools or feel ashamed for *being there*. I do not want my audience to feel like intrusive voyeurs. However, for me, I know these tensions keep me mindful of the dignity of the people who belong to a place because if I am not conscious of what it feels like to be foolish, if I am oblivious to feelings of shame, what will prevent me from producing representations and performances that are foolish and shameful? I am acutely aware of the fact that I have felt ashamed in the field and I have felt foolish, and I try to pay attention to the oncoming threats of each so I don’t fall over the edge of either – sometimes I lose balance and fall, and sometimes I maintain my balance and continue cautiously along the edge. When these moments occur it is this acute awareness that causes me to pay even greater attention to how I am representing Others in my work, in what form and by what means. There can be no image anywhere in my work of the man who hid behind the container; it would shame him and, as a result, it would shame me and my audience. However, there is a different ethical choice as it relates to feeling like a fool. I will represent work that casts me as a fool, if it sheds greater light on Others, on my purpose, or on *the sense of being present*, because I am ultimately in control and responsible for all three. I determine which is the priority – a foolish representation of myself for the greater aims of purpose and a *sense of being present*. I hold the authority to make the choice. But to use my authority as ethnographer/director to present Others as foolish, or to cause my audience to feel foolish as witnesses would be ethically problematic and, moreover, it would be a performance failure. The ethnographic sense of being present is to travel to another world (inside the temporality of performance) without shame and without feeling foolish (at least in this instance) because the aim is empathy and a sense of what it means to belong there, in that location. The ethnographic sense of being present is ultimately about a *simulation* of belonging. The simulation of belonging is a glimpse, a remnant, a fleeting sensation of what it means to fetch water all morning with your donkey and then pull the stumbling donkey from mud-brown water as your labor spills back into the pond and you must start all over again. The simulation enters into what it means to

worry about getting sick with guinea worm at fourteen years old because you can't miss a day of fetching water. An unencumbered path from the ethnographer's foolishness, awkwardness, and shame must be cleared away for empathy and for the audience to embrace simulations of belonging at the pond that day.

SCENE THREE: THE AIM TO PROVOKE

The big question is: Should water be available and affordable to all or affordable only to a few privileged households? It is feared that the privatization of water, if not carefully managed, can result in water being denied the poor through profit-driven tariffication ... those in favor of privatization have argued that most Ghanaians are willing to pay for good water but this argument misses the crucial point, which is that most Ghanaians may be willing to pay but they cannot afford to pay! OUR MINDS SHOULD FOCUS ON AFFORDABILITY NOT WILLINGNESS!! In poor areas ... shallow hand-dug wells have become important sources of drinking water. Some of these wells are situated near large open drains and some are very close to pit latrines with a high possibility of leakage and seepage. In the cities, the poor are not unaware of the health implications of drinking water from shallow wells but, given the current tariff levels, they hardly have any choice. In rural areas, even among a few communities that have access to boreholes for their water supply, many have gone back to the use of river water, stagnant ponds, and shallow untreated hand-dug wells because of the prohibitive maintenance and operation costs that these communities are expected to bear through the imposition of user fees.<sup>33</sup>

(Rudolf Amenga-Etego)

From *the sense of being present*, we now move to *the aim to provoke* that comes with un-ease and a desire to "respond back" at what is being presented before us. It was time to contrast two worlds of water consumption and the implications of different water cultures: how some get their drinking water from a dirty pond is very different from how some of us get it from bottled water. Just as the pond scene reflected how drinking water is consumed in one part of the world, it was time to make a contrast with how drinking water is consumed in another part of the world. The performance was going to address the idea of different water cultures and the problem of inequity.

Water cultures involve day-to-day experiences that include physical spaces, objects, and bodies that constitute patterns of use or inconspicuous consumption. Water cultures involve people's habits and expectations, as well as their emotional, affective, aesthetic, and spiritual values and beliefs, like washing a baby in the public market, fetching water from a local pond, or pulling fallen children from a well. As the extraordinary (un)spectacular dimensions of daily life – the small stories – were performed onstage and in



the field, they were also specific “rituals of water use that have become, to a great extent, routine, inconspicuous consumption.”<sup>34</sup>

The comparison between “first” world and “third” world water is both striking and ironic. The plastic water bottle of the former in contrast to the community standpipe of the latter (or the pond, or whatever it takes to harvest water during the rainy season) are worlds apart. This is also true in many cases with the developing-world city versus the developing-world village. The irony is that the semiotics of the water bottle industry attempt to give the illusion of a natural source – a spring, well, or pond in a mysterious place, i.e., the illusion of an original water source deriving directly from nature that is earthly pure and crystal-mountain pristine – which masks the hidden abode of corporate processes and profit.

The glass and plastic bottles that hold the *illusion* of a natural source are at one end of the water spectrum while guinea-worm-infested ponds that are the *reality* of a natural source are at the other. The “nature” illusion of the former constitutes labor processes of management, marketing, and profit, while the “nature” reality of the latter constitutes labor processes of finding, fetching, loss, and disease.

The performance intended to represent and trouble the idea of nature’s water source coming from a bottle by presenting water as an embryonic force of creation, a mystic ideal of nature, and a desired commodity.

In one scene from *Water Rites*, sounds of water splashing rise and the Savelugu pond is projected on both screens. As the sounds of water rise to a high pitch, the actors onstage simultaneously rise from their islands as if they were moving through water. Feeling the opposing force of the water, the actors rise and begin to search among countless plastic water bottles covering the stage floor. Each actor is sorting and searching among the various bottles to find the *special one* that will take them back to the natural spring – a utopian water haven. They read the various labels on the bottles and examine the size and shape of the bottles until they find the one they want. When each actor finds the “right” water bottle, they reach to the floor against the force of the water and lie down on the stage floor holding the bottle in various semi-fetal positions with their backs to the audience, resting in the womb of water.

The actors moved through water to convey its cosmic force and how we are encompassed by water in the womb before birth, as well as by rivers, lakes, and oceans on earth. The search for the water bottles juxtaposed water as a natural force in contrast to the commercialism (and elitism) of water bottle brands. The image of the actors lying on the stage floor – or at the bottom of the ocean – holding the water bottles in a fetal position brings the

audience back to the stark contrast between the dependence of the planet on water, for life and human conception on one hand, and the “evolution” of water in capitalist production in the desire to buy purified water for health or as a convenient luxury on the other.

*The performance – the three myths of privatization*

The stage is set with two islands. One island is juxtaposed or in contrast to the other to give the effect of opposites. On the island stage right, projected on the screen is a powerpoint demonstration entitled “Three Myths of Privatization.” A male character, Mr. Big, representing corporate water business, stands on a platform just downstage of the powerpoint image. Mr. Big is standing in position ready to give his powerpoint presentation on the Myths of Privatization. Sitting in a circle below Mr. Big are enthusiastic but rather recalcitrant students. The young students are confused by Mr. Big’s presentation and ask him a series of questions. They are eager to learn but need clarification on the many contradictions within Mr. Big’s presentation. Standing stage right of Mr. Big is his sentinel. The sentinel is a fierce and ominous-looking character. She gives the appearance of being more threatening than Mr. Big. When the students begin to frustrate Mr. Big with their questions, Mr. Big signals to the sentinel to stop them. She stops them by giving them a look and a gesture to sit down. This is enough for them to sit back down and keep quiet, for they fear her power even more than they fear Mr. Big. The scene is performed with great exaggeration.

MR. BIG Good Evening. My Name is Mr. Big. Tonight I shall present for you *THE THREE MYTHS OF P-R-I-V-A-T-I-Z-A-T-I-O-N*. Let me introduce myself. My name is “humanity.” I am a human being. I believe that all human beings have the right to life, to liberty, and to *WATER* ... Water ... I love water. I think all God’s children should have water. God and I have a lot in common. We are both *providers*. God provides the water but not the pipes.

Then I step in as your Pipe-Provider: Great BIG Pipes with great BIG Water.

Clean, safe, *AFFORDABLE* water. I believe that water is a human right. And because it is a human right, I believe in the sanctity, the efficiency, and the humanity of *ownership* and the private sector. (*Interruption*)

TRACY A. Mr. Big, oh Mr. Big: You mean “privatization”?

MR. BIG Well, yes. Of course, this is a presentation on *THE THREE MYTHS OF PRIVATIZATION!*

TRACY A. (*Very rebellious against Mr. Big*) This provocation that is privatization. The public sector demands people before profit 'cause price is the pollution in these water wars. Water lords juxtaposed with water serfs. We must recover our desire to treat water with respect!

MR. BIG (*Looking down on her with disdain*) YOU ARE A PROBLEM.

TRACY A (*Still talking back*) Right side, cold water! Left side, hot!

(*The sentinel snaps her fingers and gives Tracy a threatening stare. Tracy reluctantly sits down.*)

MR. BIG (*Straightens himself up and gets back into "presentation mode."*) Privatization is a *complex* phenomenon. Water is a *complex* phenomenon. BUT! When we put them together – oh, it is oh so *easy*.  
(*A second interruption*)

ASHLEY (*Earnestly concerned and frustrated*) They say that one third of Africa's people live under scarce water conditions. They say that thirty liters of water a day is what you need to survive. And then they tell me that the average US citizen uses five hundred liters of water a day? What is wrong with my country I wonder? They say that sanitation is the key. They say that 80 percent of sickness comes from water. They say that in certain areas 80 percent of the pollution destroying water comes from untreated human wastes!

MR. BIG (*Jumps to console her.*) Of course it is terrible! terrible! terrible! This is why we must help those people, make life better for them. I know what is best for them.

ASHLEY (*Interrupting*) But Mr. Big, oh, Mr. Big –

MR. BIG Too many questions. (*Sentinel steps out and stares at Ashley. Ashley is intimidated by her presence and sits back down.*) I shall now recite the *THE THREE MYTHS OF PRIVITIZATION!* MYTH NUMBER ONE: "PROFIT BEFORE PEOPLE." Reeecidulous! We believe in EFFICIENCY! – Organized water delivery driven by the competitive forces of the market. In Privatization, Efficiency is not an *option* – it's a *requirement*. When people can't develop and manage their own water systems – we develop and manage for them! *Efficiency* – it makes everyone happy! And they will thank us for it! Cherry Picking? Did I hear someone say Cherry Picking – giving to the rich who can pay, only to take from the poor who cannot – oh! Not nice AT All! Never!

SHANNON (*Interrupts very meekly.*) But what about the shareholders! Don't, don't they de-de-demand a profit?

MR. BIG (*Barks back!*) Are you being difficult, Young Lady?

SHANNON (*Startled by his anger*) Oh, nononononononono!

MR. BIG I will not answer that on the grounds that it may intimidate me!

KERSTIN (*Recalcitrant and forceful*) The fundamental issue is that the poor are not profitable. God provided the water but not the pipes. Not to be confused with God, but that pyramid of power, those big rich countries, that WTO, that IMF, they swoop in with their pipes and their pumps and their technology and INSIST that THIS is the way to do it. Don't get in our way, or we will mess you up! You want help? Here it is. Don't look a gift horse in the mouth my friend because this horse is sick and untrustworthy, but it's a horse nonetheless. (*Sentinel steps forward ... Kerstin sits down.*)

MR. BIG (*Ignoring Kerstin*) MYTH NUMBER TWO: LACK OF TRANSPARENCY. Hah! As if I had anything to hide! We have been accused of making private agreements with governments and politicians. We have been accused of not listening to the LOCAL people, not recognizing their own local water systems, or not including them in negotiations, OF NOT BEING DEMOCRATIC!!!

CRISTINA G (*Stands up and speaks boldly.*) Water, water everywhere, and not a drop to drink ... el agua es del pueblo, carajo! The water's of the people, dammit!! (*Sentinel steps toward Cristina, and she sits.*)

MR. BIG MYTH NUMBER THREE: CONDITIONALITIES. Number three is a terrible, terrible myth – we have been accused of attaching “strings” to international aid, to loans, to debt relief – they accuse us of such crass, such miserable, such deplorable methods of *forcibly* implementing water privatization. As if anyone *wouldn't* want to privatize in the first place. They say we demand water privatization in return for aid, debt relief, loans ... oh, the things we have to put up with ...

MELORA (*Frustrated with the sentinel and Mr. Big, Melora rises and speaks.*) But wait! There is something wrong here! You are not telling the whole truth! There is more to ...

*(The others join Melora and speak in protest at Mr. Big's presentation. They are about to rise from their seats. The powerpoint presentation ends. The sentinel signals for Mr. Big to leave, and he runs off the stage. The sentinel stands on the platform and takes his place. The protesting students turn to the FunkyBreakdown Café and freeze.)*

*FunkyBreakdown café*

On the island stage left of Mr. Big are a group of slam poets who will deconstruct the claims of Mr. Big in their own vernacular poetics. They are all relaxing on the platforms in various casual, “super cool” poses. They are urbane and irreverent. They are watching and listening to Mr. Big from the opposite side of the stage at their poetry slam scene. They have been listening to the entire Mr. Big presentation and also listening to the sentinel and the students. Although they gesture at the absurdity of Mr. Big, they are calm and unaffected by his claims. They wait their chance to speak. The lights go down on the Mr. Big scene and come up on the FunkyBreakdown Poets. Still sitting in their “super cool” positions as the lights come up, one of the poets, Marie, comes downstage to introduce them: “Welcome to the spoken word FunkyBreakdown Café!” One by one the poets come centerstage to riff on water. The following poem by Tracy Walker serves as one example.

The performer, Tracy Walker, comes downstage from the “FunkyBreakdown Café” and speaks out to the audience. The poem is performed in the rhythm and cadence of a spoken-word poet. She gestures every line and with detailed, flowing movements playfully and critically enacts her satire on bottled water.

Disdain, Sapphire Hills, Poland Spring, Spring Mills, Mountain Glacier,  
Mountain Valley, Crystal Geysers, Perrier, Aquarian, Aqua Fiji,  
Appalachian, Alpine,

America!

Our bottled water lines betray our privilege.

We buy evian-evi-expensive \$2, \$3, \$5 bottles thinkin’ we gettin’ shit from  
some nymph in a natural spring somewhere.

Somewhere, some nymph handing out some natural life elixir ...

No one wants to think, I mean, you all might not want to think that 25 percent  
of those nymphs look a lot like your kitchen sink.

We have flavored water, sparkling water, vitamin water, energy water, and  
designer water sold in glass containers.

While America has top quality drinking water at our finger tips!

We buy plastic bottles to take our sips.

We buy plastic bottles to have our water fresh / our water clean / our water  
pure / our water  
natural.

Our thirst for quote PURITY is our country’s drive for quote PURITY.

Our flight from mental poverty when we ignore our tapped water privilege ...

as we are so privileged when we drink our bottled water.

Now ... I want to make a statement about privilege.

Privilege is just another word for degree of separation, of remove.

We are so removed from want, from true want for the necessities of life that we claim brand loyalty for the necessities of life.

We can claim brand loyalty to our source of survival like we claim fidelity to a football team, that's why we are privileged.

Our privilege is as marketed as our bodies have become and both slip most easily into civil invisibility ...

We are picky about our water. We ARE. I am.

I have a bottled water brand preference and I WILL exercise my right to buy that brand.

That's privilege. This is privilege. But this is America.

What we must know is that our privilege has costs, and those corporations will take water from foreign lands to feed our inclination toward brand filtration.

To maintain our disbelief in our own water quality and the healing powers of purified labeling.

They will push the privatized privilege on foreign lands until water itself seems like a privilege for those who can afford to pay for it.

Water? A Privilege?

The Mr. Big/FunkyBreakdown segment was in sharp contrast to the Savelugu/Ibrahim segment. Here, we now turn from the *sense of being present* toward the *aim to provoke*. The *aim to provoke* in that we wanted the audience to make judgments, choose a side, begin to feel oppositional to/with the polemics being performed. First, our purpose was not so much to stir compassion or empathy for individuals and their location through a *sense of being present* as it was to stir critique, evaluation, and judgment, and to stand outside *presence* as self-aware respondents evaluating ideas. Second, the fourth wall was blatantly mocked and traversed as Mr. Big and the Funky Poets acknowledged and often pandered to the audience, performatively ridiculed, and deconstructed the notion of crossing over into another and different realm of meaning and action. The actors crossed over with playfulness and braggadocio, leaving the audience no fourth wall of illusion to enter.

*Provocation* replaces *presence* by interrupting empathy for argument. It was a matter of juxtaposing presence with provocation throughout the

scene that formed its dramatic rhythm. Specific to Mr. Big/Funky Poet's scene, *the aim to provoke* relied on the central modes of *parody and satire*. In replacing presence, parody and satire stirred provocation and served the dual purpose of also resisting and avoiding didacticism. The purpose of the Mr. Big/FunkyBreakdown scene was to present the basic arguments against the corporate privatization of water without falling into didacticism.

Mr. Big and the Funky Poets made political points about water privatization and the inequity of access and affordability that compose the gulf between developing world countries and those draining the world water supply. The challenge was how to make political points and be an effective advocate for water democracy without preaching a soapbox harangue. The use of parody/satire is often the way out of this problem. If parody is "ironic conversion" and "imitation with a critical difference,"<sup>35</sup> then Mr. Big played classic parody as irony, imitation, and inversion to both establish key arguments against corporate privatization – what he called "myths" – and, moreover, to justify them. Through irony and inversion, Mr. Big substantiates the very arguments he rails against. Mr. Big's language and style in promoting privatization are theatrically framed to promote the opposite intent. Through theatrical ridicule, the "Three Myths" are formed to inform the audience that they are not myths at all.

The juxtaposition of the FunkyBreakdown side by side and sequentially following Mr. Big contrasted the high with the low, reminiscent of the boardroom with the street, the technology of powerpoint with the orality of vernacular poets, the illogic of the more powerful with the imagination of the less powerful. The juxtaposition of the two islands punctuated Mr. Big's pro-privatization parody performance against the funky poets anti-privatization satiric one. The poets were not, like in the case of Mr. Big, embodying ridicule or acting ridiculous (as Mr. Big called the Myths ridiculous) but, instead, the poets were performing sarcasm or acting sarcastically as they named and described the ridiculous. The poets were less of a comic imitation and burlesque exaggeration (as Mr. Big) and more of an excessive boast of insulting histrionics. The poets enacting toward Mr. Big what Henry Louis Gates refers to, in the African American tradition of signifying and insult, as "troping a dope."<sup>36</sup>

The Mr. Big and FunkyBreakdown scenes, through parody/satire and juxtaposition, served as a house of mirrors to distort, exaggerate, magnify, reflect, as well as resemble the realities experienced in the field as they relate

to water business. This segment needed to communicate truthfully and theatrically realities thousands of miles away and make them piercingly relevant and up close.

While Mr. Big explicitly parodies the three Myths of Privatization, the FunkyBreakdown Poets were to implicitly communicate points of information realized during fieldwork. First, market ideology is like a religion. People believe in their hearts and minds that it is the supreme being of economic and material existence and no real alternatives can match the unrelenting faith in the market. Second, when the rising tide of water scarcity became an international issue in the 1990s, it was understood as a dwindling commodity that must succumb to the laws of supply and demand. Third, the private water industry justified their efforts in taking over public water systems, claiming public water systems were wasteful and inefficient in delivering water and sanitation. Fourth, as the water industry attempted to displace public water systems, they did not recognize the informal water systems poor people had in place in their own communities. The donkey-cart sellers and the various mechanisms poor people used to sell and distribute their water were ignored *and* disrupted. As Issah said to me in the car on the way to back from Savelugu: “Instead of supporting local people who have struggled but still operated and survived for years and years in providing water for themselves, these businesses make no attempt to provide support or structures to help improve the mechanism they already have in place. Instead, they end up doing just the opposite by making life even harder and undermining them.”

There were three added “lessons” from the field performed in the Mr. Big scene within the “Myths of Privatization” that were essential. First, private companies have a legal obligation to their shareholders, thousands of miles away, to make profits. These profits are seldom reinvested back into the local water system to benefit local people. Second, the contracts between private companies and government officials are not transparent. They are developed and agreed upon behind closed doors without input from local communities. As a result, these companies follow the practice of cherry-picking where they service water for the most affluent areas and leave the public sector to service the poorest areas. Third, privatization is commonly tied to conditions. Aid, international loans, and debt relief are granted only if certain free market policies, such as water privatization, are agreed upon, even though many of the policies “have plunged the world’s poorest people further into poverty.”<sup>37</sup>



SCENE FOUR: WHO AM I IN ALL THIS? OR, THE (JUXTA)  
POSITION OF THE ETHNOGRAPHER

*Dear Journal,  
University of Ghana  
Legon – Accra, Ghana, West Africa  
October 12, 1998*

*There is no water in my flat – the pipes are dry. There's no water left in my storage containers. There's no water anywhere here in Legon. I can't find water and it's a bit scary. How many storage containers will it take for me to never run out of clean water again? They warned us at the Fulbright orientation about the pipes drying up, but I never thought it would go on this long. Kweku has a friend in Dzowulu who keeps a large reservoir of water. He said he thinks his friend will share his water. Hopefully, the water will be flowing from the pipes in the next few days. I worry how the students here are managing. How do people live day-to-day worrying about how they will get water?*

*I have never known water to disappear.*

*Waiting for water ...*

In performing the poetics and polemics of water and representing seminal moments of fieldwork, it was important that I address my own positionality. Where was I in all this controversy over water? It was important to reveal moments of my own fraught position and internal struggles in the field as well as in making the performance. This brings me again to the notion of juxtaposition. Throughout the show, the juxtapositions of various symbols, texts, ideas, and opposites were positioned and placed “side by side” to create different and new meanings and sensations for the performers and the audience. Juxtaposition and the side-by-side arrangements are a proximic of both closeness and contrast. What is different about an element is further emphasized by its nearness or closeness to its opposite. But, just as physical juxtaposition was employed, there were moments where psychological juxtaposition also became important. The example that follows is the psychological binary within the inner world of the ethnographer herself represented by R1 and R2. R1 was downstage center speaking directly to the audience, and R2 was upstage on a platform speaking directly to R1. This physical juxtaposition underscored a psychological juxtaposition within the binary of the ethnographic self that knows *and* the ethnographic self that questions her own knowing in an attempt to provoke a truer reckoning with one's own intentions. In this instance “self-reflexivity” was performed, and it evolved into a drama of inner conflict – one self battling with the intentions of the Other self.

*The performance – the ethnographer speaks to herself*

*(Recorder One comes downstage and begins speaking to the audience as Recorder Two stands on a platform upstage observing her.)*

- RI In KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, they arrested Mr. Sule and put him in a prison cell. He had stolen water.<sup>38</sup>
- R2 What happened?
- RI Mr. Sule earned 100 rand a month selling water, but eventually he could not afford to pay the water bill. He also had to pay for food and shelter for his family and school fees for his children. His family needed water and he could no longer stand by and watch his children beg for it. Mr. Sule made an illegal connection to the supply pipe. When it was discovered, the police came and put him in jail.
- R2 What does Mr. Sule have to do with you? What are you doing here in Ghana?
- RI It's about water ... I need to know more ... I need to do ...
- R2 (*Mockingly*) Water ... I need to know ... I need to do ... What is it you need to know ... to do?
- RI There are big people with big money who want to own the water.
- R2 And???
- RI AND they want to *sell* it!
- R2 AND???
- RI AND they want to manage it and make a *profit!*
- R2 ANNNNNND???
- RI AND there will be people who can NOT afford to pay for it!
- R2 Ohhhhhhhh ... But, what has that got to do with you, nosey woman! Stay out of other people's business. PROFIT and PRIVATIZATION have always been the twins of progress! You know what they say: "God provided the water, but not the pipes."
- RI There will be people who can NOT afford to pay for it!!
- R2 Read my lips: (*Emphasizes each word.*) W A T E R B U S I N E S S – m-a-n-a-g-e-m-e-n-t // d-I-s-t-r-I-b-u-t-I-o-n // m-a-I-n-t-e-n-a-n-c-e // s-a-n-I-t-a-t-I-o-n. PIPES! PIPES! PIPES! Water is not free!
- RI (*Preachy*) Water Can Not Be Owned! Water is a public good. The public will manage it, the public should profit from it, the public ...
- R2 (*She laughs.*) The public/Shmub-lic! ... Hah! (*As if reading a headline, then becomes very, very sarcastic.*) The public in the Developing World Economies, oh that public has been VERY successful, so *efficient*, so *honest* and SO concerned about the public good – Yes, yes, getting

water to allllllll the people allllll the time, concerned about allllll its poor citizens, never an ounce of corruption or waste or just NOT knowing what the hell they're doing ... yes, *leave* it to the governments of these countries, after all they have done SO well (*Dramatic change in attitude*) ... done *soooo* well –

- R1 You don't understand. You haven't been paying attention to ... it is ... it is ... let me explain ... the problem is ...
- R2 The PROBLEM is the public sector has done so well as the water pipes break down everywhere, as the water collectors take money from the people and put that money in their *own* pockets, as the government water companies overcharge, mischarge, undercharge, or don't charge for water they mismanage while all the while making a messy waste of natural resources. Some people around here haven't had water flowing from their pipes in weeks! Months!
- R1 You are not looking below the surface! You don't know what you're talking about. You don't know anything ... It is more complex, it's more complex ...
- R2 (*Mocking in a high voice*) "It's more complex, it's more complex ..."  
Maybe if the Big people come, with their Big plans, and their Big money, and their Big pipes, and their Big teams, and their Big, Big, Big, Big promises, maybe people in this country can get some water ... clean, fresh, EFFICIENT water.
- R1 You don't understand what is really going on. You are missing the point. You don't understand.
- R2 Then make me understand! Help me understand! Tell me what I need to know and do! Tell me the TRUTH! You are here taking up space and getting in the way ... Tell me what is the truth and what needs to be done ...
- R1 (*Grasping for words and thinking hard*) The truth is ... The problem ... hm ... It is complex ...
- R2 (*Exasperated*) What is COMPLEX!
- R1 I'm learning ... It's here, I've got to get to ... I'm here ... I will be here.
- R2 Learn what you came here to learn! Don't give me slogans and platitudes! I am so tired of slogans and platitudes! Can you say something different and more? Recorder! There is no replacement for water! NO Replacement.
- R1 & R2 There is more to know here ... I will be here ...
- R1 I will be here
- R2 I will be here ... WE

R1 WE

R2 We must.

R1 & R2 We must.

A reflection ... *aim to provoke*

Dialectic theatre and the Brechtian idea that “art is not a mirror held up to reality but a hammer with which to shape it” were motivating factors in our *aim to provoke*.<sup>39</sup> The belief that theatre provokes self-reflection and critical awareness was the philosophy guiding our *aim to provoke*. We wanted to bring forth argument and counter catharsis. The notion of catharsis, as a means of transforming complex, disruptive, political ideas through expressions that leave the audience purged and complacent, was countered through parody and satire. We wanted the audience to be disturbed by the political economy of Third World water.

We placed inside each audience member’s program a listing of organizations with varying degrees of water politics and commitments: charities, NGOs, international institutions, and local activist groups. This list was a place to start for those who felt they wanted to know more or do more about water justice and access on a local, national, or international scale. Ideally, the performance hoped to provoke audience members to become part of a worldwide water movement – this was the highest aim – while, at the same time, keeping in mind that *Water Rites* was a performance and not a social rally. Therefore, *the aim to provoke* was not only about joining a movement or organization. We hoped to also provoke people to learn more about the political economy of water locally and globally, to complicate their needs and notions about bottled water, and to stir up interests in the cultural and symbolic uses of water.

*The aim to provoke* was not exclusively directed toward the audience and their response, but it was also part of our process as a performance community. We provoked each other. The performers enacted with and for each other invocations and provocations at several levels: the provocations expressed by water activists that the students were exposed to as they learned about water; their own provocations that evolved during rehearsal discussions on the politics of water and through their process of developing *Water Rites*; and, finally, my own internal provocations that I was battling with as the ethnographer/director. For example, Mr. Big as a representative of big business provoked his stage listeners to echo the questions that water activists ask and to reflect the activists’ major critiques. The FunkyBreakdown poets provoked by Mr. Big enacted the students’ own responses to water through

their spoken-word poetry as they learned more and more about the issues. And, finally, my internal provocations were embodied in the battle between R1 and R2 as I questioned my ethnographic intentions. Why include this personal level of provocation with the other standpoints of provocation? First, there were claims made about water, and I must be accountable for how and in what form those claims are made. Second, because the performance constituted a highly subjective and polemical view that was generated by my research and the interpretation of my research, to acknowledge this fact is to acknowledge that whether right or wrong – clear or unclear – it is not a neutral reflection of a phenomenon but my own subjective and biased interpretation.

To include my own inner conflict is to reach into and display the psychic dilemma that plagues most ethnographers who are provoked by their own inner questions and turmoil around issues of position, ethics, truth, etc. *The aim to provoke* was the aim to show and tell, enact and communicate a “response” with the hope the audience would feel compelled to do more, to learn more, think more, and effect change about water.

*Coda: August 2008*

I was visiting Kwesi Pratt at the office of *The Insight* newspaper, when Al-Hassan arrived. We arranged to meet and discuss the latest developments concerning the public water movement. Al-Hassan said that as a result of the mass demonstrations against privatization, the private companies withdrew. However, the World Bank then provided loans for foreign companies to acquire management contracts to manage the day-to-day operations of the Ghana Water Company. As a consequence, in 2006, a consortium comprised of a Dutch and a South African company signed a five-year contract to manage the GWC. Al-Hassan said, “This is simply another form of privatization, except the companies have nothing to lose because they have no investment. The management company is responsible for servicing water to eighty-two water systems in the country. It is not working. Accra was without water for more than a month, and water flowing through the pipes is inconsistent throughout the country. Yet the price of water has increased by 66 percent within the last two years.” Al-Hassan said Savelugu remains a model for community water distribution, but if they have no water coming into the area to distribute, what can they do?

Al-Hassan continues to work full-time nationally and internationally on water. In 2007 at the World Social Forum, The African Water Network was launched. Al-Hassan was appointed the coordinator. The Network held

their general meeting in Kenya where twenty-four African countries participated.

After speaking with Al-Hassan, on my way home to East Legon I remembered the early days of my fieldwork and a particular water rite I witnessed years ago at a trotro stop. I was standing at the trotro stop trying to get a bus back home. It was so hot that day. I could hardly breathe, and nothing could quench the thirst. Every trotro that passed by was filled with people packed together, crushed inside, trying to get where they needed to go – a stream of dilapidated, old vans full of exhaust fumes, sweaty bodies, overbearing heat, and smells ... Everything felt so crowded and so dirty that day. I was hot and tired and missing my home in the USA and feeling very much like the Ugly American. As I waited, hoping a trotro would come so I could squeeze into one empty seat and get back to the quiet and solitude of my flat in Legon, I looked down the road a bit and saw a woman sitting over a bucket of soapy water. There was a child at her feet; she undressed the child and then placed him in the bucket of water. She was bathing the child in the public market place ... “Quiet and solitude” for her are a different reality than they are for me. I was transfixed by what was more than just a woman bathing a child outside in a hot crowded market, but how the ordinary – how the day-to-day – is so strong and impeccably resilient against the facts of its own reality. As I watched the woman and child, suddenly an old man, appearing to be mad – his hair matted, half-dressed with very dirty clothes – walked up to the woman. Without the least concern, she simply brushed him away with a wave of her hand and continued to bathe the child. The man, undeterred – very dirty – stumbled toward the bucket and began taking off his clothes as he attempted to step into the soapy water with the baby. Immediately, two young men standing next to me at the trotro stop quickly walked over to the old man and with such sincere gentleness and gracious respect helped the man put his clothes on and then guided him back down the road. The woman paid no mind to the old man ... no mind to anyone or anything else around her – kept her willful attention on her child and their ritual. For much of the global South, specifically Africa, dirt is a fact and a symbol: dirty people having dirty children with dirty faces, wearing dirty clothes. Dwight Conquergood stated: “Labeling someone or something ‘dirty’ is a way of controlling perceived anomalies, incongruities, contradictions, ambiguities – all that does not fit into our categories, and therefore, threatens cherished principles. Dirt, then, functions as the mediating term between ‘Difference’ and ‘Danger’.”<sup>40</sup> We know that dirt is to be got rid of, but we tend to forget that dirt will dwell where water is inaccessible. Nor do we remember that when

sanitation systems are impaired or nonexistent, dirt embraces disease. The Other bodies, the loathsome bodies – the dirty body, the disfigured body, the sick body, the body that smells of refuse, the body that oozes, excretes, and cannot shelter its waste, the bodies grotesquely “out of place”<sup>41</sup> – are the bodies that wrenching poverty will breed in its abominable lack. Disgust encircles these bodies with visceral loathing and fear – fear of nearness and the threat of contamination, loathing for the failure of these bodies to keep themselves out of sight. Dirt is a factor of economic and political conditions but, as a tactical deflection, is generally cast as a moral flaw. But in this small moment on a hot day in a crowded African market a woman bathes her child, a Water Rite – Resistant and Real.

## NOTES

1. The scene was adapted from my fieldwork interviews.
2. *The Civic Response* mission statement defines its function as “a multi-purpose citizenship centre that organizes citizen forums and engagements that allow development of empowering perspectives and actions on a wide range of development issues. It also supports democratic civic activism through ad hoc information, advice, guidance and support (IAGS) clinics and by provision of affordable support services to self-organised citizens’ groups.”
3. *The Insight* is a bi-weekly, leftist, independent, alternative newspaper that serves as a radical check for greed and corruption throughout levels of power in Ghana as well as for national and international structures of neoliberal policies.
4. Adinkra Symbols are a philosophical writing system of about sixty-three abstract, artistic shapes originally created by the Akan of Ghana and the Gyaman of the Ivory Coast in West Africa that represent concepts, aphorisms, and cultural history.
5. One of the greatest challenges for the GWC was that the rural to urban migration overburdened the water system. People from the rural areas are creating an overwhelming influx of urban population, requiring the GWC to extend its water supply in these areas.
6. Black, *The No-Nonsense Guide to Water*, p. 68.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*, p. 82.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Rudolf N. Amenga-Etego, spokesman for Ghana’s National Coalition Against the Privatization of Water.
12. This criticism based on the social implications expressed in the language of water as a natural resource draws on the work of Maggie Black; Linton, “The Social Nature of Natural Resources”; and Holland, *The Water Business*.
13. Linton.

14. Ibid.
15. Ferris, "When the Well Runs Dry."
16. Ibid.
17. Jackson, "Shango Diaspora," p. 351.
18. Black, p. 9.
19. Alexander, "Performance and Pedagogy," p. 27.
20. Quoted in Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, pp. 24–30.
21. Ibid.
22. Cabral, "Return to the Source," p. 261.
23. The Institute for Policy Alternatives (IPA) defines its mission as "a public policy think-tank whose vision is to be the center of excellence for practice – research interfaces and citizen engagement on alternative policy analysis, development, and pro-poor advocacy. IPA has as its mission the promotion of policy alternatives in Africa by combining the efforts of researchers with those of practitioners to establish perspectives, experiences, and new, more engaging paradigms for development that focus on the rights of citizens and communities. IPA also supports Ghanaian policy makers and practitioners to undertake development research, learning, and practice, thereby giving meaning, intellectual relevance, and empirical challenge to those involved in policy development and advocacy." [www.ipaghana.org/index.php/organisational\\_profile](http://www.ipaghana.org/index.php/organisational_profile), accessed January, 2009.
24. Shiva, *Water Wars*, pp. xiv–xv.
25. Madison, "Staging Fieldwork," pp. 397–418; Madison, *Critical Ethnography*, p. 1.
26. Stuart Hall's sentiment expressed in a public lecture on the campus of Chapel Hill in 1997, speaking about the power of representation and misrepresentation as a consequence of how individuals, groups, and communities are treated by others, particularly those in power.
27. Conquergood, "Rethinking Ethnography Strategies."
28. Davis and Postlewait, *Theatricality* 2004, pp. 1–39.
29. Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*.
30. Referring to Jacques Derrida's critique of presence and the refutation of a "Metaphysics of Presence" where to be present before another denotes a true self, a perfect one-to-one connection to the other's thoughts, feelings, and meanings. He problematizes this presence as divine and constituting an unarguable meaning, and refutes "presence" as a truth or a transcendental signifier that cannot be altered and denied.
31. Jackson, "Genealogies of Performance Studies," pp. 73–86.
32. The idea that the ethnographer is the foreigner and persistent questioner – the one who does not know – and therefore is always searching for answers and insights among those who are native to the locale and who do know, resulting in this knower and known position leaving the ethnographer, in some instances, feeling and looking foolish.
33. Amenga-Etego, "National CAP," p. 1.
34. Anthony Giddens, quoted in Shove, *Comfort, Cleanliness and Convenience*, pp. 7–8.



35. Hutcheon, *Theory of Parody*.
36. Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*.
37. Hall and Lobina, *Pipe Dreams*.
38. Holland, p. 65.
39. Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*.
40. Conquergood, "Health Theatre," p. 197.
41. Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust*. See also Douglas, *Purity and Danger*.

ACT III

*Acts of activism*

In Act III we come to the realm of street performance and ask the question: What is at stake when performance enters and becomes public space? This section is introduced through an event signifying my own Diaspora citizenship as an African American woman finding home between two geographies of belonging – the United States and West Africa. My black Diaspora account of street performance is then followed by reflections on street performances by three Ghanaian women in the modes of oral history and poetic verse. In this section I choose to distinguish the speakers' words and bodily presence through verse in order to capture their unique poetics and verbal artistry, as well as to document the experiential and performative aspects that constituted their delivery or telling. These women were the primary agents in transforming an idea, relating to the protection and well-being of other women, into a public performative act. They transformed an urgent need into a performance, ordinary citizens into actors and audience, and quotidian spaces into memorable events. For African women whose voices are too often under-represented, representing their tellings in verse distinguishes them as performative narrators within the present space of the ethnographic interview as well as performance makers within a particular moment in history.

SCENE ONE: THE WHITE GIRL UPSTAIRS: LANDING  
AT GHANA'S KOTOKA AIRPORT, 2000

What does it mean to be at home? How does leaving home affect home and being-at-home?

Home is here not a particular place that one simply inhabits, but more than one place: there are too many homes to allow place to secure the roots or routes of one's destination. It is not simply that the subject does not belong anywhere. The journey between homes provides the subject with the contours of a space of belonging, but a

space that expresses the very logic of an interval, the passing through of the subject between apparently fixed moments of departure and arrival.<sup>1</sup> (Sarah Ahmed)

When my plane was about to land at Kotoko International Airport in Ghana, West Africa, in March 2000, I had been away from Africa for nearly a month. I had gone home to the United States to see my son and my daughter after more than two years of fieldwork in Ghana. I was leaving home to come home. For the last two years, airports on both sides of the Atlantic marked physical and symbolic junctures of the departure and arrival of home. Airports had become rhizomes of perennial beginnings and endings, of a marked liminality that delineated what it meant to depart one life and arrive in another. Airports became the synecdoche for a black Diaspora citizenship and for a politics of mobility.

During fourteen hours of travel, I departed home in order to arrive home and, in the sentiment of Alice Walker, to do the work my soul must do,<sup>2</sup> in Ghana, by doing the work of performance and by making a performance that, hopefully, mattered. As I gathered my belongings to leave the plane, at the time I thought it was my last year in Africa. I believed I was in the final stage of my fieldwork – the culminating stage. This was the year I would stage the performance, thereby making my fieldwork public and its purpose known.

It was upon entering the airport and waiting for my friend and fellow Fulbright sister, Lisa Aubrey, to pick me up that I began to feel the full weight of what I thought would be this final arrival. This was it. There was no turning back. It was time to transform two years of fieldwork data on poverty and indigenous human rights activism into a public performance, a public performance for the purpose of advocacy and change.

As I walked through the airport, I thought of the performance and its purpose. This performance that I had already titled *Is It a Human Being or a Girl?*<sup>3</sup> was going to be about the work of Ghanaian human rights activists and the work they were doing in their own country, and it had to be powerful and true and absolutely urgent because bodies were on the line. These people were changing the lives of women and girls by re-imagining the discourse of rights, by mobilizing their communities, and by changing the law. Moreover, Ghanaians did this for themselves under the forces of wretched poverty and global inequity. The performance had to unveil the labor of these activists working in their local communities, *and* it had to unveil the devastating effects of neoliberal forces that impeded and burdened their victories. This performance aimed to expose the hidden, clarify the oblique, and articulate the possible. It would be a performance of possibility<sup>4</sup> that aimed to create and contribute to a discursive space

where unjust systems and processes would be identified and interrogated. “Dissemination of democratic discourse to new and needed areas of the social is the first step toward change . . . One becomes radicalized when one finds a compelling discourse to speak.”<sup>5</sup> I hoped the performance would provide such a discourse through the descriptions and narratives of those Ghanaian rights activists who told me their stories. Staging their struggles for human rights and the mandate for economic justice through the illuminating frame of performance promised this dissemination of democratic discourse. I hoped the performance would offer its audience another way to speak of rights and the origins of poverty that would then disclose another possibility of informed and strategic action. In other words, the significance of the performance for the subjects of my fieldwork is for those who bear witness to their stories to interrogate actively and purposefully those processes that limit their health and freedom. I do not mean to imply that one performance can bring about a revolution, but one performance can be revolutionary in enlightening citizens as to the possibilities that grate against injustice. One performance may or may not change someone’s world, but, as James Scott reminds us, acts of resistance amass rather like snowflakes on a steep mountainside and can set off an avalanche. Everyday forms of resistance give way to collective defiance.<sup>6</sup> The expectation is for the performers and spectators to appropriate the rhetorical currency they need, from the inner space of the performance to the outer domain of the social world, to make a material difference.<sup>7</sup> Performance scholar Diana Taylor reminds us that when confronted with certain “truths,” theatre has the power to illuminate not only what we see and how we see it, but how we can reject the reality of what we see and know to be true.<sup>8</sup> I believe more and more that a performance is always a harbinger of and a confrontation with the truth.

I see Lisa at the baggage claim.

“Lisa!” I shout, so happy to see my friend.

“Soyiiiiineeee!” she calls out with excitement in her Louisiana accent. “How was the flight?”

“The flight was fine. I have just been so worried about getting this performance ready. This is all on top of the fatigue of not sleeping for two days trying to get back here.”

“Oh Soyini, girrrrl, the performance will be wonderful and you will be fine. Besides, you don’t have time to be tired.”

“Why?” I asked curiously. “What’s happening?”

“We must organize a protest march on the American embassy for Amadou!”<sup>9</sup>

“Lisa, it is all so awful and so redundant.”

Lisa’s voice tightens. “Does a blackman’s life, a poor blackman’s life, mean anything in the US?” The march was Lisa’s idea, and I knew that she would be stalwart in mobilizing people of conscience to stand up and speak out against the murder of Amadou Diallo and the miscarriage of justice that followed. Still, I was so exhausted I could hardly speak.

“Lisa, are we meeting tonight?”

“Yes, we’re all meeting at Flavors Pub in Osu tonight. This will be our second meeting. I need you there to help organize. We don’t have much time. We need to mount the protest for next week!”

I’m stunned. “Next week?”

“Yes, next week. We need to get the letters and petitions to Washington within two weeks for a retrial. Are you too tired, Soyini? Can you make it, because we may be up all night.”

I take a deep, uneasy breath, not so much from fatigue but from the contradiction. I am in the home of my heart, Ghana, West Africa, reflecting back on a 400-year-old rage for the home of my birth, the United States of America. The ideology of liberal democracy in the United States is, for some, a model for the world, yet its democratic principles partner with racial injustice with flagrant consistency. Racism in America is no moribund phenomenon; whatever or however its forms of disguise, it is alive and still hurting people. I will protest here, in my African home, for what was done there, in my American home, to a black man born on this continent. I say to Lisa, “Let’s go.”

There are more people here at the march than we expected. We’ve worked very hard, and we’ve pulled it off. The teach-ins, the awareness sessions, the petitions, the letter-writing campaign, and the international solidarity day for Mumia Abu-Jamal<sup>10</sup> each were essential and dynamic projects in our organizing efforts for this march, the Amadou Diallo March. Each of these activities was a success, now culminating in this day. I look at all these people gathered here: they are a blend of races and ethnicities, expatriates from Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas living in Ghana from all over the world and coming to voice their indignation over the death of a young, innocent black man in New York City who was murdered by four plainclothes police officers as he was entering his residence in the Bronx. The police officers fired forty-one bullets at Amadou Diallo; nineteen of those bullets entered his body after he had fallen to the ground. The police were looking for a criminal, a young black man they thought was Amadou. They asked him if they could have a word with him. Amadou reached for his

wallet to show his identification; then the bullets came, and they kept coming. He did not have a weapon. The officers were brought to trial.<sup>11</sup> A jury of eight white men and four black women acquitted the four white police officers. I wonder, if all the officers had been black, would Amadou's life have been spared? It is a troubling thought, but I don't think it would have made a difference. Blackness is a universal signifier of fear, danger, and threat across color lines; the meanings play out in the destruction of too many black men in American cities by those powerful and powerless with guns. Here we all stand, together, on this day, March 8, 2000, remembering Amadou and demanding justice. And here I stand, African American, between two homes – one majority white, the other majority black. I stand here thinking about this thing called race that wrestles between Africa and America and that is complicated by the category "African American." Performance scholar Joni Jones writes:

Just what is an African American in Africa? My inability to answer this question uprooted a heretofore fundamental aspect of my identity, a part of the self I took for granted in the United States as a part of my cultural identity. In my mind, my dreadlocks, West African inspired clothing, and blackness of tongue meant something powerful in the United States, while for the Yoruba, these artifacts of identity elicited puzzlement, amusement, and sometimes disdain. I did not feel that my self, the self I had constructed on the US soil, was visible. Indeed, I felt out of my self.<sup>12</sup>

*A digression ... I remember*

I remember, during my first days in Ghana, I went to visit Lisa. I was looking for her flat; I couldn't figure out which apartment was hers. A Ghanaian living on the first floor of her building saw that I was lost. He knew that I was looking for Lisa, so referring to her, he asked, "Are you looking for the white girl upstairs?" I was taken aback by his description. Lisa is honey brown, with natural hair and West African-inspired clothing, and blackness of tongue. How could he mistake Lisa for a white woman!

"No," I said, unsettled and insulted. "I am not looking for a white girl, I am looking for Lisa Aubrey, and we are both African Americans." The man pointed to her apartment and then just shook his head and chuckled under his breath, "Abruni." I trembled. He had just called me a foreigner, a white person. Black people are dying and catching hell in the United States, and that man called me abruni! I belong to blackness as much as this man! I am reminded of cultural critic Elspeth Probyn: "If you have to think about belonging, perhaps you are already outside. Instead of presuming a common locus, I want to consider the ways in which the very longing to belong

embarrasses its taken-for-granted nature.”<sup>13</sup> For many black Americans, at profound moments, belonging requires a fixed political ground. Understanding that ultimately we belong in different categories and to different communities and that our belonging may be annunciated at different stages of political and social progressions (or regressions), beyond all this, “African American” as signifier and as signified is nonetheless a relatively stable reality of belonging to blackness in the United States, however complicated that belonging may be. I experience belonging within the racialization of blackness in the United States not as a longing from an outside identity to enter into an inside identity. I am always already inside. Even when I’m not thinking about it, am I ever not a black person? Granted, I experience black belonging on American soil as a space of flux and ambiguity constituting multiple identities; however, this belonging remains a discursive and material association with specific bodies based on historical, social, and political arrangements that are regulated through law, culture, and the everyday. As this belonging is discursively instituted and materially experienced, my black body is further evidence that I am not white and that I belong to the category of blackness. Black people can or cannot and will or will not choose to be slippery and equivocal about their racial identity and belonging. But for many black people in the United States, embracing this belonging, however it is articulated or whatever the level of its consistency, becomes a matter of saving one’s life and one’s sanity. This kind of belonging falls beyond intellectual or philosophical pondering; it is psychological and physical protection. I never questioned the fact of my blackness. It is as much a part of me as my skin, my nose, my mouth, my hair, and my speech, all the while with an understanding that it is beyond appearances. When Anna Julia Cooper said, “When and where I enter, my race enters with me,” she acknowledged the ubiquity of race as it is internally felt and externally constructed.<sup>14</sup> The ever-present fact of race looms within the multilayered realms of blackness in the United States and within a web of projections both colored and white, both hostile and admiring, where race/blackness often precedes being. In Ghana, West Africa, the words “white girl upstairs” disrupted the reality of belonging that I’ve always known to its very core. I was reminded that geography might be one of the greatest determiners of them all. Perhaps geography is destiny after all. My personhood, for Lisa’s neighbor, was outside blackness. I was outside belonging. I represented something else to him. At that moment, it was representation that eclipsed any notion of belonging. I was not a black woman, but the representation of a white one, the representation of a white, advanced country. The neighbor certainly understood

that I was not white like Julia Roberts is white. I was not white by phenotype, but by country. Although he may have understood that I was of African descent, it did not matter. Nation and global order took primacy over racial identification. In that instant, I represented an individual of American descent, not African descent. I live in an advanced country; he lives in the developing world. This fact of economy eclipsed blackness within the US context or any unity around Diaspora blackness that I might fantasize. Belonging may be the effect of identity, but representation became a framework for meaning in the white girl upstairs. And if representation embodies meaning, my meaning was now constructed by Lisa's neighbor as not black and as not belonging. And if one of the things that culture is based on is the production and exchange of meanings, and if one of the ways we give things meaning is by how we produce them and how we represent them or how they appear to us, in that moment the white girl upstairs became the classic encounter between cultural insider and cultural outsider. At that moment, insider/outsider was deeply inscribed and poignantly reversed. I was the outsider, and belonging was reversed. That race is socially made became an understatement at the sound of "white girl." We are reminded repeatedly (and for good reason) that race is constructed, reconstructed, and deconstructed depending on locale, history, and power, but immediate experience sometimes penetrates deeper. Would he have called Lisa white if she had been a man and if I had been a man? Would he have said, "the white boy upstairs"? If I had been a white American woman, would he have referred to race at all? Would he have said, "you mean the American or the lady upstairs?" I personalize my experiences in the field to engage ironically with a vulnerability toward universal questions and human unease. Race as personally experienced in the ethnographic then, when I became subject and object of the Other's gaze, brings me to the ethnographic now, writing. I theorize from the starting point of the personal and from my own racial dislocation between, within, and outside belonging in Africa. Race, in the moment – "white girl upstairs" – meant that this (re)construction of who I am is tied to where I live and where I travel, as well as politicized perspectives on wealth, opportunity, and technology, specifically as they are perceived by those in the global South, the developing world. That blackness is contingent – relative to African Americans, *not* on being of African descent but on being American citizens – is for many Africans taken for granted, while for many black Americans it is disheartening. Blackness is tied to slavery, terror, and discrimination, as it is also tied to a culture and past that are



generative, free, and prosperous. However, all these layers were displaced in recognition of my American citizenship, which is complicated because I am of African descent.

### *The march*

We are marching down the streets of Accra. This is less a protest march and more a street performance, or is it more a protest march because it is a street performance? We had all planned to meet at the Labonne Coffee Shop in town and then march in silence to the American embassy; upon reaching the embassy, we would begin our program of speeches and testimonies. But the silence has surrendered to the sheer energy of our collective will. We are all caught in the drama and the urgency of our indignation, which cannot be stilled by silence, not here on this continent of drums, poetry, and dance, always dance, because this coming together has evolved into a extemporaneous praise song mightily strung together by the antiquity of dark-skinned motion. The march is a performance of movement made into a variance of sounds, symbolic rhythms, and lyrical incantations of mourning and politics. The onlookers in our path join our chorus of steps. They sing and chant with us. They see the black and white T-shirts we are wearing, the word “Diallo” written in black letters across the front and the numbers “19 of 41” written across our backs. We pick up more and more people on our way. This march is becoming a carnival of contestation of the highest order, of purposeful action.<sup>15</sup> We are all together, absorbed spontaneously in the flow of this assemblage of movement and this alchemy of collective will. There is no white girl upstairs here; there is only, in this heightened moment, collective energy. On this path of street performance and protest, for this brief moment in time, all of us belong to each other for performance and because of it, and some of us for justice and because of it. More and more come to join the march. We are stepping and singing; we are meeting new friends; we are learning about the particularity of a lost life; we are enacting our urgency for justice. Reggae singer Shasha Marley raises his voice and calls. We respond.

The magic of our inspired union summoned by the dramatic sounds and motions of street performance displaced “the white girl upstairs,” at least today and with a possibility for tomorrow, into a Diaspora consciousness, a black Atlantic identity, that would demand that African peoples on the continent and in the United States understand Amadou’s death as an allegory for political action on both sides of the ocean. Now the march has grown to even greater numbers. Amadou Diallo’s memory is reaching out like a hand gesturing for another to hold and to remember. Manifest

through performance, the gesture is exquisite, evolving into a celebratory embrace.

We finally reach the American embassy. We form a large circle in front of the building. As the circle forms, we begin lighting our candles. Lisa begins the ceremony by recounting the night of Amadou's death. She concludes her presentation by speaking eloquently on the nature of democracy and descent. Her words are a call to action for free speech, for collective action, and for the US Department of Justice to intervene and bring federal civil rights charges against the acquitted police officers. After Lisa ends her presentation, I begin to speak. I am speaking of the power of mourning: mourning the hope of Amadou Diallo, who was like so many immigrants, who strive most of their lives to come to the land of opportunity, wealth, and happiness, and discover that when they finally arrive, they must confront the ominous inequality and violence of race in America. I close by recovering what it means to mourn, not only as loss but also as evocation. I am reminded of rights activists who have fought across national borders and their compelling cry: "Don't mourn, organize!" The ceremony is drawing to an end. The written statement we crafted, demanding a retrial and that civil charges be brought against the four police officers, is given to the director of the embassy. She receives the statement with the promise that the embassy would look into the matter and take action, as its officers also believe in justice.

*After the march: public protest as street performance*

Radical Street performance draws people who comprise a contested reality into what its creators hope will be a changing script.<sup>16</sup> (Jan Cohen-Cruz)

I returned to Ghana before opening *Is It a Human Being or a Girl?*, the performance that provides the title and focus of Act I. Although the performance was in my thoughts upon landing, the Diallo march occurred before I began adapting the script. Both events, the Diallo march and *Is It a Human Being or A Girl?*, suggest how performances merge and how one mode of performance may inspire, extend, or displace another. *Is it a Human Being or a Girl?* was postponed due to the need for an urgent response to the Diallo verdict. During our preparations for the march, little did I know that the street performance would inspire more serious attention to the stage performance in honoring activism, art, and public access. What was the power of our street performance and street performances generally?

Just as a bell cannot be unringed, our street performance cannot be undone. It is remembered, and it has produced friends, allies, and comrades, as it has

also inspired imagination. The promise of a performance of possibility is that it not only creates alliances while it names and marks injustice, but it also enacts a force beyond ideology; it enacts and imagines the vast possibilities of collective hopes and dreams coming into fruition, of actually being lived. In the words of performance scholar Janelle Reinelt, “performance can overrun ideology’s containment.”<sup>17</sup> Why, then, did our street performance matter? The performance made public international injustice committed on an American city street. It brought that injustice beyond its particular location by extending the arena of public viewing and awareness across national boundaries to invoke and materialize a transborder participatory call for justice, generating a street performance that embodied a dialogue with authority.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, in this more expanded performative participation, a re-visioning of ingrained social arrangements, relating to authority and violence, class and power, as well as freedom of speech and social change, was called into question by the voices and action of those situated below within the context of globalization.<sup>19</sup> The march evolved into a street performance that made spirited actors out of passive observers. Engaged action motivated by performative intervention, a performance of possibility, was required for the call and the response, for the testimonies, the dialogue, and the demand upon the American embassy. Moreover, it is the emotionally charged animation drawn from the body in motion within the heightened moments of performative intervention that unleashes a palpable defiance that dissolves apathy.<sup>20</sup> The performance evoked spontaneous *communitas* that offers the alchemy of human connection, conjoinment, and intersubjectivity to the power and ubiquity of memory. We remember how this communion felt for us and for each other, together. It was made even more powerfully human because it was publicly performed. I echo the sentiment of social activist Ernesto J. Cortes, Jr. that there is a dimension of our humanity that emerges only when we engage in public discourse. The street performance, empowered by collective action and the humanizing dynamics of public discourse, provided us with the gift of remembering. The street performance became a method and a means for the dissemination of discourse relative to rights, justice, and change, and for transborder participatory democracy.<sup>21</sup> Lisa Aubrey states: “By organizing the protest activities, African Americans were forcing the US to look into the mirror for the very transparency and probity it aims to cultivate and extract from other governments.”<sup>22</sup> The street performance honored the local in speaking truth to power<sup>23</sup> and became a communicative instrument in the public interrogation of injustice that resulted in the enactment of collective memory and mourning. Finally, the street performance opened the possibility for another strategy for globalization from below.

Globalization from above is making poor people poorer and rich people richer. Brecher, Costello, and Smith, in their important and concise book *Globalization From Below*, state:

The ultimate source of power is not the command of those at the top, but the acquiescence of those at the bottom ... In response to globalization from above, movements are emerging all over the world in social locations that are marginal to the dominant power centers. These are linking up by means of networks that cut across national borders. They are beginning to develop a sense of solidarity, a common belief system, and a common program. They are utilizing these networks to impose new norms on corporations, governments, and international institutions.<sup>24</sup>

The street performance is another illustration of the communicative function and political efficacy of performance in mobilizing communities for change. It serves as an added example of the potential of street performance as a platform for subaltern voices and for cross-border access and networks. To illuminate aspects of Baz Kershaw's discussion of "the politics of performance," our protest serves as an example of political street performance on several levels. First, it brought a reality that we contested into what we hoped would become a "changing script" or a reality of change. Cohen-Cruz writes, "When one needs most to disturb the peace, street performance creates visions of what society might be and arguments against what it is."<sup>25</sup> Second, theatre generally transports the audience to a reality apart from the everyday; however, street performance strives to transport everyday reality into the theatrical, into an imaginary or ideal. Third, street spectators are not necessarily predisposed theatre-goers or a deliberate theatre house audience; they do not go to the theatre but the theatre goes to them, now turning a public space into a theatrical space. Cohen-Cruz reminds us that street performance "is the gateway to the masses – it is a manifestation of public access." Fourth, the body is being offered for a common goal without the protection of a theatrical frame. Kershaw reflects, "I came to believe that change was brought about more by people making theatre than by watching it."<sup>26</sup>

Several years have passed since our march on the American embassy in Ghana, and I still relive in my memory the words and chants from several of our Ghanaian friends who were responsible for turning a protest march into a street performance. Shasha chanted "We are One Love"; Akosua kept repeating "We prove today that we are sisters"; Helen asserted "We are all African people"; and, as the march came to an end, Kweku said, "An ocean cannot divide our blood."

I remember the resounding force of the drummers and how our steps marked the rhythms of the drums along the road to the embassy under the hot sun, the blazing heat, and the many accented voices filled with song,

chant, poetry, and laughter. In Shasha's words, in the words of Bob Marley, and in the words of many other Ghanaians who performed that day, we were living in the *communitas* of one love.

But after the march, and beyond the path of the marchers, Lisa and I still remain the white girls upstairs. However, on that particular day, the alchemy of performance evoked a politics that was lived in the flesh and on the ground and that demanded social justice, a politics that is now remembered and recounted.

This narrative of our street performance is conveyed to you as I sit here now typing on my computer – at a distance in time and space from you, my invisible yet anticipated and imagined reader – my voice is only present to you through words that will eventually be pressed upon the pages of a book. So I turn now from my own street performance written to you to the street performances *told* to me through the face-to-face ethnographic encounters of three Ghanaian activists and their oral history performances.

In an effort not to lose or diminish that presence and to preserve a semblance of those embodied moments, I have chosen to write these three stories of street performance in poetic verse. It is the drama within the telling and the told<sup>27</sup> of these stories – the performative aspect of their delivery – and their improvisational, sensory, emotional, and poetic import(ance) that I hope to capture. There was also a practical reason for limiting poetic transcription to this Act. The previous interviews in Acts I and II are represented in direct dialogue because the intention is to include, as much as possible, actual voices from the field in their own terms. Because these voices accompanied my own reflections and analysis, as well as excerpts from the two staged performances, the space and number of pages required to place all the interviews in verse would have been unwieldy, cumbersome, and perhaps distracting. Moreover, I wanted to distinguish my interview experience, beyond the frame of conversation and dialogue, from that of oral history performance to heighten the act of women as agents and actors in public spheres, as well as agents in both the story (narrative) and event (action narrated) of activist interventions. Verse was included to highlight the words and expressions of African women whose voices, gestures, and actions have been too often constrained and obstructed.

*A digression ... oral history performance defined*

Della Pollock describes the oral history interview as “momentous” and as an “ignition point, charged by and charging its historical moment.” The narrated event (the particular historical moment being told) and the

narrative event (the embodied or immediate telling) constitute enlivening dynamics of a telling and a told that create this momentous third space of oral history performance. This notion of a narrated event and a narrative event is not so much a separation between form and content, but “a recognition of the subjective and phenomenological world of a teller framing and crafting a memory” of an actual moment from the past.<sup>28</sup> The narrative event includes dimensions constituting it as performance, e.g., the linguistic, paralinguistic, kinesic, proxemic, artifactual, and olfactory dimensions. These elements combine to form a “drama” which guides the meaning and power of the narration. Words are not isolated from the movement, sound, and other sensory dimensions which add to their substance, therefore we can choose not to place words on a page in prose form so that we avoid distancing the words from the sounds and action of their speaker. Describing oral history as “something more than words,” Betty Fine reminds us that “Each of us, at one time or another, sat under the spell of a performer conscious of the artistry of voice and body.” She goes on to add that “If we could only combine the stability of print with the recording capabilities of film or video,” then we could more fully enter the “aesthetic patterning and the social impact of verbal art.”<sup>29</sup> Poetic transcription attempts to do this. It joins content and form as embodied reportage, as verbal art, as “performance in print,”<sup>30</sup> or as oral history performance. The concern here is the mutual importance of *how* something is said along with *what* is said or with the telling and the told. The narrative event and the narrated event coalesce in a poetic rendering and linguistic layering of feeling, rhythm, tone, pitch, intonation, and volume. Poetic transcription reflects what happens when we translate beyond the “good syntax” and the spelling eye of the prose writer and embrace the poetic style in lines of varying lengths, positioning words and phrases in ways that project the rhythm as well as the tone and affect of the human voice.<sup>31</sup>

Oral history performance and its poetics attempt to embody the *mise-en-scène* of history. Oral history performances therefore do not function as factual reports or as objective evidence, nor are they pure fictions of history. Instead, they present to us a moment *of* history and how that moment *in* history is *remembered* through a *particular* subjectivity. The emphasis here is a felt, sensing account of history as well as its particular materiality. It is not that the facts of history are no longer important – I do not want to do away with the facts of history, however objective or subjective those facts may become. It is at this matrix of materiality, memory, subjectivity, performance, imagination, and experience that events culminate in oral history performance, a culmination of layers that are all mutually formed by each

other. James Baldwin once said: “people are trapped in history and history is trapped in them.”<sup>32</sup> History makes subjects and subjects make history, and the dynamic reciprocity of this present subjectivity and past materiality is witnessed through oral history performance. What the activists in this section value and how they express the valuable takes precedence over validity. The “certitude” of historical events is less important than the phenomenological interpretation of such events.<sup>33</sup>

As with the previous interviews in Acts I and II, my observations and analysis accompany the interviews to signify both their more embedded implications and the complexities of their surface (or obvious) meanings. This approach has been criticized in certain circles. The argument is that the interview data should stand alone and speak for itself. The reasons vary. First, the researcher’s analysis is an intrusion, often leaving the narrator in effect *silenced*. The authoritative voice and heavy hand of the researcher overshadows the voice and presence of the narrator; it “upstages” the narrative, thereby leaving the narrator’s actual words only whispers against the booming volume of the researcher’s interpretation. Second, the researcher’s analysis is his or her own idiosyncratic interpretation and distorts the meanings and expressions of the narrator. The view is that such interpretations are sometimes problematic and dishonor the veracity of the narrative while betraying any promise of interpretive illumination and self-reflexive engagement. Third, the researcher’s analysis promotes theoretical jargon that renders the narrative analysis itself *ineffectual*, at best, and silly, at worst. The researcher becomes so enamored with “theoretical speak” that the narrative is lost to the acrobatics of abstraction and theoretical word play. The researcher’s analysis does not necessarily silence or distort the narrative but becomes undesirable to it, an alien indecipherable rant alongside the vitality of a living account. Fourth, the researcher’s analysis is a descriptive overstatement that is only a redundant summary that becomes an obtuse repetition of what is already apparent and more powerfully articulated in the words of the narrator. Here the narrative is narrated again but only secondhand by the researcher in the absence of new insights and possibilities of meaning, making the analysis useless repetition.

Although I sometimes agree with these criticisms, it is also believed that analysis can open a deeper engagement with the narrative text and unravel contexts and connections within the undercurrents of the narrative universe, as well as inscribe the profundity of the narrative event, enhancing its sensual presence and ephemeral intensity. This can be accomplished without the researcher acting as a psychoanalyst, clairvoyant, prophet, or mimic. Analysis attends to the narration as one is compelled to attend to the

significance of any object rich with possibilities and thick with description. Analysis does this by promising to open up subtext and discreet elements of signification so that we may realize the depth of their inferences, their over-reaching consequences, and their political nuances and so that we may then have the good fortune of a deeper realization, an added insight, or a reality “thwarted” and “undone.” The researcher’s analysis serves as a magnifying lens or, better, a house of mirrors, to enlarge, amplify, and refigure the small details and the taken-for-granted. Too often hidden in plain sight of words spoken and written are meanings and implications below the surface that beg to be excavated, refigured, or made unfamiliar. We may listen to a story or point of view, and on first impression it may seem pedestrian and uneventful. The researcher points to those moments, large or small, that we take for granted as “ordinary talk,” while, instead, they connect realms of associations that we have not otherwise considered or simply did not know. Analysis helps us pay closer attention. This means that the researcher’s analysis employs theory in order to defend the complexity and dignity of the multiple truths and paradoxes below the surface but holding the surface in place. Theory serves as a hologram in which we see spectrums of light that change the color, shape, and motion of a form. Engaging theory at its best is quintessentially revelatory and imaginative and can be as instrumental as light to help us see what was once obscure, distorted, or unseen. Theory does not necessarily block our access to the interview narrative, but shows us the way into its deeper (not always seen or evident) questions and veracity. Instead of theory becoming its own narrative – theory for theory’s sake – it can gift us with a language and vocabulary out of which we not only discover the layers under the surface, but we rediscover the surface itself and realize in that moment we did not know what we did not know.

The researcher’s analysis also serves to substantiate the beauty and poignancy of description. As narrators describe certain persons, places, things, ideas, and feelings, the researcher may feel it necessary to then describe the description. This is a matter of deep listening and honoring the artistry and poetry of an act of describing. The researcher embraces the emotions and sensuality of *what* is being described and *how* it is being described through highlighting, sometimes re-describing, the remembered textures, smells, sounds, tastes, and sights rendered through story and performance.

We have now come to Act III where oral history and street performance mark the final renderings into *Acts of Activism*. These performances are narrated through the reflections of three Ghanaian women who offer “a changing script into being.”



## SCENE TWO: DON'T CRY, WAIL

The woman on the morning radio speaks with resounding clarity. All morning is a rush to review discussion notes, get dressed, and leave so I won't be late for class. It is just a five minute walk to the English Department and I am cutting it close, but this woman's words – her passion and biting conviction – are compelling. I slow down and stop to listen. She is a lawyer and women's rights activist speaking in support of Ghana's highly controversial Domestic Violence Bill.<sup>34</sup> The primary point of contention in the Bill is a call for the repeal of the marital rape exemption of Ghana's Criminal Code which prevents a wife from bringing rape charges against her husband. The speaker's name is Angela Dwamena-Aboagye and she is describing sex without consent as an act of violence whether the perpetrator is a stranger, friend, or husband. She says it is a violation of a wife's dignity and personhood as well as her body. She speaks of the countless women murdered by their husbands and warns that physical abuse in too many homes is a normal state of domestic life. She speaks of the numbers of married women who have crossed her door and their life stories revealing the tyranny of their husbands, too tragic to ignore or forget. She speaks of men who believe they are obligated to control the life and destiny of their wives because by right the woman is the property of her husband. She speaks of the responsibility of the state to protect women against domestic violence because it is a pervasive reality and says that protecting the lives of women is not a private affair, but a public responsibility. Mrs. Dwamena-Aboagye assures her listeners that the Domestic Violence Coalition will continue to educate the public and facilitate open discussions of the Bill in order to protect the safety and well-being of more than half the citizens of Ghana, whose futures are threatened at the hands of the very men who are supposed to love and protect them.

Rushing to class, I gather my briefcase and hurry out the door. I decide that Angela Dwamena-Aboagye's words will enter today's class discussion. The topic this morning is the film *Eve's Bayou*. The students viewed the movie last night. They loved it. We are examining the representation of sexual freedom and the role of the father as the seat of power and adoration in the family.

I rush into the classroom and the students are seated upright in their chairs waiting for me. We begin class and they are more than ready to talk about the movie.

"What are your thoughts of the father?" I ask.

One student raises her hand and speaks: "All the females in the house revered the father. They put him on a pedestal as if he were king of the

world. His two daughters and his wife all seemed preoccupied with adoring him.”

“I think the film was showing how sex, power, and desire are all wrapped up in the man as the authority, making him free to do what he wants,” says another.

“What do you mean?” I ask.

“As a man – a rich and powerful man – he was free to have sex with other women and that empowered him even more and made him more desirable,” the student replies.

One student interjects, “Yes, the women in the story and in the real world, here in Ghana, do not have the sexual freedom that men have, especially outside of marriage. It is expected that men have other women in marriage and several girlfriends. But it is a terrible and abominable sin if women have sex outside of marriage.”

“This is the African continent. This is Ghana. Women in the United States have more freedom, just as the movie demonstrated,” says another.

“No, the movie did not demonstrate that women have more freedom, just the opposite. The married women who were having sex with him were flawed in the movie. They were either sick women or bad women,” the student responds.

“The good woman was the wife who stayed at home. I don’t believe the wife could be free until she was no longer a wife, until the husband was destroyed,” says one student.

Thinking to myself about Angela Dwamena-Aboagye on the radio this morning and the suggestion of incest in the film, I ask the class if a sexual violation in the home should be a matter of transgressing a personal moral principle or if it should be a violation of state law.

A student immediately speaks with force, “Consenting adults who have sex outside their marriage is based on their religious beliefs, their culture, and their personal values, but in the case of incest and raping your wife, you should go to jail!”

Disturbed by the comment, another student asserts, “The father did not rape anyone in the film, and a man cannot rape his wife!”

“Why not?!” the student asks.

“In marriage there is no such thing as rape. Having your wife in that way is part of the contract,” the student responds.

“Are you saying that once a woman gets married her body is not her own anymore, her body belongs to her husband?” the student retorts.

“All I am saying is the wife has an obligation to her husband. She has an obligation to him by marriage! How can a man take what is already his under the marriage contract?”

“So, in your opinion, the wife’s body is there for the husband to *take* without her permission because it belongs to her husband!” exclaims one student.

“I am saying that the wife should understand that she has an obligation to her husband under the marriage contract!”

Another student turns to me and says, “Prof, a few years ago, women were murdered in Ghana. They were finding the bodies of women all over Accra. Our bodies belong to us.” The student turns to the class: “Men cannot rape us and murder us and get away with it!”

Defensively the student exclaims, “Who is talking about the rape and murder of women?! I am talking about a marriage commitment, not rape and murder! A wife’s obligation to her husband has nothing to do with murder and rape!”

The other student responds calmly, “Yes, they do. We are talking about violence against women, and when a man forces himself upon his wife, he is doing violent harm to her. Those mass murders in Ghana went on for years – far too long – because women are not valued. When a man *takes* his wife against her will, he is devaluing her. Where is the law to protect women who are raped or murdered by the men who promised to love them forever?”

*Four years later ... August 2006*

I am in the taxi and on my way to the Ark Foundation to finally meet Angela Dwamena-Aboagye. The taxi has had two breakdowns already. The car is very old. I can smell the fumes from the engine; it is so loud I can hardly hear the driver’s combination of excuses and apologies for the extreme condition of the run-down vehicle. Nevertheless, this taxi is the man’s livelihood and being a taxi driver is his job, so he is determined to get me to my destination. But I am nervous because every time the taxi breaks down and the driver gets out to fix it, I am further delayed in meeting this very busy and important woman. I can’t be late for this meeting.

I turn to the driver almost pleading, “Please, I will pay you. I need to get another taxi. I am going to be late for my appointment.”

“Oh Madame, I have fixed the problem. We are on our way now. Please, just exercise patience.”

After another breakdown, I arrive at the Ark Foundation just in time. I give my name to the receptionist at the front desk, and I am directed to have a seat in the next room. As I wait for Angela Dwamena-Aboagye, a young woman walks toward me smiling. I look behind me thinking she is

greeting someone else. She calls out, “Hello Prof! How are you?” I am warmed by her pleasant enthusiasm, but I still do not recognize her.

“Oh Prof, it has been a long time. Do you remember me? I was in your English class at Legon several years ago. I sat in the front of the class. We studied the film *Eve’s Bayou*. Do you remember?”

I hesitantly nod my head yes, but I’m still not sure and can only vaguely remember her. Years have passed since I taught that class.

“I still remember *Eve’s Bayou*. I remember the way we interpreted the characters from a Ghanaian point of view. I learned how to be more critical of what I see – films and most everything – after that class. I will never forget a boy in class saying I was wrong. I made a comment, and he said it did not make sense or something like that, but you spoke up for me. You said you thought I was right. I remember. That meant so much to me. I thought ehh! I know what I’m talking about.”

I begin to remember the young woman. Her name is Blessing. I don’t remember the particular incident very clearly, but I now remember her sitting in the front of the class. I am always surprised by the irony of these ethnographic moments that stretch past time and memory and come full circle in their revelations of how past and present come together and meet. Four years ago, when I first heard, and today as I first meet, Dwamena-Aboagye, this young woman was and is meaningfully present, back then and right now. When I first heard Dwamena-Aboagye on the radio, I did not know the young woman who so eloquently reflected the spirit of her words that morning in class would be working for her four years later. This young college student, who eloquently reflected the sentiment of Dwamena-Aboagye and so passionately spoke in defense of Ghanaian women owning their own bodies, now works for the cause.

Angela Dwamena-Aboagye comes over to greet us. Blessing introduces me to her. Dwamena-Aboagye is a graceful woman. She carries herself with a soft dignity and a warm, welcoming demeanor. We sit down in her office; it is spacious and bright, with large windows. There is a picture on the wall of her shaking hands with Hillary Clinton at the White House in 1995. We sit at a large round table across from her desk. The room is filled with books, papers, awards, and recognitions. There is religious music playing in the background. I begin by asking about her thoughts on the classic human rights debate regarding universalism and relativism.

DSM How would you describe what is meant by human rights? There’s been a lot of controversy surrounding the notion of universal human rights. Some people say there’s no such thing as a universal human right.

They say all rights are context-specific and dependent on the culture in question. They say the United Nations' idea of universal human rights is a Western idea often used to control and exploit other countries and their people. Is there no such thing as universal human rights?

*(She is nodding her head and looking straight into my eyes as I ask the question.)*

ADA I would NOT be doing this work if I did not believe in the *universality* of human rights.

Human rights center on the experiences of h-u-m-a-n b-e-i-n-g-s and the need to respect each other just because you are a human being.

From one human being to the other *(Pause)*

People must recognize that people

have worth / have dignity / are equal

and these basic principles should apply everywhere.

*(She pauses and moves in closer.)*

There MUST be *standards* or basic principles that we all ascribe to.

We should *always* look at the c-o-n-t-e-x-t.

This is NOT about relativism.

There are times when human rights *may* work here and *not* work there!

We understand that in order for human rights to really mean something to the people with whom we work we must contextualize.

We must look at the situation / the circumstances

and then translate the very fundamental principle of human dignity into that *particular context*.

*(Speaking slowly)*

I believe there is a part of the argument from *both* sides that makes sense.

But, it's about actually coming to the *middle* point where we can *compromise* and understand each other and accept the fact that if the UN had NOT made that declaration ... *(Pauses and looks out toward the window and shakes her head.)*

I mean *(Pause)* I can't *IMAGINE* the world without some of these basic principles.

*(Turns from the window and looks at me with a serious expression.)*

I can't imagine the world without them

because then everybody and everything

is thrown to the dogs.

The fittest will survive.

(Quietly, placing both hands on the table)

Universal principles demand there MUST be a level of conscientiousness in respecting and showing respect for *others*.  
We must meet certain *standards*.

(Pause)

And even though enforcement is not too good  
conscientiousness somehow acts as a check.

Throughout the world, the universalism versus relativism debate on human rights is too often cast as a dichotomy between those who believe there are universal and foundational rights that must be granted to all human beings regardless of their culture and context, in opposition to those who believe universalism is a fallacy and, instead, rights must be contingent and determined by the unique circumstances. To illustrate: Michael Perry asserts “certain things ought not to be done to any human being, and certain other things ought to be done for every human being,”<sup>35</sup> and Michel Ignatieff asserts “Rights are universal because they define the universal interests of the powerless.”<sup>36</sup> At first glance it seems that Perry and Ignatieff are calling for universalism, yet neither quote requires a negation of contingency or malleability relative to rights. Perry’s operative term here is “ought”; that is, he suggests an obligation, an expectation, or advisability. To state that “certain things *ought not* to be done to any human being and certain other things *ought to be* done for every human being” is to state an ideal, a hope, and a desire for the care and well-being of all humans. It is not the unequivocal *must not* or *must be*. In turn, Ignatieff is professing that the existence of rights serves to *define* the *interests* of the exploited and persecuted of the world. To assert “Rights are universal because they *define* the universal *interests* of the powerless” is to state that the existence of human rights is in the universal service of all human vulnerability and suffering. It is not to say that the *specifics and degrees of implementation* should be oblivious to its context. This means human rights universally exist to protect the vulnerable, however the implementation may be defined by cultural and contextual factors. The ontological fact of human rights is to address human abuse and suffering and to protect all human beings that are in need of protection. The *forms* and *enactments* of this universal protection do not negate the details of how the surrounding situation determines it. This is in keeping with Dwamena-Aboagye when she says “believing in human rights as a universal principle does not necessarily negate forms of relativism.”

More recent defenders of human rights resist the traditional dichotomy of universalism versus relativism in ideas spanning from “weak cultural relativism”<sup>37</sup> to “cross-cultural universals.”<sup>38</sup> Weak cultural relativism recognizes a set of primary principles that undergirds universal human rights “but permits some measure of local exceptions and variations, the latter primarily through particularized interpretations of universal standards.”<sup>39</sup> Cross-cultural universals contend that “every culture follows its own moral precepts,” which requires a “sensitivity to cultural norms in the application of international human rights norms, particularly in non-western societies.”<sup>40</sup>

In further combining elements of relativism and universalism, Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na’im argues for an *activist approach* where “people are more likely to accept a normative position on human rights if they are sanctioned from within their own cultural tradition.”<sup>41</sup> This approach emphasizes the “internal cultural discourse” that members of the cultures themselves generate, negotiate, and interrogate within and through their own day-to-day lives, structures, and imaginations. This internal cultural discourse is where Dwamena-Aboagye and her comrades work, where they speak and listen to each other, and where they all at once define, employ, and embody the strategies and tactics of their activist work. What is particularly important to note is that internal cultural discourse is dynamic and contested, and by its own nature and within this historical moment, becomes part of a transnational flow of information in which other worldly discourses then evolve from an internal cultural discourse to what An-Na’im describes as a *cross-cultural dialogue*. Language and meanings that circulate and evolve within a culture change the ground of tradition and convention toward more progressive and visionary practices and simultaneously produce and are produced by global conversations of value and practices. This is particularly true of discourses surrounding human rights that have led to what has been called the “human rights revolution,” a revolution of more popular interest in human rights – its philosophy and practice – across national and international locales that inhere in the dynamic and generative combinations of both universalism and relativism.

DSM What do you think about the Trokosi/Troxovi practice and the accusations that those who work to reform the practice are demeaning African culture?

ADA (*Smiling with her hands cupped as if she were holding something precious*)

I think it's important for us to realize that while we uphold our cultures  
and that our cultures are diverse  
and we must respect our diversity  
we should also be realistic in facing the fact that our cultures are  
c-o-r-r-u-p-t-e-d.

*(Softly but firmly)*

Our cultures have negative elements.

*(Placing her hands on the table and leaning in to speak)*

There are aspects of our culture  
or if it's not the culture it's the way people have taken it upon themselves  
to practice the culture that is *demeaning*.  
Ghanaians *must* ask themselves  
if they were put in the situation of the victim or survivor  
would they really like it?  
For me that is the b-o-t-t-o-m l-i-n-e.  
Should it be done to THEM or to THEIR children?

*(Shrugs her shoulders.)*

If you ask that question and they say yes *(Pauses and shakes her head.)*  
well then that's *another* debate.  
But ... we need to be honest with *ourselves*.

*(Speaking a bit faster)*

I understand because of our particular history on the African continent  
there's been so much exploitation.  
We've been made to swallow / hook / line / and sinker /  
all kinds of ideologies religious and so on ...

*(Picks up a pen and begins to tap gently on the table.)*

Different people have different agendas.  
Some are genuine and some are NOT.  
Others gain by trading interests / all kinds of hidden interests ...

*(Puts the pen down, speaks slowly, and sits back in her seat.)*

We know about the slave trade / and as a consequence / we feel suspicious  
about critiques of our culture.  
I have gone to areas where Trokosi is practiced.



I saw the things that go / on there.  
 And I have also read a lot from researchers / Ghanaian researchers / some  
 of whom  
*come* from the areas.

*(Speaking faster)*

If you are denied the *right* to go to school  
 if you are used as a farm hand from morning 'till evening  
 if you sleep in huts without windows / without doors  
 so that somebody can have access to you sexually any time they want  
 if you are punished / beaten for running away

*(Pauses and takes a deep breath.)*

all those things  
 then the question is who is *affected* by the practice.  
 And whose interest is it for the practice to continue?

*(Speaking slower)*

The w-h-o-l-e question of women's human rights ...  
 Do people even *recognize* that women in *particular* must have rights?  
 The whole question about the lack of adequate response systems  
 from the state level  
 and the fact that most of these issues are still unresolved ...

*(Shakes her head and raises her hands in the air.)*

You have to shout and DOUBLE shout  
 to make yourself heard on issues regarding persons  
 with disability / children / women / poor people.

*(Places her hands on the table and takes another deep breath.)*

It is a d-a-i-l-y struggle.

There are times when some of us become ambivalent and especially cautious if our fieldwork requires that we critique the structures, beliefs, and practices of the sites we study. To point out the wrongdoings of the people and the governments where we do our fieldwork is complicated because those of us who analyze from and within the West are too often implicated not only as privileged foreigners – outsiders who carry our national and institutional affiliations with us and therefore have the luxury and freedom to critically comment upon our temporary engagements with the “native” – but we also carry the baggage of Western foreign policies that have often directed,

funded, and sanctioned corrupt state practices in the developing world. This corruption, for better or worse, indirectly affects us as American citizens. The Western researcher studying non-Western cultures is a fraught positionality and one that demands self-reflexive critique vis-à-vis our own power and privilege as members of the global North. It is our responsibility to make judgments against injustice, for the sake of ethics and for the sake of those who suffer under injustice, while it is also our responsibility to be radically circumspect. Which means paying attention to the very roots and genealogy of injustice and its foundations, convolutions, and covert arrangements that might possibly implicate foreign policy on *our* native turf.

Do I have the right to point the finger at corruption in Africa when my own government has acted with complicity, at best, or has been responsible, at worst, for offenses in various parts of the globe? Of course I must provide critique, but, I would argue, the first expression and judgment will most effectively come from those Ghanaians who have lived and have been affected by it. The work of Dwamena-Aboagye, like so many other men and women in the global South, requires a platform out of which their critical words and deeds can be heard, thought, and felt. What this work aims to do is assist in providing more platforms. Platforms are essential for justice work. The platform serves as an amplifier and an enabler. When our work as Western researchers assists in creating and building platforms for the struggles and expressions of Others, we not only honor the authority of their voice and experience but assist in the needs of the struggle.<sup>42</sup> What might we accomplish in the global struggle for human rights through the creation of all forms and orders of expression? Creating platforms does not mean we should not actively speak against wrongfulness on foreign soil or become passive witnesses. It first means we are employing a more effective strategy; it means a more ethical use of our own power; and it means we are contemplative of the freedom and efficacy of local and vernacular speech.

The indigenous critiques of corruption in the narrative of Dwamena-Aboagye are revelatory on several levels. First, she reminds us of the distinction between government and citizenship and that in all corners of the world governments may embrace values and promote policies which its citizens en masse find objectionable. Secondly, the narrative demonstrates how local opposition to government corruption is based on consequences grounded not simply in the present but in the layered realities of history: the imperial resonances of religion, the losses incurred through the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and the lingering behavioral effects of colonialism and neocolonialism in contemporary governance. Thirdly, and more controversially, the narrative asserts that the historical fact of imperialism, past and present, does not exempt local government from being sanctioned and held

accountable for their actions. The resulting question that Aboagye raises is: Can government corruption allow a space for human rights?

At another level, this section of her narrative goes beyond discussions of universalism and corruption to pinpoint with more exactness the case of Ghanaian women. The “daily struggle” relative to women, the disabled, and the poor raises the stakes on the question of universalism and relativism because now Dwamena-Aboagye is invoking two interrelated debates in human rights discourse: negative rights versus positive rights as well as collective rights versus individual rights.

To first briefly define the difference between negative rights and positive rights: Positive rights emphasize the moral obligation of human beings to *extend* aid and assistance in order *to do* something in the *service* of another human being in need; however, negative rights are more discriminating and *refrain* from certain aid and assistance in order *not to do* anything that could interfere with individual freedom. A negative right resists certain assistance while a positive right requires certain assistance.

For the proponents of negative rights, the focus is primarily on civil and political rights: freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from slavery, a fair trial, property, habeas corpus, the right to bear arms. In opposition to proponents of positive rights, the proponents of negative rights would not include on their list of rights public education, social security, health care, or a minimum standard of living. Stepping outside the dichotomy between negative rights and positive rights, Judith Blau addresses the *human rights advocate* when she states that human rights “encompass civil and political rights – the negative rights – they also encompass positive rights, namely, the means by which people can live fulfilling lives.” She goes on to describe what constitutes a fulfilling life relative to positive rights: “These include socio-economic rights, such as food security, and the rights to education, a job, and housing, as well as cultural rights and the right to a healthy environment.”<sup>43</sup>

Women as a class in Ghana, and universally, represent a much larger percentage of the poor than men. Dwamena-Aboagye reminds us that women struggle and suffer each day from a lack of adequate food, water, clothing, and shelter and that this should be a human rights issue. Just as human beings must be protected against the injustices of torture and genocide, they must be protected against the injustices of poverty. Amy Gutmann states, “The right to subsistence is as necessary for human agency as a right against torture. Starving people have no more agency than people subject to cruel and unusual punishment.”<sup>44</sup> Dwamena-Aboagye is suggesting the need for *positive or subsistence rights* when she asks the question: “Do people believe women

should have rights?” Because if we believe freedom from poverty and the right to subsistence are legitimate human rights just as much as freedom from torture, the protection and well-being of women’s rights should be guaranteed.

Related to negative rights and positive rights is the domain of *collective rights* and *individual rights*. Connecting negative rights to the neoliberal tradition, Blau asserts, “germane to the [neo]liberal tradition of civil and political rights is the tension between the state and the individual.” Negative rights, according to Blau, privilege individual rights and are “inescapably political because they imply a conflict between the individual and the state.”<sup>45</sup> This “conflict between the individual and the state” seems to be occurring even when the rights of both are acknowledged and affirmed. Individual rights trump collective rights even as Michael Ignatieff describes the significance of both:

Rights are meaningful only if they confer entitlements and immunities on individuals; they are worth having only if they can be enforced against institutions like the family, the state, and the church. This remains true even when the rights in question are collective or group rights. Some of these rights – like the right to speak your own language or practice your own religion – are essential preconditions for the exercise of individual rights. The right to speak a language of your choice will not mean very much if the language has died out. For this reason, group rights are needed to protect individual rights. But the ultimate purpose and justification of group rights is not the protection of the group as such but the protection of the individuals who compose it.<sup>46</sup>

In contrast to Ignatieff’s position on individual rights, Blau refers to David Carroll Cochran and his description of neoliberalism as it is related to negative rights and individual rights:

David Carroll Cochran cogently describes [neo]liberalism as follows: “[it] rests on a moral dedication to individual freedom. It stresses individual agency and places individual autonomy at the center of its project”; yet its notion of freedom is a negative one, “centering on the individual unrestrained by interference.” According to that view, “once the basic guarantees of citizenship are secure, the state should let social and economic life unfold in a private sphere, without interference.”<sup>47</sup>

For Blau, in the [neo]liberal tradition, groups and communities “are viewed with suspicion” because they could “potentially stifle” neoliberal freedom. This view is in contradiction to a human rights perspective which does not consider collective freedoms as contradicting the individual because he or she is embedded in a group and community. Blau states: “The [neo]liberal says, ‘I want my rights.’ What the human rights advocate says is, ‘It’s your rights – the Other’s rights – that I seek to preserve.’”<sup>48</sup>

*Women wailing: don't mourn, organize*

DSM There were women being murdered in Ghana ... You were one of the central organizers of a public protest that took place outside the police station. I would call it a public performance ...

ADA (*Smiling and nodding her head*) Yes. A Performance ...

(*She moves in closer to the table and speaks with pride.*)

We sat in front of the police headquarters in black and red attire.  
I can remember a WHOLE sea of women

(*Waves her hands outward.*)

waving their hands over their heads and wailing.

DSM For the murdered women?

ADA (*Defiantly*) Yes, for the murdered women.

DSM Can you describe what took place?

ADA (*Enthusiastic to respond and sitting up in her chair*)

We sent messages all over.

It was a whole day's protest.

It was a "sit down."

We went around to various places / markets and so on and asking women to just lay down their work and come out and CRY.

DSM And they did that?

ADA (*A nod of contentment*) They did.

DSM Women came from all over –

ADA (*Gently interrupting*) Women came from ALL over Accra.

DSM All classes of women?

ADA All classes of women across political divides and religious divides.

There were nurses / doctors / lawyers / market women.

All kinds of women.

We all gathered in front of the police headquarters

and

we sat down.

DSM (*Placing my hands on my head*) Your hands were on your heads like this?

ADA (*Smiling and nodding with assertion*) Yes. We were wailing.

DSM How many of you?

ADA Hundreds.

DSM Hundreds of women and many of them sitting down in black and red, with their hands on their heads, wailing must have been powerful. How did you feel at that moment when all of these women came together? All these women, many that were strangers to each other, with their hands on their heads, wailing to make a statement against all those murders of women and nobody really doing anything about it? Can you remember back how you felt at that time being part of that?

ADA (*With a look of pride and joy, she looks into my eyes speaking softly and slowly.*)

I-t w-a-s s-i-m-p-l-y a-m-a-z-i-n-g.

I had been doing last minute stuff from home

you know banners and all kinds of things

so I was a little late.

When I got there ...

I stood by my car for awhile ...

I was just surprised.

The number of people there ...

some of them wearing their work uniforms

the nurses / the people from the tax office / the market women

(*Tosses her head up.*)

S-o-o many women from *everywhere*

People were in their work clothes ...

But most everybody there was in black and red.

When I got there I managed to get everybody to sit down

because it was supposed to be a *sit-down* action.

It was a-m-a-z-i-n-g. It was a-m-a-z-i-n-g.

It was hard

It was taxing / you were mobilizing / working / organizing

but it was *powerful* and the government HAD to act.

Sitting down is a striking performative. There is a poignant history across the world of *sitting down* as a means of civil disobedience. From the non-violence independence movement of Mahatma Gandhi to the sit-ins of the Civil Rights and American Indian Movements in the United States, the act of sitting down as a form of public protest is both intuitive and formidable. To sit down in public dissent is to dramatize the body *out of place*. The protesting body becomes an intrusion that trespasses upon a space where it does not belong, yet, in the moment of protest, claims, takes over, and occupies that very space. The body intrudes upon the space with the looming threat of staying put and assuming an authority and an entitlement that will determine

the time and conditions of its own departure. Sitting down is a striking performative because the combination of sitting where you don't belong and the factor of duration – staying put, to rest, to perch, to be still – becomes an act of activism that is all at once a peaceful, public, and a counter-hegemonic occupation of space. In its publicity, it evolves into a public ultimatum: *we sit down here until you stand up and/or for change*. The paradox of sitting as protest troubles the notion of sitting as passive, as rest and being still, for in the service of the protesting body, “resting” and “being still” is oppositional in its unyielding duration and in its active immobility. The ultimatum: *We will get what we demand, or we will sit and we will not be moved*.

For Sisters' Keepers, the protest at the police station was not only an interruption of that particular space by the women who sat and mourned the murdered, but it also required an interruption of their daily routines. When Sisters' Keepers called upon Ghanaian women to set down “their work,” life as lived in the day-to-day was suspended. It became time out and lifted from the ordinary day so that this particular day could be made *notable* in reverence for the dead and in retribution for them. Collective public action and civil disobedience, in creating this protest scene, make notable that which can no longer go unnoticed: a need for justice for the dead. A usual day must be made unusual and memorable through a dramatic act of activism: A sea of women sitting down in front of the police station in their red and black morning dress, hands on heads, wailing for their murdered sisters became a scene to be noticed and remembered.

Angela said, “It was amazing.” This act, this scene of women who were once strangers coming together to interrupt their routine, to lift life as lived from its ordinariness, brought into being a communal, performative, and memorable moment. Together they were noticed and notable for themselves and for the murdered, and together they appropriated cries of mourning into cries of dissent and made it a symbolic and graceful act of rebellion. African women sitting and weeping in front of a police station, one of the most volatile institutions of authority and power, African women across classes and ethnic divides perform an act of activism in a *double* enactment of mourning. The double nature of the Sisters' Keepers act of mourning constitutes both a communally inspired and heartfelt mourning for the dead as well as a communally inspired performance of mourning for politics and descent. All these women coming together through this act of activism become a public mourning for the dead as well as a public protest for their retribution. This double act is both theatrical and rhetorical.

Women together, with hands on their heads, wailing, transgressed the simple act of women crying into an act of civil disobedience. In this

rhetorical reversal, Sisters' Keepers grandstands women's tears from common considerations of vulnerability into where there is power in numbers and into a sisterhood that publicly performs mourning as a heartfelt expression of loss and as a rhetorical tactic for action.

SCENE THREE: I AM AN ACTIVIST

*August 2006*

"I'm going to Osu," I said to the taxi driver.

"Come. I'll take you there," he said.

"How much?" I asked.

"Only \$50,000 Cedis," he said cavalierly.

"Ehhh! That is abruni price and way too much!" He laughed, and I got in the front seat.

"The traffic Madame, the traffic. Are you going to the church?" he asked.

"No. I'm going to the WILDAF office. Do you know that office?" I asked.

"No. I don't know that ... it is called the WIL ...?"

"The WILDAF office ... Woman in Law and Development in Africa,"<sup>49</sup> I said.

"I don't know them. What are they supposed to be doing for development and for Ghana?" he asked disgruntled.

"It's a group of African women who are mostly lawyers from all over the continent that help other African women understand how the laws in their country can protect them and serve their needs in order to make their lives better because that will make life better for all Ghanaians. There are other offices on the continent and you're taking me to the Ghana office."

"I don't know if all those organizations are good for African women."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"The African woman is not like American women. Our women are not like the women in the West."

"I don't understand."

"You are American?" he asked.

"I am *African* American," I said.

"The African woman takes care of her husband and children. That is her first responsibility, to serve her husband. This is the way it is in Africa. She must make her husband happy. This is what is best for the country. Women gossip too much. They do best working at home. This way they do not get into any mischief," he said emphatically.



“What do you mean by mischief?”

“They don’t get into mischief if they are at home making their husband happy. That is all I will say about that. The woman’s place is in the home.”

“Well, it seems there are a lot of Ghanaian women who think differently. A group of them got together from all over this country and wrote a Manifesto. The Manifesto does not say that women should stay at home to keep out of mischief.”

“What is this Manifesto? How is it going to help Ghana?” he asked with suspicion.

“It is a demand for women’s equality in Ghana,” I said.

“Women are already equal in Ghana,” he said.

#### **Issues in manifesto<sup>50</sup>**

The issues tackled in the Manifesto range from women’s low participation in governance, their poor access to resources critical for making a living, their predominance among people living in poverty, and women’s health, particularly, the unacceptably high rates of maternal mortality. Other concerns in the manifesto are the harmful and discriminatory social practices against women, often justified in the name of culture, and violence against women. The special problems of disabled, widowed and aged women, and single mothers are addressed as are the issues of insecurity, disruption, and violence experienced by women in conflict situations. The media, the law, and institutions mandated to tackle women’s right issues are assessed and demands made to reform them and improve their effectiveness.<sup>51</sup>

“Okay, Mr. Taxi Driver,” I said with humor. “But I understand there were a series of women being murdered here in Accra. Several Ghanaian women that I know were very disturbed because they felt there was not enough being done to find the murderer and to protect women ...”

He interrupted, “Oh that was a terrible, terrible thing. Terrible. The murderer must be punished to the highest extent of the law. We are a peaceful people in Ghana. This was a terrible thing to happen to our women.”

“Well, there is too much violence against women all over the world ...” I hesitated then continued, “even violence from a woman’s own husband,” I said waiting for his response.

He paused and then spoke, “The murders were an evil thing. I am not a violent man, but sometimes when people talk about how they are against all violence against women, ehh! They don’t know what they are talking about. Sometimes a woman needs to be disciplined by her husband. Women in Ghana don’t mind that. They are not going to do anything about that. Women in Ghana do not cause mischief when they know the husband may need to take a stick to them once in a while. The husband is not going to hurt the woman. Women know that is okay. They go to the market and take care of their husbands, maybe have some small job, that is all they do. This is Ghana, and women don’t want to change things. They do what they are supposed to do. Those other women stirring up trouble, they don’t know anything.”

### Themes of manifesto

The Women’s Manifesto is made up of a preamble and ten sections on the following themes:

- Women’s Economic Empowerment
- Women and Land
- Women, Social Policy, and Social Development
- Women in Politics, Decision-making, and Public Life
- Women, Human Rights, and the Law
- Discriminatory Cultural Practices
- Women and Media
- Women, Conflict, and Peace
- Women with Special Needs
- Institutions with a Mandate to Promote Women’s Rights

Each section begins with a gender analysis of the problem. Following the analysis is a section containing concrete demands on the government, political parties, and MDAs<sup>52</sup> meant to address the situation within a specific time-frame.<sup>53</sup>

I said, “The Domestic Violence Bill is causing a lot of talk on the radio and everywhere.”

“It is *big* trouble!” he exclaimed. “A man cannot rape his wife! These people who are pushing this thing are saying that a man is a criminal for raping his wife. Ehh! What is the matter with those trouble-makers in Ghana here! What do they want! Is it the doing of those Manifesto women you are talking about? Nobody is listening to them!”

**Discourse on women's manifesto**

Amina Mama, Rose Mehah-Kutin, Dzodzi Tsikata

DT "... At the beginning of the drafting process, I had this apprehension that people might consider the demands too radical, but to our surprise it was the other way round, that our attempts to censor ourselves were thrown overboard! In one of two cases, we demanded 30 percent representation of women, and the drafters would demand, "Why are we settling for less than 50 percent, less than half?" And we would carry on late into the night, people would just keep going at it with a lot of energy.

RMK Obviously the process was much more complicated than we had foreseen. However, there was a lot of good humor. People were not personal about their drafts; if there were any quarrels, things were worked out.

AM Sounds unbelievable! There must have been some fights?

RMK Actually, we were amazed by the fact that people wanted to be in on it – we had thought that people would abandon the process along the way. But they wanted the thing to be collectively owned.

DT And nobody walked out. The drafting process was very energizing in fact, and the same people kept on coming back.

AM I am interested in what you said about it being so inclusive – that in some way, this made the work harder?

RMK In some ways it did, but we also came away with the sense that gender consciousness was very much higher in Ghana than we thought – we were a little surprised. We thought that we would be quarrelling about every single point, but that proved not to be the case. It was as if we had become the voices of moderation! This was humbling because those who are against women's rights often accuse gender equality advocates of pushing agendas that are not realistic in the African context. But from the attitude of the women who participated in the Women's Manifesto initiative, lived experiences actually generate and dictate the kinds of changes needed to improve women's lives. This is an important learning point because it draws attention to the need to trust in the process, to actually draw out women's experiences as the basis for making decisions and demanding changes to improve their well-being.

Another interesting thing: all of a sudden, people were beginning to ask questions and make demands on the government to provide certain things. People have become more conscious, perhaps through

the process, about the responsibility of government and the need for it to comply with its local mandates and all of those things.

AM What did you do after the draft was complete?

DT *We* organized regional consultations, two in each region, one for civil society organizations and another for government agencies. These affirmed the broad support for the Manifesto as a whole. The consultations also won the Manifesto many new friends and spread the message even wider and generated the level of interest, which culminated in that very successful launch.

“Why do you think some women in Ghana feel they need a law to protect them against their husbands? Some women say they live in fear of their husband every day because their husbands sexually abuse them. Are they just making it all up?”

The taxi driver was becoming more irritated: “I think all this is being put in their heads by trouble-makers!”

I said softly, “If making women feel safe is starting trouble, I hope there are a lot of trouble-makers in Ghana.”

“Ehhh!” He laughed and shook his head, “You women are all the same! You talk a lot, but you don’t know anything. Women are their own worst enemies. I don’t worry about the trouble-makers because all they will do is gossip about each other and fight with each other anyway! Those Manifesto women can’t do anything!”

RMK The launch, at the Accra Conference Center, was a spectacular event. Its success was beyond anything we had imagined. There was so much excitement! Over 1,000 women and men from all 110 districts of the country at the time (now there are 130) were present. Representatives from the many different organizations, institutions, and constituencies that had participated in the Manifesto process at different levels took part in the launch. Because the document represented the views and concerns of all these different groups, they felt that this was something they owned. Women felt that this was cause to celebrate as they had reached consensus on matters that affected them. Many government departments and agencies were represented, with the exception of the Ministry for Women’s and Children’s Affairs which saw the manifesto as an attempt to encroach on its turf.

For those of us in the women's movement, the lesson was that women can work together on critical issues that affect them and that with effective mobilization, success is possible. What is required now is that we reorganize ourselves and advocate for the implementation of the demands contained in the Manifesto. Once the real improvements in women's lives have been achieved, then we can claim that the Manifesto experience has been worthwhile.

We arrived at the WILDAF Office. As I was paying for the fare, the taxi driver asked, "How do you like Ghana?"

"I love Ghana, especially when the taxi doesn't overcharge a poor abruni for taking her a short distance," I said jokingly.

"Ehh! You not abruni, you Ghanaian. Ghana is a peaceful country. We don't make trouble here. We love our mothers, our sisters, and our wives." He smiled, waved goodbye, and drove off.

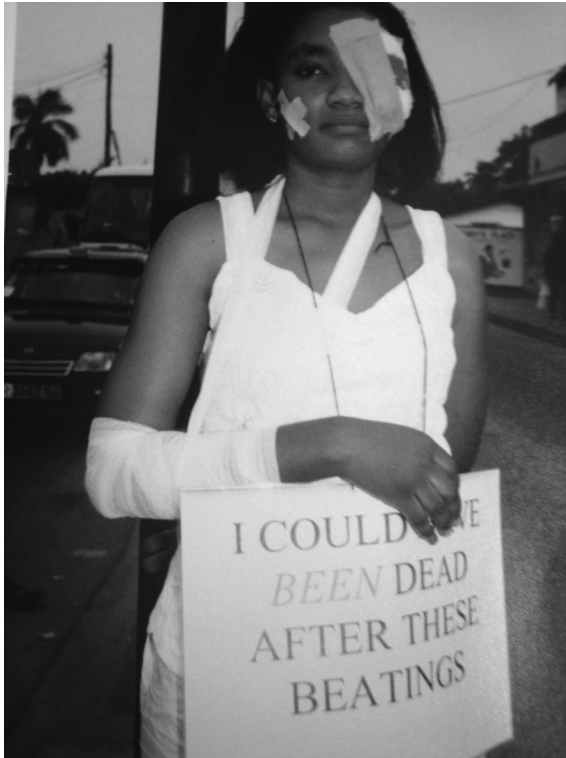
I enter the WILDAF office, and I am directed to the private office of Bernice Sam, the national director for Ghana. Upon first seeing Bernice, I am surprised. I imagined her to be much older, considering the vast influence and responsibilities of WILDAF. The Manifesto is certainly evidence of Ghanaian women's intergenerational collaborations on gender activism.

Bernice, a graduate from Georgetown Law School, is a wife and mother committed to developing strategies to promote law literacy. Bernice narrates one particular strategy she employed to educate the public on the Domestic Violence Bill.

### *Wedding gowns and traffic lights*

Bernice is seated behind a large desk. Her computer screen displays an open document she had been working on before I arrived. She is wearing a white blouse. Small gold earrings complement a youthful face that is framed by a short-cropped, natural hairstyle. She has clearly prepared for our meeting with notes and informational brochures on WILDAF on her desk. She is smiling and appears very comfortable and confident. She seems to enjoy narrating the following story.

Last year we also organized what we call a Teaser. The Teaser was to dress up a number of young women and men in wedding gowns and tuxedos.



3.1: One of the “brides” from the “Teaser” street performance

And then we put bloodstains on the brides so they reflected women who had been beaten.

*(Placing her hands on her face)*

We made scars on them and placed bandages on them.

And they all had placards that read *(Pause)*

“This could be your mother / this could be your sister / your daughter  
Do not abuse them.”

I felt the white gown was classic and people would easily know this is a wedding – a bride and groom.

We identified the traffic-prone areas.

We started v-e-r-y early in the morning  
because we had to do the dressing up.

The brides and grooms were placed at traffic-prone areas in Accra.

People were wondering *what* is happening?

Who are these women in *wedding gowns*?

Who are these gentlemen in *suits*?

It was a m a z i n g.

DSM And they were at traffic lights? Yes, that is amazing.

BS The idea was derived from the World Social Forum last year.

It was on a different issue and a different context.

B-u-t (*Pause*) that's how we began thinking about protesting on city streets.

DSM It was staged?

BS (*Her eyes widen and she nods her head.*)

S-t-a-g-e-d/YES! That's right!

The *staging* gave me the idea to develop the w h o l e concept of the Teaser.

At first we thought we would use

the different marriage ceremonies we have in Ghana.

We have three marriages (*She pauses and places her hand on her chin and moves closer.*) the Islamic marriage / the customary marriage / and the ordinance marriage.

We decided on the white gown / what is associated with the ordinance marriage.

We used red ink for the blood and injuries.

We also made bandages and plasters.

We plastered their arms / like they had a broken arm.

We made bandages for the eyes.

DSM What were the bride and groom doing at the traffic lights?

BS They simply stood in place with placards hanging around their necks.

They stood there all bruised and bloody in wedding gowns with the placards.

People did go up to them and actually r e a d the messages.

(*Her hands are now waving, extended with palms up.*)

People were just in awe of seeing these men and women on the *street* like this.

The men were wearing suits with the message around their necks.

(*She demonstrates with her hands the words on the placard across the chest.*)

Don't abuse women.

It was on the radio and TV.

It was a f-a-n-t-a-s-t-i-c event for us.

This was for one full day / YES / one day s-t-a-g-e-d in the traffic.

It was spectacular.

It was unusual.

It really brought home the fact that violence against women is r-e-a-l.

To name the street performance “The Teaser” was ingenious. The term has several denotations: to disentangle and lay parallel as in to “tease wool”; “to scratch the surface (cloth) so as to raise a nap”; “to annoy persistently especially in fun by goading, coaxing, or tantalizing”; “to comb (hair) by taking a strand and pushing the short hair toward the scalp with a comb in order to raise the hair, give it fullness and volume.”<sup>54</sup>

The Teaser as street performance is a synthesis and embellishment of all these descriptions in that the performance brought to the surface, lifted, raised, and disentangled domestic violence from the complacency, even expectation, and too often hidden abode of domestic life in Ghana. Wife abuse, across continents, is generally considered “the husband’s business.” But here it was teased out from hiding and complicity; it was disentangled from the dark quagmire of privacy, secrets, silence, and patriarchal control and now brought to the light of a public performance. What was conventionally kept unseen behind closed doors – the expectation of and respect for a man’s privacy (the wife as property) – was now *made* to be seen writ large. It was the boldness of seeing what is supposed to be unseen – this “up in your face” publicity of representation commonly unrepresented – that literally becomes hypervisible, overtly and publicly represented, to the extent that it literally stops traffic. As the Teaser street performance teased to the surface the hidden or closed parameters of domestic violence, the performance was efficacious in this boldness of seeing, largely due to the symbolic power of the wedding gown. The bloodstained wedding gowns and the grooms’ attire signified the betrayal of a promise, of a dream. Clothing, in this case the wedding costume, enacted the power of social meanings and social interaction assigned to it by demonstrating how the sacred promise, ritualistic innocence, and purity of marriage can be betrayed. Love and marriage are supposed to go together like a “horse and carriage” and the wedding gown is a symbol of this commitment to a happy and everlasting union.

In crafting oneself or one’s image through dress, the Teaser was also a demonstrative display of how dress practices and tradition can become rhetorically contested and culturally rescripted through public performance. According to Karen T. Hansen, clothes are seldom worn passively because



they often serve as the materialization of value. There is an experiential dimension to dress, both in wearing and viewing and in meaning and value.<sup>55</sup> The Teaser placed “the body surface at centerstage” and demonstrated the “efficacy of surfaces” and how desire and its relationship to dress can be transformed into an act of activism.

*I see your face and we dance*

Durbars<sup>56</sup> have been v e r y useful over the last ten years in our work. In carrying out a legal literacy education for communities we must work with the leadership of that community *first*.

*(She nods her head and gently points her finger.)*

And the way to do it is always through durbars.

This is how the chiefs and the people of the community get to know us and TRUST us.

What I find fascinating is that when you go to these durbars (*Pause*) you go to talk to them about family law

but the chiefs will say: “Come here and talk about yourself and what YOU do.”

This is as a way of encouraging people in the community to go to school and to become like you.

It’s great just being with them / being amongst them (*Pause*) dancing and singing with them at the durbars.

You come to *their* level so they can *hear* you.

This is the m-e-t-h-o-d-o-l-o-g-y we use for our work.

They / hear / you / and / love / the / way / you / are.

I learn their traditional dance / Yes.

And they laugh (*Pause*) we form a connection.

You *hear* them and they *hear* you.

It’s NOT that you are handing something *down* to them.

It’s showing them *experiences*.

And we also don’t try to i-m-p-o-s-e the law strictly.

*(Shaking her head with a serious expression)*

We do not impose the letter of the law

because sometimes it’s in contrast to what they know PRACTICALLY.

We leave them to make up their minds about how they can *modify* some of their customary practices.

Sometimes we face difficulties

because the customary practices are s-o-o entrenched  
 and the women are never empowered to *change* them.  
 But you n-e-e-d to communicate with them.  
 You n-e-e-d to bring the men together WITH the women.  
 You n-e-e-d to ask them: "What do y-o-u think?"  
 I mean you create scenarios for them to tell you what they think  
 and you must relate to *their* scenarios.  
 I remember I asked community members: "What do you want to see  
 happen to you when you die / to your property when you die?"  
 And they said: "I want the property to go to my children."  
 And I told them that is not the customary practice  
 for the property ONLY to go to your children and wife  
 but to go to your maternal relatives  
 that means it's your nephews and nieces who will inherit YOUR property  
 within the matrilineal system.  
 And then they said: "But that is not what I want."  
 And then I tell them that is why there is a new law  
 that states that we want our wives and husbands and our children  
 to be the m-a-i-n beneficiaries of *our* properties.  
 Now (*Pause*) you've got the law that's saying look at what the p-e-o-p-l-e  
*themselves* want.  
 You communicate this in *their* terms  
 and then they meet as a community with *their* leaders to discuss it.  
 (*She places both hands on her desk.*)

And I've done this over / and / over / again and it's been b-e-a-u-t-i-f-u-l  
 because you have people coming back to you to tell you  
 how that *little* information you gave them has changed their l-i-v-e-s.

Bernice's acts of activism take her from the busy streets of Accra to the rural villages of the durbars. It is in the rural areas where her work in legal literacy and in translating the law is the most rewarding due in large part to the durbars. It is during the durbars that people come together for inspiration, information, and pleasure. The durbars offer a willing constituency that must be earned. Everyone is energized and primed to listen in this highly communicative event engendered by local traditions of song, dance, and oratory. But acceptance is not guaranteed. For Bernice, being in this space of performance entails corporeal connections that are taught and shared. The nature of this corporeality is based on body-to-body action for the fulfillment and expression of communal life that offers a possibility for

loving reciprocity. The ones you are there to teach will teach you. They will teach you how to properly participate. There is reciprocity of teaching and learning, of giving and receiving that resists the ethnographic divide of “knower and known.” Together in the durbar, both the insider and outsider become one and the other, knower and known, at least for the duration. Bernice, the lawyer, representing expert knowledge from the outside, pleurably relates to the moments of traditional expertise from the inside. These are important and empowering lessons not simply because they mark the balance and reciprocity of valued knowledges, embodied in their inside/outside (back and forth performances), but because they are temporary performances enlivened by a worthy visit(or), a deserving guest.

Bernice’s narrative of the durbar is a resonance of insider/outsider encounters within moments of ethnographic performance: Having been invited as our guest, having been among us as a visitor, you can now make this performance with us. We are performing together. I am giving permission for you to learn because you have earned my respect by respecting *us*. By showing up, by spending time, and by indicating to us that you *care* about being here. You are a good *listener*. You hear that I know something. You hear that I am also a knower. This is my territory. You make the sounds we make. There is the possibility that I can trust what you have come here to say because you are here with us dancing and doing what we are dancing and doing. I can accept within this temporality that you have joined us in the sweat, muscle, and intent of our movements. Body-to-body and face-to-face is the possibility for what you have called “love.” To be face-to-face<sup>57</sup> with the Other demands protection and loving justice and “to see a face is already to hear thou shalt not kill.”<sup>58</sup> To be with the face is to acknowledge that to look into your face is to see – eye to eye; to smell – nose to nose; to taste – mouth to mouth.

*I am an activist*

*(Pressing her hands against the desk)*

My greatest challenge is juggling my professional work and my family  
It’s v-e-r-y difficult.

Our work involves a lot of travel (*Pause*) a lot of travel.

And our work is very / very demanding because we are dealing with  
people’s l-i-v-e-s.

*(Placing her palms together and clasping her hands she stares at her hands  
pensively.)*

People want to sit and to tell *their* story.  
Sometimes it's just giving them a listening ear that is *healing* for them.

(*Gently looking up from her hands*)

So you put a lot of emphasis on your work more than you do for your own family (*Pause and looking somber with her lips pursed*)  
our families suffer and my family is suffering now.  
I travel s-o-o much / my whole life has become my work.  
Yes / I'm often not at home.

(*Looking up with a sad half-smile*)

At one point the conversation with my husband was a-l-l about my WORK.  
I realized I didn't talk about anything else but my work.

DSM But you choose ...

BS (*Responding quickly, but gently*) Yes.

DSM You make this choice.

BS (*Nodding her head slowly*) I make this choice.

DSM Why do you make this choice?

BS (*She takes a breath with a small quiet laugh.*)

That's difficult to answer. (*Pause*)

A difficult question to answer.

I think first because there is a need out there and believing that your work can actually change that need.

You b-e-l-i-e-v-e you are capable of doing it.

When you look at women's rights and the challenges women face

(*Taking a deep breath and shaking her head*)

it is s-o-o much. It's / so / much.

I admire Angela Dwamena-Aboagye.

Yes. I admire her so very much

And the reason is that the work she does is *very* difficult

(*Pauses and looks up toward the ceiling and down toward me.*)

Sharing ALL those personal tragedies and being able to do what she does

(*Pauses and looks down at her hands pensively.*)

I remember my *first* year of work

the stories I heard from women *affected* me / so / much.

(*Half-laughter*)

I had sleepless nights.  
 But I had to deal with it  
 because if I didn't deal with it  
 I could not HELP the people who came to me.  
 And Angela hears worse stories / sees worse injuries.

DSM Are you a feminist?

BS (*Looking directly into my eyes with a soft-spoken confidence*)

I am an activist.

As I leave Bernice's office, she walks with me out toward the street to where I can catch a trotro. We talk about how much we both love Washington D.C. and her days at Georgetown Law School. She tells me she wishes she could take a little time off to write a book on her experiences as a Ghanaian woman struggling to balance her work as a lawyer committed to women's rights in Africa with her commitment to her family and her desire to be a good wife and mother. As I ride home, the busy sounds of Oxford Street<sup>59</sup> entangled with the blaring roar of the old trotro engine fade away and disappear under the words of Bernice's soft-spoken truth: "I am an activist."



3.2: Bernice Sam at the United Nations

SCENE FOUR: PERFORMANCE ON THE GROUND: NARRATING  
COMMUNITY-BASED PERFORMANCE AS THEATRE FOR  
DEVELOPMENT

Community-based performance is characterized by deep interaction between artists and constituents grounded in a shared aspect of identity or circumstances. Professional artists, informed in some way by community participants, explore collectively meaningful themes and then develop and stage a piece that is by, for, and about a larger group of which those participants are a part. The goals of these partnerships include and exceed the creation of art. That is, community-based performance is hyphenated not just grammatically but also as a practice. Community-based art is situated between entertainment and efficacy, art for pleasure and art that concretely *does* something, be it in the realm of education, therapy, counter-history-making, community-organizing, or social change.<sup>60</sup> (Jan Cohen-Cruz)

You can buy anything in the world at Makola Market. It is the largest and most robust market in all of West Africa. It is said that the market-women of Makola wield more power than the president of Ghana. Makala Market is the heartbeat of exchange in Ghana – the exchange of currency, goods and services, local gossip, national and international news, ideas, world languages, and politics. Market-women are at the center of exchange and, during an election year, they are at the center of discourse surrounding political parties. During the 2004 election, Makola market-women were expected to continue their tradition of perpetuating political rivalry and intolerance between the two major political parties, the National Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Committee (NDC). During election time, the multilayered circle of exchange between the city and the villages was disrupted, as market-women favored exchange with their party's supporters while discriminating against the supporters of the other party – each party affiliate was flagrantly in opposition to the other.

All this began to change when Nathaniel Ebo Nsarko decided to make history and exchange something that had not been exchanged before, an exchange of attitudes toward political tolerance. Nathaniel, a theatre student at the University of Ghana, decided he was going to bring Theatre for Development to Makola. For weeks he spent time talking with the opposing sides, getting to know their points of contention and spending time with what he describes as the “opinion leaders.” The women, on both sides, got to know Nathaniel, they liked him, and each side wanted to win him over as a supporter.

One day he told the women he was presenting a play at the public market center and they were all invited. Most of the women were able to get substitutes to stand in at their kiosks in order to attend the play. On the day of the performance, the women sat in the audience, NPP on one side and NDC on the other. After the usual exchange of insults and rants, they settled down enough to view the performance. Students from the Drama Department, under Nat's direction, performed an overblown comedy, full of exaggeration, bawdy imitations, and overstated insults that characterized the market-women during election season. Nat was careful to bring comic hyperbole to both sides equally and to make the comedy highly gestural while avoiding personal, hurtful, or embarrassing characterizations of any one individual. The market-women were laughing heartily at themselves and each other. They started mimicking the performers and began teasing each other across the aisles about the depictions. They saw themselves and their oppositional party members as both humorous and ridiculous and remembered how they laughed and joked together between election seasons.

After the play, Nat introduced the idea of the women putting on their own performance about election season at Makola Market. They would compose it themselves, direct it, and act in it. They would rehearse over a period of six weeks and present it before the public for all to see. The market-women agreed to try it.

The day of the play, the center was packed with people. After weeks of talking, listening, probing, and debating the elections, the women presented their play on political tolerance before an eager audience in the public square at Makola Market.

Nat said, "One day I could not come to rehearsal because I had a final semester exam. I told one of my mates to cover rehearsal for me and to tell the market-women I had an exam. After rehearsal, a group of them came all the way to the Legon campus – NPP women and NDC women came together – to tell me all about their rehearsal that day and to show me a new scene they created. It was a wonderful thing. I thought, maybe this tolerance project is really working."

The women devised their own comedy based on their daily experiences at Makola during election season, as well as their discussions on the theme of political tolerance during the six-week rehearsal process with Nat. They were asked to present an encore performance for two weekends on a popular radio program. I asked Nat how he felt about the process, in reflection, and he said, "I hope we succeeded. I believe it was memorable



3.3: Cast and crew of Makola Market performance. Nathaniel is kneeling first row center and Esie is the second woman on the left.

for the women. There is so much more to learn about this process. Actually, TFD is really social engineering.”

#### *A notion of development*

Nat’s teacher is Professor Elias Kwaku Asiamah.<sup>61</sup> He teaches that the controversial notion of “development” is a comprehensive enterprise. Responding to critiques that the term “development” emphasizes aspirations toward Western culture, economics, materialism, and embellishing the dichotomy of “developed” against “underdevelopment” while not attending to the deeper structures of political economy and Western imperialism, Professor Asiamah states:

Above all, Development is that human effort and ability to manage both the natural, human, scientific, and economic resources in the advancement of the most underprivileged in society. Development is the ability to create consciousness and the acceptance of the responsibility of taking into consideration the fact that the earth must be left better habitable for the future generations. This means, development leads to both analytical and reflective considerations of what should be accepted by humanity that would enhance dignity and self-image in a globalizing world.<sup>62</sup>

As a student of Professor Asiamah, Nat embraces the term “Theatre for Development” (TFD) to describe his work and, as he stated, employs TFD



as “a method of activism.” C. Esie Arhin is Nat’s wife, and is also a student of Professor Asiama. Esie’s focus is public health. Esie and Nat combine their skills by adapting TFD as a method of communication between youth in various communities in need and public health practitioners.

I met Esie in 2006 through a mutual friend, Ekua Ekumah, one of the cast members of *Is It a Human Being or a Girl?* who was working with me on the Trokosi project. When I met Esie, she shared her concerns about the high infant mortality rate in Ghana and the need for nutrition and health education for mothers. Esie narrated her method of TFD in her activist work with mothers and infant health.

*They feel part of it*

Esie came by the hostel where I was living in the summer of 2006. We are sitting together in my room. It is about 7 p.m. in the evening, and she is sitting in a wooden straight-back chair in my room as I sit across from her. I ask Esie to describe the TFD process and how topics are chosen.

The topic could be social or political.

It could be anything as long as it is *relevant* to the people. Anything!

It could be just getting them not to dump at a particular place that is causing their health to be at risk.

It is about *conscience-ization*<sup>63</sup> and building awareness.

It could be a-n-y-t-h-i-n-g as long as the people are interested.

*(Turns to the right side of the chair and shakes her forefinger to motion “no.”)*

You don’t go with a script.

Everybody comes up with ideas about what should be done about the issue. They come up with a story-line / they test it and test it / they enact it and improvise it.

What I realized is that the people get v-e-r-y excited.

They are living the experience and they *understand* the issues.

They feel a part of it.

If you were to talk or lecture them *(Pause)* that is boring for them.

They *would* come and listen to the lecture

and they would go away not having heard or appreciated *anything*.

BUT if you work with them for six weeks to three months

finding out who the community leaders are

and networking with them on an issue

and you pick a topic that they’re interested in *(Pause)*

but even if they're not interested in it  
then you can b-u-i-l-d their interest.

It *could* be a dicey issue.

It would be up to you to try to s-l-o-w-l-y warm them up to it or coax them.  
And I find THAT to be very effective.

(*Rocks back in the chair.*)

I l-o-v-e it because you get the results *right/away*.

*"You must do your research"*

Esie emphasized that TFD is a "bottom-up approach" rather than a "top-to-bottom approach." She explained that researchers must go to the community and gain an understanding of the context before they can assist in a resolution of a problem. She said "We guide them toward a resolution of the issue. That's the whole idea ... helping to come to results and contributing to achieving the results." One of the most important aspects of TFD is that guidance from the facilitator can not mean control. The community must be integral to the process. The community must be in full partnership and sometimes substantially directing the rehearsals and the development of the script. For this kind of relationship and community responsibility to be productive, the TFD facilitator is knowledgeable about the larger context and the intricacies of the issues in order to fully understand choices made by community members and, in some cases, to guide them in an alternative direction when their local analysis requires more information. The facilitator must keep a balance between stepping back and knowing when to step forward. The knowledge, wisdom, and confidence needed to maintain this balance comes from, in Esie's words, "doing your research." Doing research is the prelude to the deep particularities of context. It is searching for the thick descriptions on the ground and already operating in the field that are created, experienced, and expressed by indigenous subjects themselves. Therefore, entering the deep particularities and thick descriptions of a social space is what constitutes "doing the research." Janet L. Abu-Lughod states a social space has been "created and is continually being re-created, albeit by collectivities of social actors engaged in complex dances of successive symbiotic interactions. These interactions continually weave together nature, materials, techniques, socioeconomic processes, and cultural forms."<sup>64</sup> Doing your research is to enter this web of interactions within a social-cultural space that are always already made and in the making by social actors or agents that will eventually "act" with the TFD project where the

effects will hopefully spiral and loop back to influence the space. Doing the research also gives the TFD practitioner a glimpse into how social agents and the context of their social space are mutually formed as well as more concrete justifications as to how one cannot be engaged without the other. The TFD researcher understands that “the local context inflects the specific structure of feeling that emerges in performance.”<sup>65</sup> Whether conscious or unconscious, the shared values, practices, ideologies, and collective desires that rise and weave through the performance from the reservoir of elements and interactions constituting the local context is what the researcher aims to enter. Having a familiarity with context enables researchers to have a grasp of the codes and sensitivities that help determine the balance between too much guidance and too little, when to push their agenda forward and when to pull back for community members to take more responsibility in the creation.

You *research* the area that you are looking into / the literature / the past and present  
what people have said about the issue.

*(Her voice rises and she nods her head.)*

You **MUST** do the research.

And of course you have your *own* perspective as well.

You do your data collection and analysis and then you move on from there.

And after you do your data collection and you analyze

*then* you go back into the community.

*(Moving in closer to me so I may fully understand.)*

During your data collection you are **IN** the community.

You’re walking the town / you’re mapping / you’re talking to people / you’re trying to get information.

You’re talking to people *one-on-one*

*or*

you c-a-n do archival research.

But *(Pause)* usually it’s best to t-a-l-k to the people / to get a f-e-e-l for it.

Some researchers live in the community because they *need* to understand the people.

*(Speaking very emphatically)*

And the performances are done in *their* own language

You should speak *their* language.

The w-h-o-l-e idea is for them to understand you.

The meaning should a-l-w-a-y-s be from *their* perspective  
a-l-w-a-y-s in *their* language.

(*Smiling, but intense*)

Almost EVERYTHING is from the people's point of view. Almost  
everything!

(*Esie's voice and demeanor become more quiet and pensive.*)

You try to set out or shape certain messages that you want highlighted  
and to push them toward that end

without *messing up* what they're thinking of *their* creation.

Because as soon as you start to build *for* them / what it is that YOU want /  
the effectiveness is *lost*.

*"I was slowly getting into their minds"*

TFD employs ethnographic methods of *entry* in that one must build rapport to enter a community by establishing relationships, trust, and honest dialogue with community members. Esie lived in the community, for a while, where the clinic and many of the mothers were located. She visited their homes and reached out to observe the context of their lives beyond the clinic walls. "I went to some of the homes, and I would say, 'You have a mother here,' and I would say, 'I am from the university, and I would like to find out about the baby and who takes care of the baby ...'" Esie enacted intimate habitation in the workings of her TFD project. If we understand rapport to be about the formation of human connections – the feeling of comfort, accord, and trust between the researcher and community members, Esie's method of building rapport can be traced by how she embodied *reflexivity* and *positive naïveté*. In the following excerpt, Esie narrates reflexivity as she is aware of herself as a focused and active listener, as well as the mindfulness of her position and the status differences inherent in the research process, particularly its implications related to the *knower and the known*. Who knows and who is striving to know is a complex and slippery distinction in community-based performance that raises questions relative to the democratic processes it strives to maintain: "How democratic is its own process? Who has authority? Who has power? Why, how, and toward what end do they use it? ..." <sup>66</sup> These are central questions that underlie each stage of the TFD method.

Esie performs *positive naïveté* as she intimately inhabits the distinctions between the knower and the known to reposition and reverse them and to embellish who knows and who is seeking to know. Rapport was built

through a performance of *positive naïveté* that, I would argue, negated deceptive pretenses for the possibility of life-changing dialogues and the greater good. The rapport that Esie created allowed her to extend beyond her own rapport to open the space of rapport to other outsiders – health care specialists who filled gaps.

The *first* thing I did was take my baby and attend one of the welfare sessions.

I just went as a *normal mother*.

And I went through the process of having my baby’s weight checked.

*(Enacting the dialogue)*

And I just got talking to the mothers: “Oh, that’s a lovely baby!”

“All you feed them is breast milk?”

“Oh, yes, yes!”

“Does he eat well?”

*(Small laughter)*

I just went from seat to seat.

There are about a h-u-n-d-r-e-d women so you must wait your turn.

It’s quite tedious. The first time was just conversational and afterward

I recorded in my notebook what I learned.

I e-v-e-n-t-u-a-l-l-y told them I was doing Theatre for Development.

I told them I *need* to learn about giving my baby good food.

*(In an animated voice and gesture)*

I would say, “You have such good ideas” and “You take your baby to the market?” and “Do you only feed your baby solid food?”

*I was slowly getting into their minds.*

*(In a serious tone)*

And then I said, “I am working on this project and I must do something for my final-year project. I’m thinking this might be a good idea for my project

because I’m a new mother and I don’t know a lot about taking care of children.

I’m learning so it would be good if we could all get together and come up with something to *educate* ourselves.”

*(In a lower voice)*

And they said w-e-l-l that’s true

and of course every mother LOVES to talk about their baby.

*(Her voice rises in pitch.)*

“Do you think you guys could meet and we could talk?”

*(Smiling)*

And they said YES!

*(More seriously)*

At the first meeting

I got ten of them to show up. At the next it was fifteen.

The third meeting was the general welfare sessions.

I explained to them what I was going to do  
and about the process

I explained that we would discuss how each mother took care of their baby  
how they feed their baby / if anyone did exclusive breast-feeding / if they  
had experiences they would like to share.

That is how the whole thing started.

When I started

I *pretended* that I didn't have a whole lot of information.

*(Resting her hands on her lap)*

I didn't tell them what I knew.

I just basically l-i-s-t-e-n-e-d to them and compared what they said to  
what I had been reading about baby's health.

*(Turns her head slightly from side to side.)*

Sometimes I would say, “Well, I have heard that ... you know ... When you  
do this and do that ...”

And some of them would say, “Oh, that's not true!”

*(In a facial expression of disapproval)*

They would say, “Those book people, they just tell us what to do.

They don't know what is on, on the *ground!*”

*(In a serious and calm demeanor)*

These were local folks. Some of them were not literate.

A few of them were semi-illiterate.

Some had very GOOD information and some had very BAD information.

I realized some of the mothers knew what is good for their baby  
but *some* of them did not know.

And I've got to find a way to *share* h-e-l-p-f-u-l knowledge with them.  
 I decided to bring them information.  
 I decided to bring *books* we could read to each other  
 and some knowledgeable person from the outside  
 to discuss the readings *with* us.

*We should do a play!*

During the TFD process, Esie and the mothers developed a play based on their ongoing conversations amongst themselves, Esie, and a health care specialist, pertaining to nutrition, breast-feeding, and motherhood. This is necessarily a dialogical process similar to the method Nat used for the market-women in that conversations are reflexive, critical, and generative. The process required that they pay deep attention and be deliberative about their own process and what they say and learn together because they were to adapt their play and develop their performance upon the raw material of all of what was said and done during this dialogical process. The collaborative dynamics of translating all that they experienced and learned with Esie into a play form concretized, organized, and made it memorable. The play ultimately developed into a plot about a group of women, each one a lively, distinctive, and compelling character, who had come together as friends and ended up sharing and debating their own ideas from a range of topics relative to babies' health and the difficulties and joys of motherhood. The play reflected the key points of information in promoting nutrition and health and the central challenges and perceptions that are obstacles in health care success. The following narrative describes how transforming information into a performance affected the mothers.

*(Speaking enthusiastically as she enacts the dialogue.)*

I said, "We should do a play because if we're just going to talk about this, it's going to be boring, so we should come up with a play."  
 And they said, "A play?! We can't act!"  
 I said, "Of course you can!"

*(In a calm, serious tone)*

And then I had to *coax* them and get them to act.  
 And so we came up with a story and we acted it out.  
 We had five rehearsals.  
 Five two-hour rehearsals and each rehearsal was sort of different.

*(Speaking faster with hand gestures)*

We would change the dialogue / or they found out something else / or people would want to incorporate something different into the scene / or they would decide to take something out because they didn't *really* like it.

*(Slower)*

By the fifth performance<sup>67</sup> before the actual performance date we showed it to other members of the community.

My target audience was *really* the welfare clinic attendance.

These were the m-o-t-h-e-r-s.

It was such fun. I REALLY loved it. The *mothers* REALLY loved it.

### *They stayed in the sun*

On the day of the play, the community organizers recorded about 120 women attending the performance session. During the post-performance discussion, there was a lively interchange between participants and audience members as they asked questions and responded to the performance. The performance brought together people whose work and lives affected each other but who had never met or been in a room together: an official in charge of children's programs at UNICEF, the national coordinator for breast-feeding, a representative from the food and nutrition unit for Ghana's health service, and an official from the Ministry of Health. Esie said they were all eager to assist in the post-performance discussion by addressing technical questions and expanding on the ideas brought forth in the show. Bringing them together in a room where the mothers were agents and actors of their own knowledge and ideas through their performance, and where the "experts" were audience/witnesses/participants to their performance, empowered the mothers to do more, learn more, and gain more control over the health of their babies and themselves. Esie said the mothers were beaming with confidence "because it's not often that they get to relate to these big people, they kind of see them as big people. And I was most happy." She went on to say that the "big people" attended because they thought they were needed to provide information and thought it a good idea to support the clinic, but they didn't really understand her project or what they were coming to see. Esie said "they were amazed" and wanted the performance to travel to other audiences. Theatre as a democratic process at the health center "repositioned" the mothers. As the "big people" were



repositioned into this new arrangement of spectators, this different proxemics also repositioned them from those who know and speak to those who learn and listen. The women were now repositioned from those who needed help to those who narrated what was needed; from those who sought assistance for their babies to those who claimed their agency as mothers; from those who received a health service to those who presented other and more possibilities for health. “They Stayed in the Sun,” exemplified the actor as agent, the performing body as sign and repository of authority with an even greater possibility for collaborative, mutual respect and reciprocal learning. This was the work of live performance where performers and audience members – in a shared temporality – encountered and engaged “the dynamic oscillation between *corporeality* and *signification*.”<sup>68</sup> It was the affect of sentiment, pleasure, displeasure, and emotion conjoined with corporeal and signification that created and enhanced the existential of presence, a presence that is always already ontologically linked to live performance. This performed presence of live performance on the street or on the stage raises questions of utopia. When we enter the discourse of utopia or utopian performance, it does not refer to a place of ideal perfection, but to a commitment to the future.<sup>69</sup> Utopia “is not prescriptive, it renders potential blueprints of a world not quite here, a horizon of possibility, not a fixed schema.”<sup>70</sup> José Muñoz reminds us that the nature of utopia is more centrally related to a “a politics of emotion.”<sup>71</sup> For Esie and the mothers, it was the affect of pleasure and emotion, the oscillation of corporeality and signification, and the enlivening temporality of presence that invoke the utopian, the future newly felt and imagined, and therefore, Esie’s politics of transformation.

*(Smiling and animated as she enacts the dialogue.)*

They said: “Oh we *should* have done this all along. This was so practical! We should have had them come to the breast-feeding lunch to perform.”  
And I said: “Oh no, we are not a *theatre* group. These are women who attend the clinic here.”

And sometimes you have someone shout out from the audience.  
Then another woman would say: “SHUT UP!” It’s all v-e-r-y casual.  
And we would continue the show.

*(Resting back in the chair in a more quiet tone)*

So the whole idea was just getting the audience members to *relate*.  
For example / if I’m saying / “You need to give your baby l-o-t-s of tomatoes because giving tomatoes to your baby is very good for the baby”

Some v-e-r-y shy mother would respond to my comment about tomatoes.  
 So this is how you can get them to participate.  
 And these mothers were a bit on the *shy* side.  
 But it was *still* a-m-a-z-i-n-g that we got them into the performance.  
 They all waited patiently through the ENTIRE performance.  
 And the whole thing came up to an hour and a half.  
*They stayed in the sun.*  
 This was an outside / an outdoor setting.

*(Smiles and nods her head with pride.)*

We were sitting out on the porch  
 and there was *no shade* and the sun was up.

### *What they contributed was used*

Esie said the aim of TFD is to “change perception, or it is also to help people understand something they’re doing is right, or to bank an idea.” The facilitator has expected outcomes, but the point is to open up the issue from as many angles as possible so the community in question generates an array of possibilities for resolution. Those consequences that are threatening to the life and well-being of community members are skillfully articulated and realized by the members themselves through the techniques, rapport, and knowledge base of the facilitator. A resolution may emerge and then members will, as in the case of breast milk, “go think about it and make their own choices and decide if they still want to do exclusive breast milk feeding or if they don’t.” Esie is quick to state that if the members of a community end up with a contrary resolution to that of the TFD project, then perhaps the facilitator was off base in the first place. But, hopefully, everyone still learned something new and important from the process, e.g., an unanticipated and greater end emerged, or, the opposite could happen, the facilitator did not do the proper research, spend the needed time, develop proper rapport, or have the skills to guide the project to a more progressive or helpful end. For Esie, the latter is a nightmare. For example, Esie says, “... your play depicts a baby who has had exclusive breast-feeding for six months and a baby who has not. The audience sees the story, and they see how the babies are doing. The audience compares and decides. You don’t say, ‘that is good, or that is bad.’ But obviously, from the way the story was staged, the audience will probably go with the story-line you have pumped up.” For the TFD facilitator, what you “pumped up” is what you hope will be the story-line and resolution the members are persuaded is in

their best interest. Again, this is a delicate balance between the researcher's answers to a problem being provided and the preferred TFD philosophy that is a more collaborative, a more dialogical performance, where an informed facilitator labors toward the *participatory evolution of a particular alternative*. As Esie told me, the objective is "transformation," and you hope that once you enter a community, things will be different when you leave. She said, "You have an objective, and you want to make sure that your objective is achieved. So it's dicey because, without influencing them, you've influenced them."

We want to communicate through *performance*.

That's the bottom line.

There's an *audience* and there's a *performer* / so that's a *theatre*.

That's the basic form of theatre / but here there's NO stage / NO costumes.

I mean / you c-o-u-l-d use costumes to enhance the performance to make it more fun

but the idea is not to *bother* with costumes / props / and / so on / and / so forth.

There are *no* lights and there are *no* voice packs

or what do you call them?

Microphones.

You are just projecting your own voice

walking out to the person and talking and making it all very / very (*Pause*)

what's the word to use (*Pause*)

*organic* /very natural.

So that e-v-e-r-y-o-n-e is free.

Most of the time what you are doing is so c-a-p-t-i-v-a-t-i-n-g that they are *involved*.

Some of them say: "I told her to say that end part!"

(*Resting her hands in her lap and speaking softly*)

They are v-e-r-y happy that *what they contributed was used*.

Theatre for Development challenges notions of "development" understood as those First World nations and people who are "developed," with formations of knowledge, against those "underdeveloped" (or developing) nations and peoples who are striving to *become* developed and to become knowledgeable *like them*. Theatre for Development, as illustrated in the examples of Nat and Esie, is community-based performance where dichotomies such as who knows more and who knows less, who leads and who follows, and who represents the advanced model and who strives to be the good enough copy are discouraged. Jan Cohen-Cruz reflects the processes of

both the Makala market-women's performance and the women at the health clinic through four general principles of community-based performance that also serve as a summary of key principles of TFD: communal context, reciprocity, hyphenation, and active culture.

### *Communal context*

Nat and Esie's performances evolved from a dialogic process and mutually formed collaboration among a TFD director and community members where the space and place that they both inhabit and where they both belong come together forming a communal context that is essential to the research process. The context of the researcher and the context of the community participants are also extended beyond the process to the culminating performance where the audience is now included as part of the experience. According to Cruz, "Communal context also refers to the audience's experience in the actual time, place, and circumstances of the performance."<sup>72</sup>

### *Reciprocity*

Shared "ownership" of the performances resulted in a reciprocity where both TFD directors and community members not only shared in a particular creative and discursive process, but they are reciprocally responsible and accountable for the performance that was ultimately produced – its artistic and political value and effects. Since community members and the director have a stake in the project, all parties share ownership.

### *Hyphenation*

For Esie and for Nat, theatre necessarily conjoined with a social purpose. Their art encompassed an added realm. Cruz states, "For community-based artists, symbolic expression is not enough; they want their art to have some concrete social implication, and they want a life in art that interacts with other realms (therapy, community organizing, etc.)."<sup>73</sup> The hyphen in community-based art represents a connection. For Cruz it is the connection that links art to politics. It is this hyphenation that is "not just grammatical" but signals that the practice of art is constituted by art as praxis. For some of us, whether the hyphen is literally used or not, community-based theatre indicates a coupling joining "entertainment" with "efficacy."

### *Active culture*

Whether it is TFD or other forms of art-making, when people are involved in a creative process and in the work of making art, it most often "causes

people to plumb their hearts and minds, experiences and conceptions.”<sup>74</sup> Making art means there is greater potential for them to learn more about themselves, about others, and to enlarge their capacity for empathy, and to more actively appreciate, engage, and (re)make the spaces where they belong or should belong.

*Coda: September 2008*

When I went to see Nathaniel and Esie in the summer of 2008, they were working with the Ministry of Health on a new initiative based on preventative health care, entitled “The Regenerative Health and Nutrition Program.” They employ TFD techniques across eight districts and seven regions to encourage, in Esie’s words, “Ghanaians to take responsibility for their health by making positive lifestyle changes to prevent disease.” As a result of their success, a thirteen-episode radio drama is being developed and will be broadcast nationwide in English and in local language districts.

I also visited the Ark Foundation and WILDAF, where Angela Dwamena-Aboagye and Bernice Sam continue their directorships, and like the coalition on the Women’s Manifesto, the Network for Women’s Rights (NETRIGHT), the Gender Violence Survivors Support Network (GVSSN), and a number of other women’s coalitions, they carry on their activist work that results in policy changes and social justice initiatives that have transformed the lives of women across the country.<sup>75</sup>

Shortly after my meeting with Bernice, I went for my usual morning walk down the road in East Legon for roasted plantain and groundnuts. There was no sidewalk, so during the morning traffic I navigated between the street and the kiosks lining the road. As women carried large baskets on their heads with various items for sale, their babies wrapped in cloth around their backs, they balanced between the edge of the road, the open sewers, and the heavy traffic. These women rushed alongside moving cars as drivers hurriedly paid for their goods in the moving traffic: plantain chips, water, fruit, bread, nuts, linens, cookware, assortments of snacks and candies, and more. As I approached the woman’s kiosk where I usually purchased my morning plantain and ground nuts, a speeding car suddenly stopped in front of her plantain stand and startled me. The car was big, shiny, and black with flashy wheels, tinted windows, and a sticker on the back window that read “Buy American Rice.” The force of the car, inches away, also startled a young woman passing along the road and almost knocked her and her child into the gutter, but a boy quickly caught the woman and child and saved them from falling. A Ghanaian man got out

of the big shiny black car and, without apology or concern for anyone, walked boldly up to the plantain stand, pulled out a bunch of money, and pointed to the plantain of his choice. The woman selling the plantain ignored him as though he were air. The man, annoyed by being ignored, raised his voice and demanded the plantain. The woman calmly ignored him. With a heavy, angry voice, the man began casting insults upon her. The woman, unaffected, continued to turn over each plantain against the burning coals. By this time all eyes were on the shouting man, who looked as though he was about to implode, and the small woman attending to her plantain, who refused to acknowledge his presence. The man was embarrassed. He began to shout louder, he moved closer to the woman, but, still undeterred, she kept turning her plantain and then began to softly hum a tune. The man pointed his finger to threaten her and came in closer as though he were about to strike her, and in that volatile moment the other women at their kiosk along the road – the paw paw, pineapple, and tomato sellers – with knives in hand surrounded the angry man. The man stepped back with a mixture of surprise and fear and in a grand huff quickly returned to his shiny car making threats about “stupid women” and how he was “going to come back and teach them a lesson.” Everyone laughed as the man sped off cursing, fist shaking out of the car window, and the “Buy American Rice” faded away down the road.

I asked the woman selling pineapple: “Do you think he will come back?”

In clear English she said, “Let him come back. Foolish man! We are not afraid of stupid men. Let him come!”

The woman selling the plantain laughed and said: “Ehh! These women in Ghana here! It is a new day!”

I bought my plantain and asked her name.

She smiled and said her name was Cecilia.

Her teenage daughter, dressed in a school uniform, walked up to the kiosk and greeted her mother. The girl just missed the angry man and his big shiny car. She sat down behind the kiosk and took out a red notebook from her bag and began writing. “You look like you are concentrating very hard,” I said to the girl.

She looked up with a pleasant smile and in a shy voice said: “I am writing a story about my mother.”

Among the papers in her school bag was a small white book: *The Women’s Manifesto for Ghana*.

“Is that your school book in your bag?” I asked.

Before the girl spoke, her mother said: “I gave it to her – she reads very well and works very hard in school. She reads to us.”

“Do you like the book?”

“Yes, Madame,” said the girl.

The mother looked over at her daughter and turned to me. “I go to the meetings for women in Ghana here. I go. I teach my daughter.”

#### NOTES

1. Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, p. 76.
2. Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*.
3. The title *Is It a Human Being or a Girl?* came from an interview during my fieldwork when a research consultant informed me that when a baby is born, instead of asking is it a girl or boy, in certain areas of Ghana some may ask, “Is it a human being or a girl?”
4. Madison, “Performance, Personal Narratives,” pp. 276–86.
5. Smith, *Laclau and Mouffe*, p. 8.
6. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, p. 192.
7. Madison, “Performance, Personal Narratives,” p. 280.
8. Taylor, *Disappearing Acts*.
9. Amadou Diallo was born in Guinea, West Africa and migrated to New York. He was murdered by four plainclothes police officers as he was entering his residence in the Bronx. The police were looking for a criminal, a young black man they thought was Amadou. They asked him if they could have a word with him. Amadou reached for his wallet to show his identification. He did not have a weapon. The officers shot him nineteen times. They were brought to trial and acquitted.
10. Mumia Abu-Jamal was convicted and sentenced to death for the 1981 murder of police officer Daniel Faulkner. Since his conviction, his case has received international attention because of the debate over whether he received a fair trial. During his imprisonment, Mumia published several books and other commentaries, most notably *Live from Death Row*. As of this writing, his legal appeals are still unsettled and he remains in prison at State Correctional Institution Greene near Waynesburg, Pennsylvania.
11. The following is an excerpt from *The New York Times* (February 26, 2000) account of the Diallo case and verdict:

THE DIALLO VERDICT: THE OVERVIEW; 4 OFFICERS IN  
DIALLO SHOOTING ARE ACQUITTED OF ALL CHARGES

By JANE FRITSCH

Published: February 26, 2000

Four New York City police officers were acquitted today of all charges in the death of Amadou Diallo, the immigrant from Guinea who was fired on 41 times as he stood, unarmed, in the vestibule of his apartment building in the Bronx.

The verdict came in a tense and racially charged case that led to anti-police demonstrations, arrests, and a reorganization of the department's Street Crime Unit, to which the officers belonged. While acknowledging that they had made

a mistake, the officers said Mr. Diallo was largely to blame for his death. He did not respond to their commands to stop, they said, and did not keep his hands in sight. Instead he ran into the vestibule of his building and began digging in his pocket, they said, and then turned toward the officers with something in his right hand. They said they thought it was a gun and began shooting, setting off a chaotic hail of ricocheting bullets and muzzle flashes that made it seem as if they were in a firefight. When Mr. Diallo finally slumped to the floor, his wallet fell out of his right hand. There had been no gun. In his closing argument, Mr. Warner suggested that Mr. Diallo may simply have been reaching for his wallet to hand it over to what he thought was a gang of robbers. Or perhaps, Mr. Warner said, he was trying to show the officers his identification. The officers' snap judgment about Mr. Diallo when they first saw him from their car and their failure to think through the situation showed a recklessness and complete lack of concern for Mr. Diallo's life that made them culpable for his death, Mr. Warner asserted. "Amadou Diallo was unarmed, doing nothing wrong, and he was minding his own business," Mr. Warner said. "In the mindset they had, that man was doomed from the minute they saw him."

12. Jones, "The Self as Other," p. 3.
13. Probyn, *Outside Belonging*, pp. 8–9.
14. Cooper's phrase is quoted in the title of Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*.
15. Conquergood, "Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research," pp. 145–56.
16. Cohen-Cruz, "General Introduction," *Radical Street Performance*, p. 1.
17. Reinelt, *Crucibles of Crisis*, p. 3.
18. Gunner, *Politics and Performance*.
19. See Brecher *et al.*, *Globalization from Below*, and Cohen-Cruz, *Radical Street Performance*.
20. The following scholarship on the body and contested performance has significantly informed my thinking: Boal, *The Theatre of the Oppressed*; Bourdieu, *Distinction*; Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*; Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness*; Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*; and Scarry, *The Body in Pain*.
21. The following works have informed my thinking on participatory democracy: Amin, *Capitalism in the Age of Globalization*; Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene*; Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*; Shome, "Space Matters"; Stiglitz, *Globalization and its Discontents*; and West, *The Ethical Dimension of Marxist Thought*.
22. Lisa Aubrey, "In Salute to Hero Amadou Diallo: African Americans Organize Amadou Diallo Protest Activities in Accra, Ghana in 2000: Lesson for Democracy in The United States and in Ghana." This article, no longer extant, appeared in Ohio University's online publication *Tonguna* in winter 2001.
23. Marable, *Speaking Truth to Power*.
24. Brecher *et al.*, pp. 23, 26.
25. Cohen-Cruz, *The Politics of Performance*, p. 6.
26. Cohen-Cruz, *The Politics of Performance*, p. 5.



27. "Telling the Told" is a phrase first coined in E. Patrick Johnson's M.A. Thesis, "An Ethnography of Performance Interpreting The Personal Narrative of Mary Rhyne," University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, based on the oral history of his grandmother. It is also the title of an essay by Della Pollock, "Telling the Told."
28. Pollock, *Remembering*, p. 3.
29. Fine, *The Folklore Text*, p. 1.
30. The term "performance in print" is most compellingly discussed in Nfah-Abbenyi, *Gender in African Women's Writing* and Busia, "Performance."
31. See Glassie, *Passing the Time in Ballymenone*, and Tedlock, "On the Translation of Style in Oral Narrative."
32. The renowned African American writer James Baldwin made this statement in a television interview in the mid-1960s, responding to questions on race, politics, and his decision to become an expatriate and live in France.
33. See Alcott, "The Problem of Speaking for Others"; Bauman, *Verbal Art as Performance*; Bruner, "Experience and its Expressions"; Fusco, "The Other History"; Goodall, *Writing the New Ethnography*; Langellier and Peterson, *Storytelling in Daily Life*; Spry, "A Performative-I Copresence"; Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*; Tedlock, *The Spoken Word*; and Warren, *Performing Purity*.
34. The Domestic Violence Bill was passed on February 21, 2007. According to a source at the Ghana News Agency: "Some female Members of Parliament, thrilled at the passage, moved from their seats and shook hands with their male counterparts in an expression of joy over the Bill, which aims at offering protection for women and children particularly from domestic violence. A shout ... echoed 'No' seemed to boom the Chamber, when the Speaker, Mr. Ebenezer Begyina Sekyi-Hughes put the third reading of the Bill to a vote, but the Speaker ruled in favour of the 'Ayes' whose response was also very loud. The Bill has generated much heat since it was presented and read for the first time in Parliament in May 2006, with reactions and counter-reactions of some provisions by Members of Parliament, gender advocates and civil society groups. Divided in three parts, the first part of the Bill makes provision for the Meaning of Domestic Violence; Meaning of Domestic Relationship; Prohibition of Domestic Violence; Number of Acts which Would Amount to Domestic Violence, Filing of Complaints to the Police, Police Assistance, Arrest by Police and Arrest by Police Officer Without Warrant. In the second part, provisions are made for Protection Order as Jurisdiction of the Court, Application for Protection Order, Conduct of Court Proceedings, Interim Protection Order, Grant of Protection Order Reference to Family Tribunal and Power to Discharge Protection Order. Part Three of the Bill covers miscellaneous provisions including Relation of Act to Criminal Code, Promotion of Reconciliation by Court, Publication of Proceedings, Criminal Charges and Protection, Civil Claim for Damages, Procedure Rules for Domestic Violence, Regulations and Interpretation. Among the new clauses of the Bill is the establishment of Victims of Domestic Violence Support Fund,

which shall source funds by voluntary contributions to the Fund from individuals, organizations and the private sector; the amount of money that Parliament may approve for payment into the Fund, and any other source approved by the Minister Responsible for Finance. Moneys of the Fund shall be applied towards the basic material support of victims of domestic violence, tracing the families of victims of domestic violence and for any other matter connected with the rehabilitation and reintegration of victims of domestic violence in their best interest. The moneys shall also be applied for the construction of reception shelters for victims of domestic violence in the regions and districts and for training and capacity building to persons connected with the provision of shelter, rehabilitation and reintegration.”

35. Perry, *The Idea of Human Rights*, p. 6.
36. Ignatieff, *Human Rights as Politics and Idolatry*, p. xx.
37. Donnelly, “Cultural Relativism and Universal Human Rights,” p. 401.
38. Renteln, *International Human Rights*, p. 137.
39. Orentlicher, “Relativism and Religion,” p. 143.
40. An-Na’im, *Human Rights in Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, p. 37.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 40. For an extended discussion on notions relating to the philosophy of rights, internationalism, and political economy, see Brysk, *Globalization and Human Rights*; Buergenthal, “International Human Rights”; Butegwa, “Mediating Culture”; Ehrenberg, *Civil Society*; Orend, *Human Rights*; Robbins, *Feeling Global*; Robertson, *Crimes Against Humanity*; Shivji, *The Concept of Human Rights in Africa*; and Smith, *Transformations*.
42. This idea of the authority of experience is articulated most importantly in Joan W. Scott’s classic essay, “Experience.”
43. Blau and Moncada, *Beyond the Liberal Vision*, p. 29.
44. Gutmann, “Introduction,” p. ix.
45. Blau and Moncada, p. 29.
46. Ignatieff, pp. 66–67.
47. Blau and Moncada, p. 3.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
49. The official description of WILDAF states it is a “Pan African non-governmental, non-profit women’s rights network organized, sustained, and managed by African women which links law and women’s rights to promote the participation of African women in their local communities, in their nation and on international scale. WILDAF’s specific focus is human rights defense and awareness, legal education and policy reform, economic justice and resource access, and combating violence against women.”
50. The series of excerpts that follow are taken directly from *The Women’s Manifesto for Ghana*. Takyiwaa Manuh, director of the Kwame Nkrumah Institute for African Studies at the University of Ghana in Legon describes the coalition: “The Coalition on the Women’s Manifesto is a broad coalition of NGOs, individuals, and other civil society organizations formed out of the processes involved in the production and dissemination of *The Women’s Manifesto for Ghana* in 2003 and 2004. The manifesto was produced out of a

concern for the insufficient attention paid to gender issues, the limited presence of women in public life, and the poor participation rates of women in politics and decision-making in Ghana. The process of drawing it up built on the experiences of women in Uganda, Botswana, Tanzania, South Africa, and Zambia who have undergone a similar experience and where the adoption of manifestos in tandem with measures by the state have led to increases in women's representation in politics and decision-making and put women's issues on the political agenda. The manifesto is a political document that provides a platform for making a common set of demands for the achievement of gender equality and equity and sustainable national development in Ghana." From Takyiwaa Manuh, "Doing Gender Work in Ghana," pp. 135–43.

51. *The Women's Manifesto for Ghana*, p. 6.
52. "Mandates for Action."
53. *The Women's Manifesto for Ghana*, p. 7.
54. Definitions from the Merriam–Webster Dictionary, 1995–2000.
55. Hansen, "Fashioning," pp. 301–09.
56. Durbars originally functioned as a court of indigenous rulers and as a festival given by local rulers for imperial sovereigns. In contemporary Ghana, durbars honor the local chiefs in their full regalia as a community of celebrants come together to mark a traditional festival or special occasion. During the durbar, speech, testimony, song, and dance are collectively shared. The durbar serves as a gathering where celebrants share information, where news, ideas, and knowledge relevant to the participants are communicated.
57. Although Levinas' theorization of the face relative to loving the Other has been criticized as fetishism, I want to recoup the face as metaphor, for the purposes of this narration, because in the words of Bernice it is the felt – sensing presence, the body-to-body temporality, where through the durbar festival I can be meaningfully with you and look into your face.
58. Levinas, *Time and The Other*, and Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, pp. 43–44.
59. Oxford Street is the main commercial street in Accra where the shops are considered more "upscale" for tourists and European ex-patriots and where many of them frequent restaurants and social clubs.
60. Cohen-Cruz, *Radical Street Performance*, p. 427.
61. Professor Elias Kwaku Asiama is also a Christian reverend and a health practitioner. His self-published book entitled *Oral History and Cultural Practices of the Buem People* examines, in Professor Asiama's words, oral history as a method in "recovering history from oral sources for documentation purposes."
62. Asiama, p. 6.
63. Neologism made popular by Kwame Nkrumah, meaning to enact consciousness-raising or to enlighten for the betterment of country and citizenship.
64. Quoted in Hamera, *Dancing Communities*, pp. 9, 11.
65. McConachie, "Approaching the 'Structure of Feeling' in Grassroots Theater," p. 44.

66. Haedicke and Nellhaus, "Part Two: Introduction," *Performing Democracy*, p. 117.
67. Esie said in our interview that this is "actually called 'pretesting' because it is before the 'real' public performance."
68. McConachie, p. 41.
69. See Denzin, *Performance Ethnography*; Dolan, "Polemics and Potential"; Grossberg, *Caught in the Crossfire*; and Keeling, *The Witch's Flight*.
70. Muñoz, "Stages," p. 9.
71. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
72. Cohen-Cruz, "The Problem Democracy is Supposed to Solve," p. 432.
73. *Ibid.*, p. 434.
74. *Ibid.*
75. In 2001, the perpetrator of the serial killings of women in Accra was arrested, tried, and convicted.

## *Epilogue*

Each act/Act in this book demonstrates how performance and activism are mutually constitutive: together public space is transformed, heightened, and made more communal; the urgency of dissent and the rhetoric of protest is made more coherent, poignant, and accessible through the symbolic; the dichotomies separating modernity and tradition – the enlightened and unenlightened, the advanced and the backward – become dialectical, made more complicated by integrating opposites to create alternative thoughts and practices; and abstract moral arguments and political theory are unveiled in action and their consequences made more apparent through the body and embodied interpretations of daily life.

Performance and activism are mutually constitutive because performance demands that we pay attention to the deep particularities of human action. A performance analytic requires that we attend to the layers of contexts and motivating factors that generate acts of activism. We cannot simply theorize or perform the surfaces or symptoms of these acts. Performance aims to delve into the undercurrents, the deep particularities, to ask: How is it what it is? Searching the deep particularities of these acts of activism excavated a political economy of poverty that is inseparable from human rights and social justice. Thomas Pogge reminds us that severe poverty and the powerlessness it entails are all but impossible for some of us to imagine.<sup>1</sup> “Severe poverty today, while no less horrific than that experienced by the early American settlers, is fundamentally different in context and causation. Its persistence is not forced on us by natural contingencies of soil, seeds, or climate. Rather, its persistence is driven by the ways that economic interactions are structured.”<sup>2</sup> Poverty is not simply material deprivation but a motivating factor of human dignity, fundamental freedom, basic human rights, and justice.

This ethnography attempts to excavate political economy from the currents and particularities of human rights by representing it on the public

stage and as a performance in print because the question of motivation, context, and content are central elements in what it means to perform. Throughout these pages, performance and activism are mutually constitutive in the evocation of intimate habitation and co-performative witnessing because fieldwork “is not merely seen as an object to be externally described but as a realm to be intimately inhabited”<sup>3</sup> and because co-performative witnessing demands “acknowledgement of others as contemporaries,” moving away from the “Other-as-theme to Other-as-interlocutor.”<sup>4</sup> Throughout these pages, activism speaks and acts through performatives by doing things and by things done. Co-performative witnessing is to believe de Certeau’s edict and Conquergood’s praxis that ethics is fundamentally about defining a distance between what is and what ought to be and that this distance designates a space where we have something to do. What I had “to do” in bearing witness and in the spirit of artistry, analysis, and activism<sup>5</sup> was to provide an opportunity for others to respond, that is, to provide the opportunity of response-ability to an audience. I hope this book will contribute to performances of possibilities that will invoke new and more responses and that will inspire new and more advocates and acts of activism.

A FINAL REFLECTION ... DOUBT, THE CYNIC, AND  
QUESTIONING THE SMALL ACT

One afternoon, shortly after Nasser lost the election for Member of Parliament and Al Gore lost his election to George W. Bush for President of the United States, we were having a conversation on my back porch at Legon. I mused over the classic question pertaining to the relevance of the academy in troubled times. I remember asking him who or what “the life of the mind” ultimately serves: As academics do we overestimate our importance and our influence? Are our efforts more about frivolity than freedom against the problems that beset the world? In that moment, I was feeling just as cynical about the noble cause of activism, for acts of activism seemed minute and ineffectual as the rich and powerful got richer and more powerful while the poor and vulnerable got poorer and more vulnerable; as violence and terror across the globe became daily news events; as the warming of the planet brought innumerable threats to life everywhere; as AIDS remained rampant and merciless. The notion of an activist seemed small – infinitely minute – against the magnitude of this disorder. Nasser became pensive and, looking out at the garden, he said:

There are so many factors that are responsible for maintaining certain equilibriums in nature, in society, in creation.

I have always said that in our quest for knowledge  
we have the freedom to know so many things ...

*(Pause)*

the human mind and its limitless nature in the quest for knowledge.  
When paradigms of knowledge change, it looks like knowledge is moving in  
different directions.

*(He stops for a moment and looks out over the yard. A baby gecko plays along the  
banister of the porch.)*

Before reality started, even before the building blocks of reality were  
created –

we begin with the concept of the big bang.

This will push our knowledge back to one hundred years, two hundred,  
four million, one billion,

the furthest we can go is about 15 billion years ago to the big bang,  
which started with a small dot.

Yes, a small dot – smaller than the head of a pin.

All that we know, all that we are, all creation began with that small dot –  
smaller than the head of a pin.

It is said that the small dot was composed of an ultra concentration of  
energy –

such a very dense concentration –

the temperature was a trillion times hotter than the inner core of the sun.

The astronomers say that when others want to illustrate the big bang on  
television,

they portray a dot on a screen and then suddenly the dot covers the screen.

But the astronomers tell us that this is the wrong depiction –

this is not how the big bang happened!

Scientists tell us that you could not have been outside the big bang and  
seen it –

the space was not there, there was NO SPACE!

No light, no darkness. Nothingness.

Today, here, it is hard for us to perceive nothingness – no space.

But we must understand that the building blocks for human existence,  
the billions of stars in the galaxy, for everything – even for space itself –  
everything began with that ultra dense concentration of energy, smaller  
than the head of a pin.

*(He smiles and nods his head with a quiet, gentle laugh.)*

If we limit everything to the knowledge that we have,  
we will limit everything to the knowledge that we have.

*(He pauses. The baby gecko jumps down from the porch. We both follow her path with our eyes. Nasser turns to me with an expression of delightful wonder.)*

The black holes – the black holes in the universe  
where the inner core of stars usually collapses and forms a very dense  
concentration –  
nothing escapes them  
not even light  
but they are all spinning –  
They are spinning in a direction and an order.

If we can imagine all knowledge and creation evolving from energy so small,  
smaller than the head of a pin, yet too powerful to contain in its dense,  
boundless, and infinite effects, can we re-imagine the “small”? If we can  
imagine the power of an idea, a word, an *act* spinning in a direction and an  
order – emboldened at each turn by paths of light and indomitable human  
will – can we re-imagine our world?

## NOTES

1. Pogge, *Freedom from Poverty as a Human Right*, p. 2.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
3. Visweswaran, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*, p. 22.
4. Conquergood, “Rethinking Ethnography: Towards a Critical Cultural Politics,” p. 354.
5. Conquergood, “Performance Studies,” pp. 145–56.





## *Appendices: Scripts*



APPENDIX I

*Is it a human being or a girl?*

Adapted and directed in Ghana and USA by D. Soyini Madison  
Kelly Rowett James, dramaturge, and Hannah Blevins Harvey, stage  
manager for UNC – Chapel Hill performance

*The original Ghana cast*  
Christine Naa Norley Lokko  
S. O. H. Afriyie-Vidza  
Florence Akosua Abea  
Ekua Ekumah  
Jacqueline “Jackie” Afodemo Dowetin

The play is based on a compilation of documents, interviews, traditional cultural practices, and conversations from the following institutions and individuals. We would like to thank all of them for their time and generosity in sharing their views, their expertise, and their commitment to issues of human rights, culture, and traditional religion: International Needs Ghana, Afrikania/Afrikan Renaissance Mission, Blakhud Research Centre, Fetish Slaves Liberation Movement (FESLIM), The African Women’s Lawyers Association (AWLA), Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), Ms. Agnis Okudzeto, Mr. Vincent Azumah, Reverend Walter Pimpong, Mr. Ali Mensah Quaye, Mr. Essau Ayetor, Ms. Patience Vormawor, Professor Adam Nasser, Professor Elam Dovlo, Professor Kofi Anyidoho, Ms. Mabel Kumasi, Commissioner Emile Short, Mr. Mark Wisdom, Tugbui Addo VIII (paramount chief, Klikor region), Mr. Dale Massiasta, Professor Lisa Aubrey, Bishop Peter Sarpong, Mr. Awudu Issah Mahmudu, Ms. Jacqueline Afodemo Dowetin, Trokosi women from the Klikor and Tongu regions.

PROLOGUE: REMEMBERING

*(Lights up on Recorder 1, dim on actors. Audio tapes are playing of the Recorder’s various field interviews. The “Performance” is over. The Recorder has returned home. Projected on the screen upstage are newspaper clippings, announcements, and notices of the Performance, followed by newspaper clippings from Ghanaian papers on the Trokosi debate. All actors are onstage poised at various platforms. On cue throughout the prologue the actors change positions while the Recorder is centerstage “writing” and speaking to the audience. The audio fades.)*

RECORDER 1/PERFORMER 1 It is night in Ghana. What defines the night here are the stars and the breeze: the stars because they are like shining hieroglyphs against a vast black canvas and the breeze because its gentle coolness is a respite from the brutal heat of the day. On this Ghanaian night, I stand far in the back of the Outdoor Theatre at the home that once belonged to the ex-patriot W. E. B. Dubois. I am looking out over the audience as they sit and watch the performance. I'm watching the performance too but as a director with that overwrought intensity and vulnerability that never seems to ease up with some of us. Our watching is always more than watching – it is obsession. We are beholden to every sight, sound, and movement within the frame. Our hearts jump at the possibility of some wayward slip-up and natural breathing is suspended until the show is over and we can exhale, finally, in the greetings and chatter, the congratulations and small talk that comes after the End. So, I stand here now knowing this is the final scene and the End is soon approaching, knowing that this End means our last performance, forever gone, disappeared. I stand here now knowing that my life in Ghana will soon end, and I will leave this performance, this theatre, this country and go back to the USA. And, now, suddenly I feel the weight of too many endings. I will hang on to this moment like time has no force. I wish I could put this moment in a box, wrapped in forever-and-ever, then pull it out, once in a while, when I really need to live inside it again – exactly as it is right now – when I'm back in the States, or next week, or when I'm ninety-nine. It is Sunday, June 25, 2000 at 10:13 p.m. and I am standing watching this audience of Ghanaians watching my show, our show, and I am going to pay attention to every detail (ALL) of *this moment* because there is no such thing as a box wrapped in forever-and-ever. There is only memory. I will remember this moment in its complete, specific, detailed, and utter fullness, most of all I will remember how it feels – the breeze and the stars and the smells of this night, the feel of the ground under my feet, the sound of the drum. I will remember it in my skin. (#10 “Skin.”)

#### THE PERFORMANCE

*(The actors change positions.)*

RECORDER 1 I stand here holding my breath in the presence of this performance. The stage is a dreamscape of blue, green, and red batik draped around dark-skinned bodies moving with troubled patience in a dark-skinned country that nestles the beauty of its darkness in hope and contradictions. When Ghanaians speak their voices, in pitch and intonation, are more foreign to me than their words. I never realized the magnitude of the human voice – the assorted sounds of words spoken – before I came to this country. When I leave Ghana I will miss the sounds of her voices. The stage is more than alive with these voices.

*(The actors change positions.)*

The performers are speaking from stories handed down to them. Stories I gave them.

Stories that were given to me.

A collection of stories about the bodies of women and bodies of belief.

It is said that Ethnography is an art and a science, but I know it is more about presence.

Presence in the living immediacy of stories being made.

I listened, I lived, I recorded. I felt. I did. (#11 “I did.”)

And the doing is this performance, right here and now.

In performance I hear these stories for the second time and more.

They are lived twice and more.

Tonight, I forget disappearance and endings as though my life depends on it.

I hold on to this moment by letting my body feel its every detail.

Now something begins to rise in my throat, like a wave of creation.

*(The actors change positions.)*

The performance lifts from the stage and comes toward me / it seeps into my pores and

my body becomes mouth

I am all mouth taking the performance in.

It is not my will but the will of performance.

How dare performance do this to me, how dare it take control. I made this

performance. I am the director and it must do what I tell it to do. How dare it think it has a will of its own and a demand beyond my own demands of it.

*(The actors change positions.)*

I have lived in this country for over two years to make this performance. Now, I realize all this time the performance has been making me.

This willful consumption beyond my own logic has made itself flesh with mine.

This performance is in my blood and I am changing. I don't feel myself any more.

There is such a thing as a “defining moment.”

Performance has enjoined my body to make me know in body what

(#9) *I only knew in mind.*

I am free. There are no chains around my ankles and neck. I can come here and go there. I can vote. I can work. I can love. I can buy things. I can create. The stories that have become this performance have unsettled my brain and, in turn, I feel them. Even made them into performance. But in this defining moment when all these endings still doggedly haunt me and all this desperation against disappearances makes me weak and a bit desperate – performance seeps into my flesh and commands my body to risk, to threaten, to take a stand and I am now shaken and reborn by its presence. This freedom that is mine is nothing in the face of itself and everything in the face of the unfree. There is such a thing as a defining moment. This Performance enters me to demand I know and feel that this performance has always been about one thing beyond other things – the Right to be human. “Soyini,” this performance says to me, under dark skies while dark-skin people watch, “Will you put your body on the line for the Right to be human?”

PERFORMER 2 This performance demands that you mean your own performance.

RECORDER 1 This performance twice told and more is about religion and tradition and why in that timeworn combination they can be deadly, sometimes evil.

This performance is about my own

RECORDER 1 & VOICE #10 (PERFORMER 9) pride for and anger against America

RECORDER 1 as she gives and takes throughout the world under red, white, and blue greed and to few generous truths.

This performance is about how the bodies of women and girls become a battleground and why this is a blessing and a curse depending on the direction of the force and the intent of the power.

PERFORMER 3 The performance is about dark-skinned people

PERFORMER 4 under dark skies who put their bodies on the line for Human Rights in their own country

RECORDER 1 while white people get all the credit for good deeds done. Performance asks the question again:

PERFORMER 5 “Will you put your body on the line for the Right to be Human?”

RECORDER 1 I say to performance: “I write about The Body; I theorize about The Body; I make art from and through The Body. Studies of the Body are everywhere in the academy.

PERFORMER 6 They even have a Study Guide to the Body For Beginners!

RECORDER 1 I am aware of the power and importance of the Body. But nowhere, in my Ph.D. orals or my tenure contract, have I been asked to put MY body on the line.”

Performance shuts my mouth with its overbearing discontent. It is a rude and unrelenting intruder still inside my skin like the Responsible Knower demanding I stop forgetting what I already believe to be true. A believable truth that right now is poignant and absolutely necessary for me.

PERFORMER 7 What is it that I really mean to say?

RECORDER 1 Spurred by this Responsible One my truth is:

PERFORMER 8 When we charge theory to work against the forces of politics and culture, forces that go outside history and belonging, to coerce figurations and formations of bodies into one unalterable thing we put our bodies on the line.

PERFORMER 9 When we teach the nature of intentional and avoidable suffering – how to locate it between and among a mass of convoluted appearances even when these appearances are assembled or strengthened by our own country or our own complicity – we put our bodies on the line.

RECORDER 1 & VOICE #8 (PERFORMER 12) When we perform for beauty, infinite beauty, our bodies are on the line.

RECORDER 1 In making this performance my body was on the line, BUT there are different lines.

PERFORMER 2 My line is not the same line as Wisdom Mensah, who journeyed in the middle of the night under threat of death into a remote and isolated village to liberate two little girls from bondage in a religious shrine.

PERFORMER 10 Not the same line as the twelve-year-old boy, a human rights activist, from Sierre Leone whom I met on the plane on my way to Guinea who told me the story of how he lay hiding quietly in a puddle of blood under his dead mother's body until the soldiers who hacked his family and his village to death left and moved on.

PERFORMER 11 Not the same line as Kweku, Sika, Kofi, Ibrahim, Segbefia, Kwakye, Owusu citizens in developing world politics negotiating mobility and survival under dubious globality.

RECORDER 1 In this land I have seen the human body in forms that are beautiful, insufferable, and somewhere in between – I have seen bodies endure and not – there are too many bodies pressed upon my memory hovering between death, starvation, and imprisonment.

PERFORMER 3 These are bodies that are on a (*and Recorder*) different line than mine.

PERFORMER 4 I stand here in Africa in the Outdoor Theatre that is the home

PERFORMER 5 and final resting place of W. E. B. Dubois and my body

PERFORMER 6 my American, academic, healthy, straight, body

PERFORMER 7 begins to feel the performance loosen from under my skin.

RECORDER 1 Performance leaves me and returns to the stage. It is just me now, alone in my own body, watching the performers take their last bow. Holding on to this moment:

*(Slow fade to black)*

## SCENE ONE: QUEENS AND SLAVES

*(Lights up in bright wash. Performers are standing in various positions onstage. The Recorder "weaves" between them.)*

PERFORMER 3 Trokosi / Troxovi / Fiashidi

PERFORMER 5 Troxovi – Troxovi

PERFORMER 4 Trokosi – Trokosi

PERFORMER 9 Fiashidi

PERFORMER 6 Trokosi

PERFORMER 3 Troxovi

PERFORMER 5 Trokosi

PERFORMER 4 Troxovi

PERFORMER 9 Fiashidi

PERFORMER 6 Trosi

PERFORMER 3 Troxovi

PERFORMER 5 Trokosi

PERFORMER 4 Trosi

PERFORMER 6 MaMa. Grandmother. Queens fit for kings.

The only, among women, who can reprimand the chief.

The Fiashidi attends the sacred stools.

The Fiashidi selects who should be ga, hanua, or hlofia:

headmen, youth leaders, and chiefs.

PERFORMER 4 Troxovi – A divinity which adopts children.



A divinity of justice, morality, public security, education and social welfare.  
Afegame – Great House.

*(Performer 3 and Performer 6 take steps away from each other until they are at opposite ends of the stage.)*

PERFORMER 6 Trosi – Tro/God Asi/wife – Wife of God.  
 PERFORMER 3 Trokosi – Tro/God – Kosi/Slave, Virgin, Wife  
 PERFORMER 6 Trokosi – Wife of God  
 PERFORMER 3 Trokosi – Slave of God!  
 PERFORMER 6 Trokosi – Wife of God!  
 PERFORMER 3 Trokosi – Slave of God!  
 PERFORMER 6 Trokosi – Wife! / T – Trokosi – Slave! / K – Trokosi – Wife! /  
 T – Trokosi – Slave! *(Repeat)*  
 PERFORMER 3 The Trokosi system demands that young girls be sent to a shrine  
 by force  
 As reparation  
 As atonement  
 For a crime committed by a member of their family  
 Many of whom she does not even know  
 She is sent to the shrine where she must serve the priest  
 She must serve his every need  
 She labours in the shrine  
 She goes and labours on the farm  
 She must have sexual intercourse with the priest  
 She is a virtual slave to the shrine and the priest in atonement for  
 An offence committed by someone else!  
 She must be sent to the shrine to satisfy God  
 Or, tragedy will befall her family, befall the community  
 If a Trokosi dies she must be replaced by another young, virgin, girl from  
 her family.  
 The Trokosi are in bondage  
 The Trokosi have no freedom  
 The Trokosi are denied an education  
 The Trokosi are denied the fruits of their own hard labour  
 They are denied the protection and dignity of their own bodies  
 They are denied the freedom to choose their own destiny  
 The Trokosi girl has committed no offence, no crime

*(Each performer from their position repeats “lies” turning in all directions with focus on each other, offstage, and to the audience. Performers do not move out of place. Throughout the performance “lies” is NOT spoken together but individually, and chaotically.)*

LIES / LIES / LIES. *(Repeat.)*

*(Performer 3 and Performer 6 still at a distance; they remain in place and speak their lines from opposite ends, again.)*

PERFORMER 6 The Trokosi system is a system of training  
 And education  
 Young women are sent to the shrines to learn valuable lessons of  
 Social, cultural, spiritual, and moral behavior  
 The young girls are honored and distinguished  
 For they are trained to be wives of the God  
 Their children are most ennobled and glorified  
 For they are children of the God  
 The are NOT sent to the shrine in Atonement  
 But sent for training to lead a righteous path because  
 Their families can no longer teach them and lead them  
 To serve as role models in the society.  
 These queens will lead us!  
 “If you educate a man, you educate an individual  
 if you educate a woman, you educate a whole nation”  
 There are breakaway shrines – quack shrines  
 These shrines do NOT adhere to the proper training  
 These shrines do NOT honor and protect the girls  
 These shrines do NOT practice Traditional African Religion  
 Genuine troxovi shrines are Afegame (great houses)  
 To train these girls as leaders – to be great women of  
 Moral and spiritual character  
 The Trokosi are honored  
 The Trokosi are protected  
 The Trokosi are Trained  
 The Trokosi are loved

*(Performers begin moving in the weave-like pattern – in and out and between one another. They repeat “Lies” and speak their lines, again in multi-directions.)*

LIES / LIES / LIES. *(Repeat.)*

PERFORMER 9 Christian Chauvinists!  
 PERFORMER 4 Human Rights Activist!  
 PERFORMER 5 Traditionalist!  
 PERFORMER 3 Offenders of human rights!  
 PERFORMER 6 Religion!  
 PERFORMER 3 Bondage!  
 PERFORMER 9 Training!  
 PERFORMER 4 Slavery!  
 PERFORMER 5 Training!  
 PERFORMER 3 Slavery!  
 PERFORMER 4 Religion!  
 PERFORMER 6 Bondage!

*(Performers will stop on “Bondage.” In place, but not in a freeze, they will repeat “Lies” until it builds to peak volume and then they will bring it down to a whisper, then silence.)*

LIESLIESLIESLIESLIESLIES. (*Repeat*)

*(Performers form a small circle downstage center. Their palms are touching in various patterns to resemble a matrix of connections or levels. They will change positions periodically but they maintain the motif of the “matrix.” Another performer, who has been in the background, hardly noticeable, comes forward to observe the ball of human connections. She examines it carefully and thoughtfully. She sits on the platform and begins writing. She reads her notes to herself aloud. Lights dim. Spot on Recorder.)*

RECORDER 2/PERFORMER 7 Truth is elusive.

It is becoming too difficult to disentangle.

I cannot find it.

It is not neat and clear, not anymore.

Not as I travel further, look deeper, and hear more.

Am I looking in the wrong places?

I am only stumbling past a million half-truths.

Yet, all of them are partial and powerful.

I've met so many people here who are telling their side of the truth:

the women and girls known as Trokosi *do* live in servitude.

Yes, I've seen them; I've listened to their stories.

I've been to those places ... servitude, it is true.

But there is another truth.

There are women who are *called* Trokosi who live honorably within the rituals of an ancient tradition.

There is a truth somewhere between servitude and honor.

I need to ask more questions.

#### TRANSITION

PERFORMER 7 September 8, 2000. Dear Journal: This afternoon Kweku took me to lunch at the National Theatre. I ordered palava sauce and plaintain while he had his usual Okra stew with fufu. His younger brother Kwesi came with us, but he just ordered fried rice. Kweku was on a roll this afternoon complaining again about African leadership. He says the problem with Ghana is corruption; he says African politicians breed in a culture of corruption. Even if they don't start out being corrupt, they will eventually start stealing money just like all the others and put it into their pockets or their overseas bank accounts. He says there are two kinds of politicians, the ones that are corrupt and the ones that are just simply daft and don't know how to run a country. He is so angry and says Africans are their own worst enemy. Kwesi got upset and told Kweku that he should stop talking like that. Kwesi said that after independence African leaders ...

KWESI (PERFORMER 2) African leaders only had a short time, almost not time at all, to learn how to lead a country, manage a government, and understand principles of bureaucracy before the 70s made a mess of everything – the economic crises hit Africa and everything just stopped – tragic. Everything broke down. Even the very best leaders, even the most honest ones can't do

anything without tools, information, and resources ... Some of them just didn't have the technical know-how to run a government – it was a policy disaster.

KWEKU (PERFORMER II) It was a financial disaster and our people suffered.

KWESI (PERFORMER 2) But after colonialism the economy was doing okay ... we were struggling, but we were doing okay. It was the 70s and the oil. It was the oil. It devastated Africa.

KWEKU (PERFORMER II) You're just like all the rest. Blaming all our problems on the oil crises. Africans need to stop making excuses and blaming everything wrong with Africa on the oil crises, the World Bank, and the IMF. We need to take some responsibility. Look, the world is not fair. I know there are people making a profit from poverty in Africa, but we've got to be accountable for what we do wrong. Why are the politicians driving big cars and sending their children to school in Europe and America while our people are starving in the streets and babies are dying? In the 70s when the Arab countries stood together to control the supply of oil and increase the prices, where did the money go? I'll tell you where that money went. The hundreds of billions of dollars they made was dumped into Western banks – American and European banks were holding all that Arab oil money.

KWESI (PERFORMER 2) And all that money put in those banks needed borrowers to make a profit off it. Money, eh, to make more money.

KWEKU (PERFORMER II) Exactly! And the irony is that some got richer from oil while others got poorer. Our economy crashed and we were desperate for money, not only to develop our country but to pay for the rising oil bills!

KWESI (PERFORMER 2) Yeah, others made profits from oil that we couldn't afford to buy.

KWEKU (PERFORMER II) And then they make *more* profits from the money we borrow to buy the oil that they are profiting from.

KWESI (PERFORMER 2) So why are you blaming Africans for the greed of the West.

KWEKU (PERFORMER II) Because a lot of that money from the loans was given to African dictators because those Bankers knew they would pay it back, even if it meant exploiting their own people. Maybe some of the money was mismanaged because the problems in the country were too great ... maybe the suffering was greater than the knowledge needed to end the suffering ... but too much of it was siphoned off by African elites into personal bank accounts abroad.

KWESI (PERFORMER 2) The banks were making money from the oil, the loans, and the dictators.

KWEKU (PERFORMER II) Yeah, and African leaders didn't have the know-how or the integrity to use the money properly.

KWESI (PERFORMER 2) That is not the whole truth. Not all of them. Some of the money was used to build roads and schools and ...

KWEKU (PERFORMER II) Those loans increased five times by the mid 80s to something like 612 billion dollars! You tell me, was it worth it ... those few roads and schools against all that capitalism and corruption? Was it worth it? Was it?

KWESI (PERFORMER 2) But a lot has been done to change it ... some of the interest and some of the loans have been forgiven.

KWEKU (PERFORMER II) It all needs to be forgiven. All of it. Every penny. Hah! Forgiven. An interesting word, Kwesi, Who really needs forgiveness?

*(Light transition)*

PERFORMER 7 October 2, 2000. Dear Journal: Kweku and I went into town today. He gets so frustrated with me, because every time we stop at a stoplight I'm trying to find coins to give to the beggars and the little girls selling water. We had a big argument today, because he said I just can't keep making him wait at every stoplight until I finish giving coins to every begging Ghanaian. I told him why not? I know this is part of a way of life for him, but for me it's part sadness, part anger, and, well, maybe part guilt.

*(Light transition)*

PERFORMER 3 Trokosi / Troxovi / Fiashidi

PERFORMER 6 Trosi – Tro/God Asi/wife – Wife of God

PERFORMER 3 Trokosi – Tro/God Kosi/Slave

PERFORMER 6 Troxovi / Trokosi

PERFORMER 8 All these women who are kept illiterate and subjugated

PERFORMER 5 Imagine what they could contribute to our social economy / our politics and culture

PERFORMER I Imagine what free men and women can do together

PERFORMER IO Imagine what type of development we would have in this country

RECORDER 2 In the field today I spoke with a woman who told me when a mother gives birth to her baby and when friends and relatives hear the good news they become so excited and curious, and they will ask: *Is it a human being or a girl?*

PERFORMER 4 There is a certain amount of skill in interpreting my people's way of life

PERFORMER I It is not easy to ask questions, but you must ask questions

## SCENE TWO: RELIGION AND SUFFERING

*(Performers move toward the Recorder and sit her on the block center. Two performers move upstage. Performers help the Recorder "write" what is said. Performers are writing in the air with the Recorder while other performers speak. They hold the "book" for the Recorder. On cue, Recorder leaves the book to form a line of women writing on their backs.)*

PERFORMER 4 The human rights the people are talking about cannot be applied to religion. In every religion where training is involved a person will be required to submit or leave some of his or her liberties. So, if, for example, I am marked with a knife as a sign of becoming an initiate of a shrine, that might look oppressive but it should be understood that that mark gives an identity to the religious group to which I belong. It is a matter of knowing the thing, understanding it before coming to the conclusion of human rights.

PERFORMER 2 Before you can respect the human rights of others you have to undergo certain tortures, certain pains – as when you are sent to school. It is painful to receive an education. You must perform certain labours, after that your raw nature is developed into a useful human being which can be used to improve society. So the place of reform and rebirth are always a place of suffering and pain.

PERFORMER 4 There may be a Trokosi system in many shrines but the way Trokosi is practiced in the various shrines is not the same the difference depends on certain factors one is the economy of the place. The other factor is the general understanding of the people who live there. Some places are more advanced than others.

I do have one concern about religion. I think we should allow our children to grow before they are allowed into a religion. It would not be good for the Christian to baptise his child when he is just one year or two years old the child is not aware of what is happening to him. This should be the same for traditional religion. People should be initiated only when they grow to understand what they are getting involved in. I would like the children to grow before they are initiated.

PERFORMER 2 It means that you are not foisting something on someone.

WOMEN It means that you are not foisting something on someone.

PERFORMER 4 When people are talking about human rights it means they don't know what religion is. You talk about women, well women in particular are to suffer in a special way, and it is true that in most of the shrines they are headed by women. There is one here, she lives in the shrine – she goes bare-chested, but she is head of the shrine. The initiates come and go. But she lives there. Some people think it is reparation. But in religion we have reform and rebirth when a raw person will be initiated to be reborn to become part of the ministry of the shrine. Then we have the criminal, and that person is not only to be reborn but also reformed. The initiated – the Trokosi – are trained morally in the shrine and then allowed to live as a normal human being.

AFI My name is Afi. I am a Trokosi from the Klikor region of Ghana. I am very proud and happy to be a Trokosi because it is a *special* honor. I am the great-great-granddaughter of a Trokosi – my great grandmother, my grandmother, my mother, and now me – all Trokosi! I come from a long line of Trokosi queens, and I am very proud. My great-great-grandmother became a Trokosi because her brother did a terrible, terrible thing. A slave girl became pregnant. When the elders asked her who was the man who made her pregnant, she pointed to my great-great-grandmother's brother. When he was identified, he then became very angry because he did not want to be disgraced before the whole village, so he stabbed the slave girl to death. The family of the slave girl demanded justice, so my great-great-grandmother was sent to the shrine. When she died, all my mothers after her and now me – all Trokosi; and, when I die, my daughter will become Trokosi. My life here in the shrine is a good life. It is a very good life. I have learned so much. The Trokosi here are trained to be women deserving of

respect. We are taught lessons in morality and religion. We are taught how to cook and clean and manage our affairs. We are taught how to take care of ourselves and how to keep our body, mind, and spirit pure and uplifted. We are trained here, and it is this training that guides us through our life and makes all of us walk with dignity and knowledge. We Trokosi are powerful women, for we are the only women that can reprimand the priest and the chief! These men must listen to what we say, because we are Trokosi! We are *not* slaves, as some have said – that is a lie! *And*, we are free to marry *anyone* we choose. But we can only marry after our training – after the nubility rites. Once the nubility rites are performed, then we are ready to marry. But the men who marry a Trokosi have a great responsibility. These men must treat their wives with special kindness and respect. The husband of a Trokosi must be strong and generous, because he must love and protect his wife for all of his life. If he does not hold his wife in the highest esteem, he will be punished. Over the years, life has changed in the shrine and the Trokosi system has changed too. Many of the Trokosi now are very modern ladies. They are going to school and getting an education. This is my wish. I want my daughter to be a Trokosi. I want her to have the life and training that I have had in the shrine, but I also want her to have an education like some of the young ones coming up now. I did not have the opportunity for a formal education. But my daughter will be educated – with an education *and* with the Trokosi training – she will be tops!

PERFORMER 4 Trokosi are carriers of the Society Trokosi are queens We honor them They are special women The abolitionists will stop the Trokosi practice over my dead body!

PERFORMER 10 I hope Ghana will be a place where one day women will have their rights; where women will be uplifted and given their full respect as human beings. We should eradicate all outmoded customs. That man says these women are carriers of the society? He says they are queens? He says we honor them? He says they are special women? (*She laughs.*) That is what he tells you?! But they are not! The girls themselves will tell you they have been treated like slaves. He says those of us who want to stop the Trokosi practice will only stop it over his dead body? Well, he is going to die soon!!! (*Laughs.*) He says the women that go through the shrines are only going there as an education for training to teach them purity and to prepare them to have children for the gods? He says these women will be virgins until the age of twenty-eight? He says they are not to be touched until they are twenty-eight years old?

PERFORMER 5 He says then they will be allowed to marry the priest, and at that time she will have gone through the ritual and the teaching and training for purity? He says she will be ready at the age of twenty-eight and these children will be the children that will lead the nation? (*She laughs.*) He says the children can only come from these very revered and honored queens? I don't see what kind of purity he is talking about! They don't teach them anything in the shrines except you wake up in the

morning, you go to the bush to farm, you gather firewood. They don't learn anything! Do they teach them how to read, to write? No! They don't teach them anything! They would rather sexually abuse them! They sexually abuse them at the age of twelve, at the age of fifteen I have seen these girls I know them! What is he talking about? These are the people who are trying to suppress women in this country? I am with these girls and they have been sexually abused a lot!

PERFORMER 10 The school is helping the girls to feel free inside themselves We teach them to use the potential within themselves When they come to the school they cannot read, they cannot write, they don't know about the things around them. We try to make them feel free and to go out and see things for themselves – how life is. We teach them they can work with their own hands; they can create with their own hands. They can live with dignity and love. They must feel free and they have the right to feel happy. Last week we took them out. They went to the airport / to the harbour / to the zoo in the city! For many of them that was the first time they'd been to the city. They saw a two-story building. It is good exposure to them. Some of them, even when they finish the course, they don't want to go back home. They want to stay with me. The school is changing their lives. They feel safe and worthy. Some of them are now on their own. They are making their own life.

THE WORK WE DO AT INTERNATIONAL  
NEEDS GHANA

*(The performers are now confused, moving about the stage in all directions. Their voices are chaotic. The Recorder strains to listen. She goes to her basket upstage right and signals for them to look in. They do not listen to her. Then she screams FOREIGNER! They stop and look at her and each other in bewilderment. They slowly make it to the basket and each one takes out a book. They softly speak: "Trokosi are Queens/Trokosi are not Queens" as they each take a seat and begin reading – for each passage they repeat the "queen" phrase and take a seat.)*

PERFORMER 3 Before a release, we go to visit the shrine priest  
We find out from him how he feels about the Trokosi system  
We find out why he feels he can or cannot release the women and girls  
We try to find out what he can do to help them  
We counsel him in adjusting to things he does not understand  
Those who don't know our work may fear we are coming to break the whole shrine  
But we come to help make the shrine more progressive and more humane  
After we come to an understanding, we ask the priest to release the women and girls  
If he understands and we come to an agreement, he will let us speak to the Trokosi  
We meet the girls and we counsel them one by one



We help them psychologically about being separated from their parents  
 about being sent into the shrine  
 about going back into the village  
 about what kind of work they will do  
 about who will they live with  
 about how they will take care of their children

*(The actors move into a second position as they read.)*

PERFORMER 8 We help them go to school for professional training if that is  
 what they want to do

All this is not a one-day affair

When they are released, then we go with them to their homes

And we continue to go back to see how they are adjusting

We counsel the family / the household / and the community who fear the girls  
 are still

Trokosi and should remain as outcasts

We must counsel the Trokosi and the non-Trokosi because the fear is very  
 powerful

PERFORMER 3 We follow them for about two years to be sure they are socially  
 integrated / economically independent / psychologically adjusted / and healthy.

We encourage them to think on their own and for themselves

The priest does not need to think for them anymore

We even study all aspects of their body movements and facial expressions to  
 observe if they are happy

PERFORMER 8 During this time of tracking we keep profiles of the women

We check in on all the factors: health / finances / social adjustments / and so forth

We want them to realize they can be independent

When they have a problem, they don't have to wait for someone to come

They can take care of it themselves

PERFORMER 3 Some believe that we do not know the Trokosi system because  
 we have not lived there and that we are outsiders

This is not true

We have lived there

We are not outsiders

We have Trokosi relatives

The village people should not think we are just city people trying to go in and  
 change the system.

We have people who are victims of the system on our team. So we know what we  
 are doing

We have been there talking to people one-on-one

*(Performers change positions.)*

PERFORMER 8 One thing about human beings / they are not like machines

In this work you learn a lot about human beings

And one thing you learn is that they all behave differently

You learn how the environment changes them  
 You begin to develop relationships with them / even if you believe in different things  
 You get to know them very well and you learn all about them  
 And you respect them even if you have different ideas from them / you respect them  
 We see ourselves really helping them  
 When I play a part in this person's life to make it better,  
 I am happy.

## TRANSITION

PERFORMER 8 All these women who are kept illiterate and subjugated  
 PERFORMER 10 illiterate and subjugated  
 PERFORMER 5 Imagine what free men and women can do  
 PERFORMER 3 Imagine what free men and women can do  
 PERFORMER 8 Imagine what kind of Development  
 PERFORMER 3 Development  
 PERFORMER 5 We would have in this country  
 PERFORMER 10 Imagine what kind of Development  
 PERFORMER 8 Free men and women  
 PERFORMER 3 We would have in this country

## SCENE THREE: THE FOREIGNER

RECORDER 2 As a foreigner, I've observed that Ghanaians from the North are discriminated against by other Ghanaians – it seems like if you're from the North you are looked upon as inferior. Is this true?

PERFORMER II Yes, it has to do with our history. For a very long time the northern part of Ghana was not an important part of our history. It has only been very recently that we have begun to study the history of the North. I've forgotten the date when the British declared the North as a northern protectorate – Germany and France were all around scrambling for the African continent. It was a conscious British policy to keep the North as a labor reserve for the mines down south and the cocoa plantations. Northerners were only good for hard labor and to carry wood. It was also part of the policy to deny the people access to formal education. Illiteracy was contained in the North so the people would be denied access to opportunities that would encourage them to disrupt the status quo. All these things have culminated in the general psychology and stereotypes about people in the North.

RECORDER 2 How are people from the North discriminated against?

PERFORMER II It is manifest in areas that you would be very very surprised at, even on campus. It happened just last year when the students were about to register. There was this tutor in Mensah Saba hall who made some very

derogatory remarks – not one, not two, but several – very horrible remarks about people coming from the North. She made statements like “People from the North are responsible for the current crises in education, because they are not sticking to what they are best suited for and that is farming.” She said “Northerners are suited for menial jobs; they should not be taking up space at the university.” So any time a student would come up to register and the name looked like a northern name, she would make a derogatory remark or a facial expression of disgust. This was reported to me during a conversation with a new student from the North – he was saying how he felt helpless. He could not confront this woman. He felt very insulted but he couldn’t react. This same student wanted me to write a letter of recommendation for him. But before I could write the letter, I told him to go and find out the facts surrounding the tutor’s insulting remarks – he should go and catalogue the details and all that the woman said. This was a condition for me to write the letter of recommendation, I must understand how capable he was in terms of his independence and mode of thinking – his general character; his attitude towards work – if he was someone who could be trusted with responsibility. I must understand the full implications of what he reported to me and must be able to prove it, especially with someone who is supposed to be an intellectual. He went and collected the facts and got the name of this woman. He was able to verify her consistent and blatant insults. I asked the Northern student union on campus to write a protest letter to the vice chancellor and to also send a copy to the woman. I asked them to also send letters to other officers on campus like the dean of students, the hall master of the hall where she made the comments, the SRC-student representative council, and the national union of Ghanaian students. The vice chancellor was very angry, very, very angry. The vice chancellor wrote back to the students. He took exception to the woman’s comments, stating that the campus is an environment that is supposed to be an intellectual one where people are supposed to know better, where people are supposed to be enlightened. He stated the university is the place where we should have the least manifestation of ethnic tensions. What I heard later is that the woman felt very bad and actually wanted to seek audience with the Northern student union, but the students said no, the vice chancellor had already spoken to the issue.

PERFORMER 7 As I asked more questions about Trokosi, there were even more stories – the different paths – about other women, about the North, about what it means to be accused and shamed ...

*(Recorder transitions to interview arrangement.)*

RECORDER 2 How are certain women marked as witches?

PERFORMER 1 When a person is accused of being a witch then everyone believes her to be one. She has no defense. Anyone can say a woman is a witch and from that point on she is tormented. It is dangerous for her to live in her own community – her life is at risk. Once a woman is accused of being a witch, there is no one to convince the community that she is not a witch. And there

is something else, this is dreadful. But once a woman is accused of being a witch she becomes very depressed. These women feel no peace; she cannot rest. Her mind is tortured. She must leave her community to find some peace of mind and because her life is threatened.

RECORDER 2 Can you give me an example?

PERFORMER 1 There was an old woman and she prepared food and gave it to her grandchild. After eating the food the child became sick. The suspicion was that this old woman must have put something in the food to make the child sick. The child became very sick and eventually died. The grandmother was then blamed for the death of the child. It is interesting but it is mostly old women who are accused of being witches, old women and stepmothers. But, sometimes, even when children die from malaria, the mothers are accused of killing their own children. Someone can even be accused of being a witch if an enemy of the family has a grudge against them. A woman may give a certain look or display a certain gesture that offends someone and she can be accused of being a witch. Another example may be a disagreement over business or property, or, you may have two women married to the same man ... one wife may have three children and the other has no children. The woman is accused of being a witch – she may even think herself to be a witch – and this is the reason she cannot give birth. Once an accusation is made the sympathy is hardly ever for the woman, but for the one who falls victim to her. The sympathy is for the accuser not the accused.

RECORDER 2 What happens to these women?

PERFORMER 1 The jungle law rules. Everything becomes so embattled, so hostile and confusing that the community, the household, puts pressure on the witch to leave town. The people will sometimes take the law into their own hands. There was an incident in the North, it happened in 1994 where an old woman was murdered by a young man. This young boy went to the woman's house and dragged her out of her home and then beat her to death. He then set her house into flames. There are many of us – many human rights activists – who are trying to change things. We are working to help these women and enlighten these communities. The camps – known by some as “the witch camps” – are here to give refuge to the women accused of being witches. These women can come here and stay and be with other women. Some prefer to be with their family, but if you look at what they suffered in their communities, many of them prefer to be in the houses here at the camp. One reason why the government or society hasn't done much for these people accused of being witches is because they know that this camp or home exists. So they leave the welfare and care of the women to the camp, but the camp needs help. There is a lot of work to do. People need to understand the plight of the women in this place. I happened to watch an interview of the inmates from the camp. I was surprised at some of their answers: Why are you here? I was accused of being a witch. Why did they accuse you? They said that maybe I killed my stepdaughter. Did you kill her? Then the woman will sit

there and find it difficult to answer, as though she may think herself guilty. She may wonder if she really is a witch.

RECORDER 2 The camps must give them some solace, but it seems these women are living under such despair ...

PERFORMER 1 These people have been so traumatized by society and the attitude of everyone around them. With this trauma, they become depressed and confused so they aren't sure of themselves. Did you kill them? Sometimes she can't really answer. She will say, I killed them because I gave them water to drink. She may have even thought this is a naughty boy why doesn't he just go away. If something happens to the child the woman my think it was that thought that could be the result of the death of the child. Once society accuses them of being witches, they get confused, they tend to think, well, maybe it is true.

*(Recorder 2 moves downstage.)*

RECORDER 2 The witch camps, the North, Trokosi

I listened and I asked more questions – What does it mean to be a Ghanaian? How do I begin to understand what is African in histories too vast to name, but distinctly, and more, Ghanaian? The answer always led to the name of one person: sometimes loved, sometimes not loved, but always, always an enigma: Kwame Nkrumah.

*(Recorder 2 moves to next interview.)*

Why does the legacy of Kwame Nkrumah still prevail, even today?

PERFORMER 5 He is the one and only African leader who gave us a sense of African identity. A national identity, but most important an African identity. He was the leader who came to make us understand that contrary to the white man's philosophy, we are not inherently inferior. There was something very glorious about our past, and we could recreate our past. We could take inspiration from our ancestors for building the empire of Ghana. When the British were still living in caves, our ancestors had already created a very viable empire comparable to the highest level of any civilization. Based on that fact alone there is nothing inherently inferior about the African race. So Nkrumah debunked this whole idea of inferiority and that Africans should accept subjugation without question. He debunked the idea that God created some people to rule and others to be ruled by them. He led us to independence and identified himself with others who felt the same ... W. E. B. Dubois, George Padmore, Marcus Garvey and the rest ... He even met Malcolm X. Nkrumah gave us the general platform for our independence. It was just unfortunate that the same forces that he fought against overwhelmed him just at the time when he was going to translate the second stage of his vision.

RECORDER 2 What was the second stage of his vision?

PERFORMER 5 The vision to improve the material livelihood of our people. At the economic level, he attempted to embark on a very rapid industrialization policy. He understood that industrialization and technology are very critical variables in any mode of production. In order to cope with the rest of the

world in terms of development, there must be the combination of general enlightenment and science and technology. It is unfortunate that the forces that he fought against overwhelmed him and used internal reaction to overthrow him before he could bring this second stage of industrialization into fruition.

AMA (PERFORMER 9) Hello. My name is Ama. I am seven years old. I sell water on the street to the passing cars. I put water in these little plastic bags and then I tie a knot very tight at the top. When the cars stop at the red light, I run over to the window of the car, and I sell my water. I run from window to window while the light is still red until I can get someone to buy a bag of water. It is very hot in Ghana, very, very hot and all the smoke from the cars makes it even hotter. You breathe smoky heat. Your throat can get very dry from the smoke and the heat and all the traffic. When throats are dry, they need my water. On very good days when plenty, plenty throats are dry, I can sell many bags of water and I can make almost twenty-five cents for the whole day. Those are good days. I sell most of my water to cab drivers, because they get the driest throats. Sometimes it is hard to sell water because people will have a dry throat and they see a cripple and they will feel bad and give the coin to the cripple or the blind woman with her baby. We rush to the car, the begging cripples and me, and the dry throat will give it to them on this red light and then wait to buy water from another girl at the next red light. The girl at the next red light will get their coins and the begging cripples at that corner will get nothing. These beggars get in the way of my water business. I must work so that I can eat and these people make life very hard for me. I used to feel sorry for them: They cannot work – there are no jobs for them – the only way for them to get money is to beg for it. I cannot feel sorry for them any more, because I must live and eat for myself. I have a wish that one day something will change and I will never have to worry about beggars or food anymore. There are people who never worry about how they are going to eat. They eat everyday. Everyday.

RECORDER 2 October 12, 1999. Dear Journal:

I am in a dilemma in the fieldwork

Throughout the interviews I am led down other paths – beyond Trokosi  
The Implications.

Trokosi has greater implications

Rural life / The Witch camps / The North / Nkrumah

Implications.

These are subjects for another time ... yet

These are subjects that are inside Ghanaian life

Witches, the first president of Ghana, Northerners, life in the villages

Why do they keep coming up, again and again?

Experience is never neat.

Culture is never narrow.

They say that Context is everything.

Rural life / The Witch Camps / The North / Kwame Nkrumah

I am listening,

They say that context is everything.

I have been listening.

I hope for good purpose

PERFORMER 4 I get very disgusted about the way these opportunists, disguised as human rights activists, are using the system to discredit the Ghanaian society, especially my society – the Ewes. I get very upset about it.

PERFORMER 6 I see that these people are using the system to get money from the outside – funders in Europe and the United States – to make themselves rich while defaming our tradition! Those who are making the most noise about traditional religion are the people who claim they are Christians, they think that because they are Christians that anything to do with our traditional religion is dirty is bad.

PERFORMER 4 So those who are making the most noise are those who don't want anything to do with our traditional religion. Our traditional practices are our own way of getting people to behave properly. I admit that there are certain portions that can be reformed. Yes. But it is through tradition that we have kept our society in line – it is through tradition that we have survived. I know it is wrong if a man in your family behaves in a way that is against society and the man is not punished and only women are used as reparations for the crimes of men – I know this is wrong.

PERFORMER 6 As a feminist, yes that to me is not good but there is another way to look at it. Yes, women should not be used as reparations for the crimes of men, but it serves a more important function – it is the way morality and order are maintained in the society. Traditional religion tries to keep people in line. I suppose it is normal for people to say that women are being made slaves but they forget that there is another function that is more important than just making people slaves. I think the Trokosi practice should continue. What I don't think should happen is for the government to say that any religion should be outlawed. You can only ask that it be reformed and reform must come from within not from without ... So I don't think that it's right for Trokosi to be outlawed ...

PERFORMER 4 The Trokosi system is a way of living for people. If you take that away what are you going to replace it with? It means that there will be a breakdown in the society. If you take it away then you must replace it with something so there will not be a breakdown in the society. Are they willing to do that? What these Christians are doing doesn't seem to do this. What comes is a condemnation of traditional religion. If you condemn Trokosi then you are condemning traditional religion. The two things are mixed together. There is no way you can condemn one without condemning the other because those who are doing the condemnation start from the premise that traditional religion is bad – it is dirty. These Christians are angry so whether they say they want to reform or not, the way they enforce their position is to tell people that traditional religion is dirty.

PERFORMER 6 I am a feminist and it means I will not let people push me around because I am a woman. I will not let people, especially men, decide what the situation is for me. Being a woman is like being a second-class citizen. I don't let men push me around that is what it means.

TRANSITION: WE ARE NOT DESTROYING  
THEIR RELIGION

*(Performer 10 gently takes the notepads from Recorder 2, and begins the next section.)*

PERFORMER 10 Africans believe in God; they feel God. This is reflected in the tradition of their religion. The Trokosi is part of the religion. We like their religion. We admire it because like all religion, traditional religion practices morality. But we must ask the question, if your religion practices morality, then don't be wicked! We are interested in communal life – in the village everyone helps out. The problem of one person is the problem of all. The Trokosi is not good for the people. We respect the village and the religion; we only want to change the Trokosi Practice. It is wrong. We don't want to break the shrines. We do not want to abolish the worship system. But what they do with the girls is wrong and it is going against progress, development, and our modern society. Why can't they release the girls and let them go to school? If someone commits a crime that person must pay for his *own* crime. They should punish the offender not the innocent girl! Why? If a boy-child insults his father, the father should not punish the sister. The father should punish the boy-child who insulted him!

PERFORMER 5 Some people think that if we punish the direct offender the whole religion will be destroyed. We understand they must have a judicial system for order, peace and morality. This is good – let's keep that! But do not sacrifice innocent girls by sending them inside the shrines. It is wrong.

PERFORMER 10 They have the interpretation that we want to abolish the shrines and ruin their worship.

We do not. We only want to help the girls and women.

The shrines should and must remain, yes.

People go there for healing.

The shrines help correct people.

PERFORMER 3 We recognize and respect the freedom of religion. We come to tackle the Trokosi practice on the basis of human rights and not on the basis of religion. We don't come out to say your religion is bad, we see there is an aspect we respect, but there is an aspect that is against the law. Continue to live your religion but without this violation of human rights. We don't say accept Jesus Christ and the God you worship is bad. No we do not impose Christianity not in any of our literature, not anywhere. But we do oppose the violation of human rights.



## TRANSITION

*(The performers form a fast-paced circle, moving around and around. The Recorder tries to enter the circle. It is difficult, but she manages to jump inside. She tries to be heard. They do not hear her. She screams: "I am Listening!" They stop and look at her and then on cue, they all make it to their platforms.)*

PERFORMER I But the way Trokosi is practiced in the various shrines is not the same

The difference depends on certain factors

One is the economy of the place

PERFORMER 5 "One is the economy of the place"

PERFORMER II *(He opens a book marked "Globalization by Zygmunt Bauman".)*

Poverty is not just hunger

800 million people are hungry but

4 billion people live in poverty

Poverty is not just hunger

Poverty is:

Illness

Illiteracy

Aggression

Families falling apart

Lack of a future

Non-productiveness

*(Looks up at audience.)*

This cannot be cured with high protein biscuits and powdered milk!

SCENE FIVE: WHAT DOES THIS HAVE  
TO DO WITH TROKOSI?

RECORDER 2 I am in the middle of my fieldwork and there are so many questions *still* unanswered

I just wanted to understand the Truth behind the Trokosi system

Just the Trokosi system

But now there are other stories

Other connections

Other surfaces that go so deep

The dilemma of listening for good purposes

What do I do with what I have heard

With what I have seen

A distant country

A distant people

But this country / these people / are not so distant anymore

They are part of me now

like an inseparable friend  
like an unforgettable lover

This land / These people  
Can these notes capture the poignancy of their lives?  
The everyday moments of their laughter and  
their suffering

“I cannot indulge in sentiment without politics”

“I cannot indulge in sentiment without politics”

Development

Democracy

Wealth / poverty

“I cannot indulge in aesthetic spectatorship without political engagement”

What does Trokosi have to do with Development

What does Trokosi have to do with Democracy

What does Trokosi have to do with wealth and poverty

America

American

African

African American

Advanced

Advanced Country

Black

American

Living

In

An

Advanced Country

What do *I* have to do with Trokosi

BlackAmericanLivingInAnAdvancedCountry

What do I have to do with Trokosi?

I live in the richest country in the world

I will not give up my history

I will not give up my privilege

I will not give up my history?

I will not give up my privilege?

What does all this have to do with Trokosi / The witch camps / The North

The legacy of Kwame Nkrumah?

I live in the richest country in the world

What do I do with what I've learned here

I live in the richest country in the world

What have I learned here?

SHIKA My name is Shika. When I was seven years old, my grandfather came to my school and told me I had to leave my class because I was going away to visit a friend of the family.

But that was not true. I was taken to a shrine in the Tongu region of the Volta. I was taken here because my uncle became very sick.

He could not move his legs.

The shrine priest told him that he was being punished for something he did that was very, very bad and that is why his legs were paining him.

His legs pained him all the time. I didn't know what my uncle had done that was so bad.

No one ever told me. But my mother told me that everyone in my family would get very sick, just like my uncle, if I didn't go to the shrine.

The shrine priest told my uncle that he must bring a girl to serve the deity. This was the only way the family would be saved.

This was the only way his legs would stop hurting.

God was very angry for the bad thing my uncle did.

They sent me to the shrine to satisfy God. Soon peace and health would come back to my family.

Soon, my uncle would be well again. The day I was sent to the shrine, my mother gave me a mat to take with me for sleeping.

I remember there was a crowd of people that walked with my mother and me to the shrine.

At that time, I didn't know why they were singing and I didn't know where I was going.

When I got to the shrine, a woman was there.

It seemed like she had been waiting for me to come.

She took me inside the shrine.

Her hands were hard and quick.

They were not like my mother's hands.

The woman began taking off my clothes. She took off my panties. She wrapped me in a cloth and placed a cord necklace around my neck.

I began to cry.

I wanted my mother to take me away from that place.

But mother left me at the shrine.

I was very confused and frightened.

I was at the shrine for ten years. I was unhappy there. I missed school.

I wanted to go back to school and I wanted to go back home with my mother.

I wanted to read and write like children who were free.

But at the shrine, all I did was clean, work on the farm, and fetch water.

When I started bleeding, I knew that soon the priest would come and make me sleep with him.

I was so scared because I didn't want him to touch me.

He was too old and I didn't like him. But what I feared so much was soon to come.

One night he came to me and he made me take off my clothes.

He entered me.  
 He entered me, and I remember everything started turning in my head and all around me because it hurt so much.  
 He didn't care that it hurt. He didn't care at all. When it was over, he left.  
 I felt like I had been broken. I had been broken into pieces.  
 I now have two children by the priest.  
 He doesn't care for my children – sometimes there wasn't enough food to eat.  
 All my work – on the farm, cleaning the shrine, and carrying water – all my work ... and still there wasn't enough money or food for me and my children.  
 When I was liberated from the shrine,  
 I went to school at the International Needs Vocational Training Center. I am learning how to be a dressmaker.  
 I am reading and writing.  
 I feel safe and free at the school. My children go to school there too.  
 The warden of the school loves all the girls and she takes very good care of us.  
 I want my children to have a better life.  
 I want them to learn how to read and write. I never want them to go to the shrine and be slaves.

*Excerpts from "A Small Place" by Jamaica Kincaid*

- PERFORMER 1 The thing you have always suspected about yourself the minute you become a tourist is true: A tourist is an ugly human being. You are not an ugly person all the time; you are not an ugly person ordinarily; you are not an ugly person day to day.
- PERFORMER 5 From day to day, you are a nice person. From day to day, all the people who are supposed to love you on the whole do. From day to day, as you walk down a busy street in the large and modern and prosperous city in which you work and live, dismayed, puzzled (a cliché but only a cliché can explain you) at how alone you feel in this crowd.
- PERFORMER 9 How awful it is to go unnoticed, how awful it is to go unloved, even as you are surrounded by more people that you could possibly get to know in a lifetime that lasted for millennia and then out of the corner of your eye you see someone looking at you and absolute pleasure is written all over that person's face, and then you realize that you are not as revolting a presence as you think you are (for that look just told you so).
- PERFORMER 8 And so, ordinarily, you are a nice person, an attractive person, a person capable of drawing to yourself the affection of other people (people just like you), a person at home in your own skin (sort of; I mean, in a way; I mean, your dismay and puzzlement are natural to you, because people like you, just seem to be like that, and so many of the things people like you find admirable about yourself – the things you think about, the things you think really define you – seem rooted in these feelings): a person at home in your own house (and all its nice house things), with its nice backyard (and its nice backyard things), at home, on your street, your church, in community

activities, your job, at home with your family, your relatives, your friends – you are a whole person.

PERFORMER 1 But one day, when you are sitting somewhere, alone in that crowd, and that awful feeling of displacedness comes over you, and really, as an ordinary person you are not well equipped to look too far inward and set yourself aright, because being an ordinary person you are well equipped to look too far inward and set yourself aright, because being ordinary is already taxing, and being ordinary takes all you have out of you, and though the words “I must get away” do not actually pass across your lips, you make a leap from being that nice blob just sitting like a boob in your amniotic sac of the modern experience to being a person visiting heaps of death and ruin and feeling alive and inspired at the sight of it; to being a person lying on some faraway beach, your stilled body stinking and glistening in the sand, looking like something first forgotten, then remembered, then not important enough to go back for; to being a person marvelling at the harmony (ordinary, what you would say is the backwardness) and the union these other people (and they are other people) have with nature.

PERFORMER 8 And you look at the things they can do with a piece of ordinary cloth, the things they fashion out of cheap, vulgarly colored (to you) twine, the way they squat down over a hole they have made in the ground, the hole itself is something to marvel at, and since you are being an ugly person this ugly but joyful thought will swell inside you: their ancestors were not clever in the way yours were and not ruthless in the way yours were, for then would it not be you who would be in harmony with nature and backwards in that charming way?

PERFORMER 5 An ugly thing, that is what you are when you become a tourist, an ugly, empty thing, a stupid thing, a piece of rubbish pausing here and there to gaze at this and taste that, it will never occur to you that the people who inhabit the place in which you have just paused cannot stand you, that behind their closed doors they laugh at your strangeness (you do not look the way they look); the physical sight of you does not please them; you have bad manners (it is their custom to eat their food with their hands; you try eating their way, you look silly; you try eating the way you always eat, you look silly); they collapse helpless from laughter, mimicking the way they imagine you must look as you carry out some everyday bodily function.

PERFORMER 1 They do not like you.

PERFORMER 5 “They do not like me!” That thought never actually occurs to you. Still, you feel a little uneasy. Still, you feel a little foolish. Still, you feel a little out of place. But the banality of your own life is very real to you.

PERFORMER 9 It drove you to this extreme, spending your days and your nights in the company of people who despise you, people you do not like really, people you would not want to have as your actual neighbor. And so you must devote yourself to puzzling out how much of what you are told is really, really true.

- PERFORMER 8 That the native does not like the tourist is not hard to explain. For every native of every place is a potential tourist, and every tourist is a native of somewhere.
- PERFORMER 9 Every native everywhere lives a life of overwhelming and crushing banality and boredom and separation and depression and every deed good and bad is an attempt to forget this. Every native would like to find a way out, every native would like a rest, every native would like a tour. But some natives – most natives in the world – cannot go anywhere. They are too poor. They are too poor to go anywhere. They are too poor to escape the reality of their lives; and they are too poor to live properly in the place where they live, which is the very place you, the tourist, want to go – so when the natives see you, the tourist, they envy you, they envy your ability to leave your own banality and boredom, they envy your ability to turn their own banality and boredom into a source of pleasure for yourself.

## TRANSITION

- RECORDER 2 Could you clarify for me the problems some Africans are having with the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and Structural Adjustment Programs?
- PERFORMER 6 First of all the IMF and the WB need to listen.
- PERFORMER 9 They are interested in creating a global economy and integrating everybody, even the most remote peasant farmer, into that global economy – not as partners but as material for exploitation.
- PERFORMER II People who put up an intellectual defense for the IMF and WB, I wonder if they actually read the letters of intent or conditionalities.
- PERFORMER 2 One thing we must recognize is that the only way that we can acutely extricate ourselves is by developing technology – getting our own technologies and embarking on an industrial revolution. We must produce our most basic needs.
- PERFORMER 6 We are not talking about going to space. We are just talking about industrialization where we can produce our most basic needs ...
- PERFORMER II So no child will go to bed hungry, and so that anyone who wants to work is given the opportunity to work.
- PERFORMER 6 It is not too much to ask for.
- PERFORMER II In the North, where I come from, it is the breadbasket of the country. The soil is productive for rice and agriculture, but with this import liberalization program, it hurts the local farmer.
- PERFORMER 4 The big agricultural businesses dump their imports like rice and so the people suffer. How? You don't expect my uncle who is a rice farmer about fifty miles from Tamale who has just about two acres and who doesn't have a tractor, just a hoe, to compete with these big agro-businesses. My uncle produces about fifteen bags of rice. He doesn't have the technology to produce a lot of rice. He goes to the market to sell his rice. Now, because he

doesn't enjoy the economies of scale and production his rice will be slightly more expensive than the imported one. So, you can't expect that peasant farmer to compete with that big agro-business.

PERFORMER 6 The IMF and WB don't factor that in, in terms of economic stability. Yes, the situation is better than it was some eighteen or twenty years ago. But it is not where it could be or should be. It is aid driven and the social cost of that is enormous.

PERFORMER II Plus, the indebtedness. There is no way we can ever pay back the loans –

PERFORMER 6 Close to 7 billion dollars.

ALL There is no way.

*(The performers turn their backs to the audience. And the Recorder takes the stage.)*

RECORDER 2 The rich and the poor are at distances beyond comprehension

Yet

The rich and the poor are strangers up close and personal like opposing twins

One holds the other by global strings

Global and enormous

Global

Together and apart!

*(The performers stand with their journals.)*

PERFORMER I The UN Development Report documents how globalization has dramatically increased inequality between and within nations, but at the same time it has brought people together like never before!

*(The performers begin reading from their journals.)*

PERFORMER 4 We live in a world where the financial assets of just 200 of the richest people in the world are greater than the combined income of the more than 2 billion people!

PERFORMER 9 The majority of trade and investments takes place between industrial nations.

PERFORMER 2 Global corporations control a third of world exports.

PERFORMER 5 Of the hundred largest economies in the world, fifty-one are corporations.

RECORDER 2 What does this have to do with Trokosi?

PERFORMER IO The global economy disrupts traditional economies and weakens their governments to help them.

PERFORMER 8 They are left to fend for themselves against failed states

PERFORMER 6 against destitution

PERFORMER I famine and plagues

PERFORMER II They are forced to migrate

PERFORMER 4 They are forced to offer their labor at wages below what it takes for them to live

PERFORMER I2 They are forced to sacrifice their children

PERFORMER 3 They are forced to cash in their physical environments  
 PERFORMER 9 They are forced to neglect their personal health  
 PERFORMER 2 They are forced to just survive?  
 RECORDER 2 What does this have to do with Trokosi?  
 PERFORMER 5 Education and health budgets are slashed to pay off debts.  
 PERFORMER 10 The total wealth of the 358 global billionaires equals the  
 combined income of 45 percent of the world's population.  
 PERFORMER 8 The recent transformation of the world economy  
 PERFORMER 6 has not been matched by  
 PERFORMER I changes in our political institutions  
 PERFORMER II by changes in our political institutions  
 PERFORMER 4 by changes in our political institutions.

RECORDER 2 What has this got to do with Trokosi?  
 It is time to go back in the field  
 It is time to go back to Trokosi  
 There are more questions  
 It is time to get back to the debate  
 Why *is* the debate about Trokosi so heated  
 Why is everyone so angry?  
 Trokosi is not the subject  
 The subject is the debate  
 It has *got* to be about the Debate  
 Can I shut up and listen for good purposes!  
 Anthropologist on Board? Oh! BEWARE  
 Another Westerner charges human rights abuses in Africa ... against an oblique  
 paradigm?  
 Against her performance?  
 Westerners ... ah, here we come to save Africa from herself  
 We have the answers ... we have the A\_I\_D  
 Listen while we show and tell you  
 To yourselves  
 Here we come, giddi yup, giddi yup, the wild, wild West will show you and tell you  
 Who you are!

*(Recorder freezes. Performers take the stage.)*

PERFORMER I There is a rising movement by people concerned about poverty  
 and economic injustice in Africa. They are demanding that all those loans  
 given to African countries by the IMF and World Bank be completely  
 forgiven. They are demanding an unconditional debt write-off for all coun-  
 tries in sub-Saharan Africa. Do you agree with this?  
 PERFORMER 3 Yes. I agree. But I don't think it will ever happen.  
 PERFORMER I Why?  
 PERFORMER 3 Too many people in power are against it. They don't understand  
 our problems here. They ask: What did Africans do with all that money they



got to develop their countries? Where did the money go? Africans were given all that money, and they don't want to give it back. What happened to the money? Well I'll tell you what happened to the money. Have you heard of giving with one hand and taking back *double* with the other hand – you give five pence with your right hand because you know you can take back ten pence with your left, maybe fifteen, maybe twenty. Hah! Let me tell what these loans really mean. They mean that you give *some* in order to take back *more* ... people with big money making more money from their money. They call it surplus! ... people with no money trying to survive in a world where big money rules. I call that poverty. But let me answer your question more directly. What happened to the money? I'll tell you what happened to the money. You think a handful of water can stop a burning flame that is out of control? It cannot. Especially if you're not sure what direction to pour the water to stop the flame AND if someone else is pouring buckets of gasoline on it in the *right* direction. All you got is a fire out of control and empty hands. Next thing you know people are asking you where did all that water go, and they're blaming you because you can't put out the fire. Well, that's what happened to the loan money. Now they're asking us to give them ten buckets of water back from that handful they gave us while they keep pouring gasoline on the fire. You can't make water from fire. Can't be done.

## TRANSITION

- PERFORMER 5 Many people believe that because this practice is ancient there is no way to stop it ... Some think we should take up arms and destroy the shrines – put fear in the fetish priest! I took the middle road and that was to win the respect of the fetish priests. It was for reforming the practice not destroying it.
- PERFORMER 10 We went to the villages and spoke to the priests and we became friends. They saw that we were not crusaders coming to abolish their practice and that we were people who cared about them. When people were ill in the shrines they called for us and we helped them. We involved as many people as possible to try and reform the practice. MY DREAM ... I wish these slaves were free enough to own property for themselves. To have resources to determine their future for themselves and their children. To leave the shrines because they can take care of themselves.
- PERFORMER 12 Money to buy a plot of land and provide capital big enough to start life. They can do it. But they need training and a start. I want them to become women with their destiny in their own hands, free to think for themselves. I have another dream ... this dream is to enlighten Ghanaian culture about the role of women. And I must relate this to our religious practice. The Trokosi practice is just one of the many practices that hinder women from developing.
- PERFORMER 3 Our whole system is based on the man as ruler – as leader. The Ghanaian woman must look to her husband – to the man for her way. I know this is not only in Africa it is in the US too. But in Africa it is so entrenched

that, literally, the woman is a slave. She is subjected to the wishes of a man. The woman does not talk, only if the man talks. His ideas are the ideas that will rule the house. My wife is very intelligent, she can do what I can do. Why shouldn't she have the opportunity and freedom to be who she is so that both of us can enjoy life together?

PERFORMER 5 I see the role of women as lighting two candles together. The two bright lights will give both of us a brighter life. We can enjoy our lives together.

PERFORMER 10 All these women who are kept illiterate and subjugated. Imagine what they could contribute to our social economy / our politics and culture. Imagine what free men and women can do together. Imagine what type of development we would have in this country.

*(Recorder moves from the interview and takes the stage. Light transition/change image.)*

PERFORMER 4 & PERFORMER 10 (P4)Trade In / (P10) Trade With

(P4) Trades Off / (P10) Trade For

(P4) Trading / (P10) Traded

(P4) Trade / (P10) TrrrrrrraaaaaaadddddDuh!

(P4) Trade In / (P10) Trade With

(P4) Trade Off / (P10) Trade For

(P4) Trading / (P10) Traded

(P4) Trade / (P10) TrrrrrrraaaaaaadddddDuh!

(P4) I Trade / (P10) You Trade

(P4) They Trade

(P10) THEY Traded YOU!

(P4) TraDER / (P10) TraiTOR

(P4) They Traded you

(P10) And THEY got to be Mister BIG TRADE

PERFORMER 3 The hot sun and little girls selling water

(P4) They Traded you? (P10) Traitor

(P4) And THEY got to be Mister Big TRADE / (P10) Mr. B-I -G Trade

PERFORMER 8 Beggars and Babies at stop signs.

(P10) Big Trade / (P4) Little Trade / (P10) Big Trade / (P4) Little Trade

(P10) Mister Big Trade Trades-In / (P4) Trade-up / (P10) Trades-over Mister Little Trade

(P4) Mister Little Trade can hardly find Trade anymore hah! ... been Traded-In

(P10) Mister Little Trade been Traaded iiiinnn - (P4) AGAIN

PERFORMER 9 Made twenty-five cents for the WHOLE day.

(P10) Mister Big Trade Gets Bigger / (P4) Gets Bigger Trade

(P10) Look See / (P4) See / (P10) Watch

(P4) Mister Big Trade Gets Bigger / (P10) Gets Bigger Trade

(P4) Look See / (P10) See Watch

(P4) Mister Big Trade Trades For More Big Trade

(P10) Trades For More Big Trade

PERFORMER 5 Made twenty-five cents for the WHOLE day.

(P4) Mister Little Trade cries out and says: FAIR TRADE

(P10) Mister Big Trade roars loud and says: FREE TRADE

(P4) They Traded you and got to be Mister Big Trade

(P10) Trade / In

(P4) Trade / With

(P10) Trade / (P4) Off your Country

(P10) Because some people never have to worry.

(P4) They eat every day. (P10) Every day, under (P4) FREE TRADE.

(P4 & P10) Ev-ver-ree day.

#### TRANSITION

PERFORMER 3 Being a Catholic bishop and a believer in traditional religion, no, I don't see any difference in the two cosmologies at all!

PERFORMER 9 I have lived a natural life with my people in my village. In the village I was told there was one God – one unsurpassable God! So being a Christian and honoring traditional religion is not a problem for me – it is a way of life. Trokosi is not African traditional religion.

PERFORMER 12 It is only a small part of African traditional religion. When you go to the Ewes, their supreme God is not Trokosi, their supreme God is mawu – creator, loving, eternal, judge – everything, father, grandfather and that is the centre of African traditional religion. In English they say gods. It is an abomination! How can you have a God and then have gods!

PERFORMER 5 My Muslim brothers have one Allah. You cannot have Allah and then a group of small Allahs, no – Allah is Allah. The word “gods” is only used by the English. In African traditional religion we don't have gods; we have deities. It is a travesty of justice for us to have more than only one god. There are agents of god, there are superintendents of god; they are of god, but they are not God. Polytheism is a situation where you have gods who are interdependent of one another – that is polytheism – but that is not the case in Africa!

PERFORMER 10 This is the point, although the Ashantis believe God is Yacompong, they don't believe Yacompong created only the Ashantis and some other God created all others. Then Yacompong would not be supreme – he would have rivals! The fact that you believe your God is supreme – whether it is mawu, Yacompong, Allah, or Yahweh – your God is supreme!

PERFORMER 11 He is the creator of everybody not just your people. If Allah were the creator of Muslims, he would not be a supreme God! He is the creator of all human beings, that is the basis of religion. For Jews, Yahweh is not just the creator of Jews. Yahweh is the supreme creator. The creator of the world. He has no rivals.

PERFORMER 1 That is why traditional religion is very tolerant – we are brothers and sisters. It would be a contradiction to believe that yomcomper were the creator of everything and not regard your neighbor as your brother or sister.

PERFORMER 8 In my village, I lived in a society that believed in one creator of everything! Obviously my people also believed there were other spirits – but those other spirits were not gods ...

PERFORMER 2 Many people confuse African traditional religion with the symbols that they see. The symbol will manifest a certain thing but it is not the God. Nobody is going to tell you that the tree is God – it is a symbol. The snake is not God, it is a symbol.

PERFORMER 4 No African language will confuse this.

*(Positional change)*

PERFORMER 6 I am saying all this and I am a Christian. I am a Catholic bishop. And it is because I am a Catholic bishop that I can honor my culture and tradition. How can I believe that this kind God of the Christians put my people in total darkness! How can this kind Christian God judge my people as wrong for what they believe – as backward, as heathens. It is not Christian to believe that my people are under the grip of the devil for what they believe. I will put it this way.

PERFORMER 7 I am Ashanti, not because of my color, but because of my birth and culture. What if after my birth I were sent to China? I would be speaking Chinese fluently, I would be eating with chopsticks. What I want to say is that a human being is not just biology but a human being is sociology. We are not just flesh – we have an environment and social life. If I were not living among human beings, I would not be a human being. It is other human beings that make me a human being. It is you that is making what I am saying human. The bible says “... in many ages God has revealed himself to man in various forms.” Listen, nobody can tell me that humankind is going to hell because they are not Christians.

PERFORMER 4 Please, all these Muslims, all these Hindus, all these Buddhists, all these Sikhs – they are going to hell because they don't know Jesus Christ, because they are not Christians. What kind of God would do this? Jesus Christ is the savior of humankind and he has a way of saving which we don't understand. And it is the pride and arrogance of some Christians who say they know what Jesus has to say. It is just arrogance! Christianity is not the only way it is just one of the ways.

*(Laughter. Positional change)*

PERFORMER 9 The early missionaries came armed with what they had read about the African ... and those who wrote those books were not scientific anthropologists or sociologists ... they were adventurers, explorers, thieves who came to slander us – when they saw something that appeared strange to them, that is what they described. That's why I made the point that it is not the tree that is the god but the spirit in the tree – the tree is the symbol. Now it was these people in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries only described the symbols – they described the

PERFORMER 3 African as barbaric, savage, they even said they have no sense of shame. Subhuman with the intelligence of dogs ... they wrote this as fact. Ashantis were warmongers, bloodthirsty savages, why? Because we didn't allow the British to conquer us. They travel thousands of miles to conquer us – we were not the warmongers – or the blood thirsty – can you imagine somebody comes from Britain and says I've discovered you! They came here to discover us! Ha! Well, what if we go to London and say oh, I have discovered London. Hm?

PERFORMER 5 It has been hammered into the minds of Africans that they are inferior. Everything in Europe is the ideal. It has been hammered into the minds of Africans that their religion is inferior and some believed it. They said our religion is a crude religion and I'm afraid that it has caught on? Some of our own people believe it.

PERFORMER 10 In pursuit of my doctorate in theology, I studied all the philosophers: Immanuel Kant, Martin Buber, René Descartes, Aristotle, Socrates. But, if I want to believe in God, if I want to understand religion, why should I understand it only in terms of Socrates and Aristotle? Why? Is there no wisdom in my people? Is there no wisdom in my people through which I can understand theology? I believe my people have enough evidence of the existence of God – as a Catholic bishop, let me tell you: I know of the existence of God from the wisdom of my people, not from books. These are the people who are more God-fearing.

PERFORMER 11 Listen to the times they call upon God, listen. Our drum language is full of God: our myths, our proverbs, our architecture is full of God. Our art symbols are full of God. We have been told that libation is bad. Everything is bad? Why? How can you be insulting to fetish priests? How? The pope came to Benin around 1985. He went to visit one of the priests – everybody thought how terrible. Why? Are they not human beings? Are they not believers in God? Messengers of God?

*(Positional change)*

PERFORMER 1 You mentioned Trokosi ... Have you examined it and found out what it is? There is a certain amount of skill in interpreting my people's way of life ...

PERFORMER 8 As for Trokosi – there is nothing in this world that is either all good or all evil. It depends on the circumstances. I kill a human being – you cannot say I have committed a sin and you cannot say I have done well. It depends upon the circumstances. If I see you mercilessly slaughtering people to death, and I have a pistol, and I shoot you, then I have done well.

PERFORMER 2 This Trokosi, you must analyze it from both sides. If I wanted to know something about Trokosi, I wouldn't approach it with any preconceived ideas, no. I cannot agree with those who see evil in it and I cannot agree with those who see no evil in it. There must be something evil in it; there must be something good in it. You must listen to those who are involved in it. Listen and observe.

PERFORMER 4 It is not easy to ask questions, but you must ask questions. Don't rely on what the people say they are doing. But on what you see. What you see, what you observe, what you experience, what you live in – ask questions. Why are there not any boys? Why are the girls sent to the shrines? What do they do there? Did they come on their own? Ask a million questions ... a million questions.

PERFORMER 6 Jesus never condemned anybody for his or her beliefs. He never said you are believing in the wrong religion. Never! It is not the religion that matters but whether you are acting in accordance with your conscience!

PERFORMER 7 Jesus came to purify humanity. If we follow his injunction there will be no war, there will be no bribery and corruption. There will be no human rights abuses. Even Mahatma Gandhi said he loved Jesus but hated Christians; He loved Christ but hated Christians.

ALTERNATING VOICES I don't see any contradiction between my being a bishop and an Ashanti ...

#### TRANSITION

RECORDER 1 It is night in Ghana. What defines the night here are the stars and the breeze:

The stars because they are like shining hieroglyphs against a vast black sky and the breeze because its gentle coolness is a respite from the brutal heat of the day.

It is said that ethnography is an art and a science, but I know it is more about presence.

A distant country

A distant people

But this country / these people are not so distant anymore

They are part of me now

Like an inseparable friend

Like an unforgettable lover.

PERFORMER 2 As for the Trokosi – there is nothing in this world that is either all good or all evil

PERFORMER 8 This Trokosi – you must analyze it from both sides

PERFORMER 10 I cannot agree with people who see *all* evil in it and I cannot agree with people who see *no* evil in it.

*(Light change)*

#### EPILOGUE: HIDDEN FORCES

*(Light change – blue with alternating brightness/intensity to enhance “floating” movement by actors. This entire section is performed as a choreopoem. It becomes a dance as much as a monologue – the five performers move through the “cosmos” interpreting the monologue through abstract movement of coming and going – moving into each other and away.)*

- PERFORMER 6 There are certain hidden forces in society that we take for granted and we don't know the forces that are keeping these forces together.
- PERFORMER 9 There are so many hidden things that are responsible for maintaining a certain equilibrium in nature, in society, in creation – in general – that we don't know.
- PERFORMER 7 Sometimes you are able to sit with somebody and exchange ideas in perfect harmony. What is responsible for this?
- PERFORMER 12 When the paradigms of knowledge change, it looks like knowledge is moving in different directions.
- PERFORMER 11 Right now in order to go to Tamale I must go by transport – I have to go by car or by air or by bus – that is only ONE way. Is it possible for me to be in Tamale and to be sitting here with you at the same time? – to be in two places at once?
- PERFORMER 4 I have always said that in our quest for knowledge we have the freedom to know so many things – the human mind and its limitless nature in the quest for knowledge.
- PERFORMER 6 Before reality started, even before the building blocks of reality were created – we begin with the concept of the big bang. This will push our knowledge back to one hundred years, two hundred, four million, one billion, the furthest we can go is about 15 billion years ago to the big bang, which started with a small dot.
- PERFORMER 9 Yes, a small dot – smaller than the head of a pin.
- PERFORMER 7 All that we know, all that we are, all creation began with that small dot – smaller than the head of a pin.
- PERFORMER 12 It is said that the small dot was composed of an ultra concentration of energy – such a very dense concentration – the temperature was a trillion times hotter than the inner core of the sun.
- PERFORMER 11 The astronomers say that when others want to illustrate the big bang on television they portray a dot on a screen and then suddenly the dot covers the screen. But the astronomers tell us that this is the wrong depiction – this is not how the big bang happened! Scientists tell us that you could not have been outside the big bang and seen it – the space was not there, there was NO SPACE!
- PERFORMER 4 There was nonexistence, no light, no darkness. Nothingness. Today, here, it is hard for us to perceive nothingness – no space.
- PERFORMER 6 But we must understand that the building blocks for human beings, the billions of stars in the galaxy, for everything – even for space itself – everything began with that ultra dense concentration of energy smaller than the head of a pin.
- PERFORMER 9 *Time had not started and there was no space.*
- PERFORMER 7 So when they ask what was there before, when they talk about how life began – it was some 15 billion years ago, and we are all part of that reality. So, yes, we have been able to at least conceptualize to this point how reality began. But, beyond this it is counter-intuitive.

PERFORMER 12 The question of why did the big bang explode to start all of creation ... maybe we will leave for others to answer.

PERFORMER II The type of reality in which we find ourselves, we trace it to this small dot that erupted into the big bang, but there could be another reality – realities where there is no need for space and time.

PERFORMER 4 We think that without space and time we could not exist – we cannot conceive of life without space and time.

PERFORMER 6 If we limit everything to the knowledge that we have, it will limit everything to the knowledge that we have.

PERFORMER 9 Could we not appreciate that there are other possibilities? The human brain is not well equipped to even conceptualize beyond certain realities. This is why I trace everything to that little dot because that is the limit of our memories – the limit of our knowledge.

PERFORMER 7 We need something else to be able to perceive beyond the big bang where our limited knowledge cannot reach.

PERFORMER 12 So when I talk about hidden forces, although it may have religious undertones, scientifically, even the astronomers agree – there are forces that must have set the big bang in motion, that guide the balance and equilibrium of life.

PERFORMER II Even Einstein toward the end of his life said everything is moving in a certain direction – a certain order. This is not an accident, so this is what I mean when I say hidden forces.

PERFORMER 4 Even if we just take religion away and we believe we are the only reality, isn't it arrogance on the part of human beings to believe that way – to think it is just us?

PERFORMER 6 The black holes – the black holes in the universe where the inner core of stars usually collapse and form a very dense concentration – nothing escapes them not even light but they are all spinning –

ALTERNATING VOICES They are spinning in a direction and an order.

*(Fade to black)*



APPENDIX 2

*Water rites*

*Digital Imagery and Sound by Anissa Clark and Brian Gaves,  
Assistant Director, Elizabeth Nelson*

PART ONE: WATER MEMORIES

Water rites	videography by Torkwase Dyson
Fresh out of water	words by D. Soyini Madison performed by Sonny Haynes and Laura Lindsey
Water memories	written by D. Soyini Madison
Nieves, PR	performed by the Ensemble
The Haitian	written by Cristina Garcia
Perfect once more	written by Tracy Austria
Solitude	written by Kerstin Lindgren
A burning of senses	written by Melora Rivera
Watery streets	written by Tracy Walker
God's test	written by Marie Garlock
The liquid of all feelings	written by Paul North
The boy and water	written by Sonny Haynes
Making waves	written by Shannon O'Neill
Mercy of the world	written by Amelia Forrest Kaye
Savelugu at the pond	written by Madeline Walter performed by Sonny Haynes and Laura Lindsey
Ibrahim: the donkey-cart	written by D. Soyini Madison performed by Stephen Gibson
Me and my shadow: we are here	written by D. Soyini Madison performed by Sonny Haynes and Laura Lindsey

PART TWO: WATER BUSINESS

Mr. Big	performed by Allan Maule as Mr. Big written by D. Soyini Madison & Allan Maule
FunkyBreakdown/spoken word	
this is NOT	written and performed by Abrina Brown
privilege	written and performed by Amelia Forrest Kaye

we go carry water	written and performed by Marie Garlock
buzz	written and performed by Paul North
Designer glass bottles	written and performed by Tracy Walker
What do I have to say for myself?	written and performed by Madeline Walter
Money is life	written and performed by Sonny Haynes

## PART THREE: WATER WARS

Don't blame me	performed by Stephen Gibson, Kerstin Lindgren, Allan Maule, Paul North, Shannon O'Neill, Ashley Patterson and Melora Rivers written by D. Soyini Madison
Interviews*	performed by Marie Garlock, Stephen Gibson, Sonny Haynes, Amelia Forrest Kaye, Kerstin Lindgren, Laura Lindsey, Allan Maule, Shannon O'Neill and Melora Rivers written by D. Soyini Madison
Maji-Maji story	performed by Marie Garlock, Stephen Gibson and Paul North written by Paul North
Cochabamba story	written and performed by Christlna Garcia and Amelia Forrest Kaye
Haitian story	written and performed by Tracy Austria and Ashley Patterson
Indian story	written and performed by Tracy Walker and Madeline Walter
Ghanaian story	performed by Abrina Brown written by D. Soyini Madison
Me and my shadow: truth	performed by Sonny Haynes and Laura Lindsey written by D. Soyini Madison

\*Compiled from conversations with Awudu Issah Mahmudu, Iliasu Adam, Al-Hassan Adam, Nasser Adam, Angela Djamenah, Sam Salifu Danse, Kwesi Awusu, Coleman Agyeyomah, Sule Gariba, Wisdom Mensah, Mawuli Dake, Kweku Acquah, Mariama Al-Hassan, Lisa Aubrey, and the words of Sarah Grusky and Rudolf N. Amenga-Etego.

## PART ONE: WATER MEMORIES

*(The audience enters while AUDIO INTERVIEW TAPES ARE PLAYING. Recorder interviews three women from Savelugu who organized the distribution of water in their area. They speak in Dagbani. Mahmudu is interpreting. The tape ends. The house goes black and the show begins.)*

## BEAT ONE

*(The opening video plays on both screens: scenes of water and the image of a woman and child. The voice-over poem "Water Rites" underscores the images in the video. The Recorders (1 & 2) sit by the screen, watch, and take notes in a field journal. As the video and poem end, the ensemble comes onstage. They take their places on the three islands. Each sits so his/her back or profile is turned against the view of the audience. The actors hold a rather large, highly decorated box out of view of the audience. The closing scene of the video is frozen on the screens. Recorder 1 moves downstage.)*

Recorder: Fresh out of water

*(As the Recorder begins to speak, THE SOUND OF SOFT DRUMBEATS plays in the background. The actors very, very slowly turn and bring the boxes in view of the audience. By the end of the Recorder's monologue the actors (and the boxes) are now in full view of the audience. The actors hold the boxes in various positions. They focus on the boxes throughout.)*

RECORDER 1 Dear Journal: October 12, 1998, University of Ghana, Legon – Accra, Ghana, West Africa. There is no water in my house – the pipes are dry. There's no water left in my storage containers. There's no water anywhere here in Legon. I can't find water and it scares me. They warned us about the pipes drying up, but I never thought it would go on this long. How could there not be water?

RECORDER 2 Dear Journal: January 2006, London, England. These are the facts: More than one billion people lack access to clean and affordable water and about two billion lack access to sanitation ...

RECORDER 1 Kweku said he will come and we will search for water ... he told me he knows where we can get enough to fill the containers. I just want him to hurry up and get here. It's just too scary not having water ... too weird and scary. I worry how the students here are managing?

RECORDER 2 In the urban areas of Ghana, only 40 percent of the population has a water tap that is flowing; 78 percent of the poor in urban areas do not have piped water.

RECORDER 1 I'm sitting here at the window waiting for Kweku to drive up the gravel road and put an end to all this water anxiety ... how many greedy storage containers will it take for little ol' me to never run out of clean water again?

RECORDER 2 Treated water is available only to about 65 percent in urban areas and only about 35 percent in rural areas.

RECORDER 1 I remember one day I had just left the market. I was standing at the trotro stop trying to get back home. It was so hot that day. I could hardly breathe and nothing could quench the thirst. Every trotro that passed by was filled with people packed together, crushed inside, trying to get where they needed to go – a stream of dilapidated, old vans full of exhaust fumes, sweaty bodies, overbearing heat, and smells of every sort. Everything felt so crowded and so dirty that day. I was hot and tired and missing my home in the US and feeling very much like the Ugly American.

RECORDER 2 Dirt is a fact of material and political conditions, but too often it is cast as a moral flaw. The World Health Organization's daily requirement for water is 20–40 liters a day per person. In Ghana for those without a piped water system, purchasing three buckets or eighteen liters of water a day costs between 10 and 20 percent of their average daily income.

RECORDER 1 As I waited, hoping a trotro would stop where I could squeeze into one empty seat and get back to the quiet and solitude of my home, I looked down the road a bit, and saw a woman sitting over a bucket of soapy water. There was a child at her feet, she undressed the child and then placed him in the bucket of water. She bathed the child in the public market place ... "quiet and solitude" for her is a different reality than it is for me. I was transfixed by what was more than just a woman bathing a child outside on a hot day, but how the ordinary – how the day to day – is so strong and healthy and impeccably resistant against the facts of its own reality.

RECORDER 2 Water-borne diseases kill one child every eight seconds.

RECORDER 1 As I watched the woman and child, suddenly, an old man, appearing to be mad – his hair matted, with very dirty clothes and half dressed – walked up to the woman. Without the least concern, she simply brushed him away with a wave of her hand and continued to bathe the child. The man, undeterred, stumbled toward the bucket and began to take off his clothes while attempting to step into the soapy water. Immediately, two young men standing next to me at the trotro stop quickly walked over to the old man and with such sincere gentleness and gracious respect, helped the old man put his clothes on and guided him back down the road.

RECORDER 2 In sub-Saharan Africa, 70 percent of deaths and diseases are due to the lack of clean and accessible water. The majority of women and children in rural areas travel miles in the morning and evening for water that remains infected with water-borne diseases.

RECORDER 1 The woman paying no mind to the old man ... no mind to anyone or anything else – kept her willful attention on her child and their ritual. This small moment, in a small, crowded space of heat, sweat, and smells, was claimed – taken back – by a Water Rite between mother and child. Pristine, Real and Resistant. Kweku will come. I will eventually find water today. And this search over time will come again, and again, and it will eventually become another, a different kind, of Water Rite. But, I wonder sometimes about the old man.

#### BEAT TWO

*(WATER SCENES FROM HOLLYWOOD MOVIES COME UP ON THE TWO SCREENS immediately after the Recorder ends her monologue. The movie scenes fade in and out WHILE MOS DEF'S "NEW WORLD WATER" PLAYS. The actors begin exchanging the boxes to the beat of the movement with excitement until each actor recovers his/her original box. They open the boxes with great excitement. At the line "WE NEED IT FOR THE FIRE," they dump the plastic water bottles inside all along the island and stage.)*

*THE MUSIC FADES AND THE "WATER STORIES" BEGIN. WATER IMAGES ARE STILL BEING PROJECTED ALTERNATELY ON EITHER SCREEN, BUT AT A MUCH SLOWER PACE BETWEEN IMAGES (APPROXIMATELY ONE IMAGE PER STORY). As each story is told, the actors not in the teller's story group will flow into movement patterns – pause – move – pause – move – with the other members of their group.)*

Water memories

*(Actors are seated on their particular islands with their groups.)*

CHRISTINA Large, plastic, blue barrels

The first time I saw them  
 I thought I'd discovered something secret.  
 They weren't hidden from view,  
 Rather strategically nestled in places  
 People never noticed or ventured to.  
 On the right side of Nieves Beauty,  
 Behind the staircase that led to my aunt's home above,  
 The barrels collected water from the clouds  
 That hovered over Santurce, Puerto Rico.  
 If I'd paid closer attention,  
 I would've realized sooner  
 That the water I'd watch fall into the barrels  
 Was the same cool liquid  
 We'd bathe with during water rations  
 By the bucket, that rain helped keep my aunt's business going?  
 You see, my aunt is Nieves, Snow,  
 And she's magical with hair.  
 She sings Fro, Fri, Como agua del rio  
 While she washes, dries, and styles, Washes and styles, hair.  
 Because she'd sometimes use rain water,  
 She seemed like a goddess  
 Performing a sacred ritual.

TRACY A. An American girl, born with American privilege  
 Questions her Haitian boyfriend, bred with Haitian humility  
 How he remembers water

His first shower, age twelve. Soccer camp in Port-au-Prince:  
 A twist of a mere knob invites a stream of delight for the first time  
 Curiosity is satisfied as the cool droplets trickle, then cascade, then envelop him,  
 Until his entire body comprehends the meaning of innocent pleasure.  
 Previously, "shower" entailed a bucket of water, a cup,  
 And the patience to cycle the discontinuous flow.  
 "Hot water" made by allowing the sun to heat the liquid stored outside the house;  
 Causing "summer" to mean showers between noon and three.  
 With his new house came a new system

As “running water” races from heaven to Haiti  
 The roof collects the rainwater, rushing it down pipelines beneath the house  
 To a room-sized storage tank.  
 And his family was never a poor family,  
 Only a family in a poor country in our own backyard.  
 Incomprehensible is this lack of utilities, to this American girl, born into the  
 American way of water and wastefulness.  
 Do you scoff at our attitude of triviality while the world craves water?  
 What were you thinking once you encountered your first shower?  
 And the Haitian boyfriend, bred the Haitian way of tranquil appreciation  
 answers  
 “Oh. Well it’s much faster this way.”

KERSTIN What is water to me? It’s the filling bathtub, the flushing toilet,  
 washing the dishes. It’s the thing I drink all day long that sustains and  
 energizes me. I don’t really think about it. It’s just there. I turn on the tap  
 and out it comes, as much as I like. Maybe I think about it once a month  
 when I get that bill. Or maybe when the hot water heater breaks and I have to  
 wash my hands in the cold cold water on a cold cold day. But that’s just an  
 inconvenience. The water is still there. I can still drink when I please and I’m  
 secure in the knowledge that I can call someone and they will come and see to  
 it that my water is perfect once more.

MELORA The sun was bright and even as a child I was able to recognize the fact  
 that this was a day I should enjoy, cherish, frolic in, play, live in life and  
 in childhood. My father ... distant. Me ... alone. I decided to escape. I’d  
 pretend I was at the beach. With my beach pail I walked along the ledge. Not  
 in the pool with the others, not on the deck with the others, but in my mind  
 on the shore just where the tide came in and kissed the sand. Then I slipped,  
 entered a new world. Deep, dense. Everything distorted, but beautiful. I  
 knew it was wrong, but for some reason I felt safe. I was alone but I felt like  
 this loneliness was a necessary disposition in order to truly enjoy this moment  
 and be invited to this place. I should go back.

TRACY W. I remember being small and touching “very hot water” – Maybe it  
 was in a bathtub, boiling on a stove, running under a faucet, maybe it was in  
 the kitchen ... Water rolled over my hand, scorching, searing its way to my  
 bone, pain so quick it shocked me, caught me, arrested me with sensation.  
 The water was so hot it made my small fingers feel frozen with “cold”. I told  
 my mother and she said

MARIE “That’s what can happen when something is extremely hot.”

TRACY W. When water is burning/angry/blistery hot, it will leave a trail “like  
 freezing ice”

PAUL on your nerves.

TRACY W. They become confused, overwhelmed, plagued with the impression  
 of acute temperature. The body cannot grasp the extremes and so switches  
 them ... It was water who first taught me not to trust my senses ...

MARIE An early summer afternoon, studying statistics in a downtown coffee shop, full of smoke and hip kids. At first, grey clouds sighing across outside, and then, a swelling, a burgeoning, a breaking loose. Huge fat drops plummeting thickly to steaming pavement, streams and streams of water rushing to drains through curbside canals. Sheets and sheets of liberty, luring us to partake ... we went! Twirling, jumping, splashing in pools, clothes translucent. Mouths open wider than all the screaming sheets and windshields combined; mouths agape to mirror the sky's agape. Jumping high to scrape the underbellies of grey. Returning to a coffee shop's "bohemian" facade revealed – in their refusal to let in sopping bodies, who had already purchased drinks. Soaked potential customers shuffle in, are welcomed to sit, purchase, stay. Young wet bodies, pool-circumferenced, you can NOT come in HERE like THAT. We sternly advise you to "get out." The freedom is too much. We overflow – and leave. Tumbling through open heavens and floating down full and watery streets.

PAUL I've never been sure if God's up there in heaven,  
My confusion began at the ripe age of seven,  
At school, we sung hymns about Noah and his wives,  
But what's that got to do with the Creator of Life?!

CHORUS The arc, the flood, the RAINBOW!

PAUL If God controls Nature and claims all the rest,  
Water could serve as the ultimate test,  
It's hard to believe in a God you can't see,  
But if he did it for Noah, why not for me?!

CHORUS For him, For him, Do it For Him!

PAUL Curious one Sunday, I slipped out the back garden,  
To address God himself, if I might beg his pardon,  
"God," I called loudly, "I don't mean to play games,  
But if you really exist, then please make it rain!"

CHORUS Make it Rain!

PAUL Nothing, nada, not a cloud in the sky,  
Which strengthened my doubts about God upon high,  
"I'll pray every day, I'll even get christened,  
If I only had empirical proof that you listened!"

CHORUS Are you listening, God, Are you listening?

PAUL But the sun shone down and birds chirped in the trees,  
And from desperation, I fell to my knees,  
"Oh, C'mon, God! It's not bribery!  
We're in bloody England! How hard can rain be?!"

CHORUS Seriously, it rains like everyday!

PAUL Silence ... So then I tried telepathy ...  
But when that didn't work, I was filled with frustration,  
And resigned to rejoin with my secularist nation,  
So at the ripe age of seven, I reached the doleful conclusion,  
That God ruled not the rain and was just an illusion.

PAUL “God, I guess you don’t exist ...”

*(Chorus mimes rain. Paul motions to re-enter, and the rain stops. He hesitates, turns his back once again, and the rain resumes. Then Paul resolves to step outside, and the rain halts suddenly.)*

“I suppose I’ll be an atheist ...”

SONNY Water is the liquid of all feeling. Hail, sleet, snow – none as pure as rain. My mother always said if God invented anything better than water, He kept it to Himself.

SHANNON Mom, Daddy, and I were at a hotel in Boston for the weekend, and it had a huge pool. I really liked swimming and being in the water. People were jumping and diving into the pool and thought it was really neat. Mom and Daddy both encouraged me to do it, and they promised to catch me as I came in. But, as the child who was used to being gingerly placed in the water, making no effort on my own end, and I wasn’t sure if I was ready to do it myself. In all honesty, I thought those people were crazy jumping and diving in head first. How did they know they would really hit water and not some hard piece of sidewalk or something? Then, it happened. There was a boy. He was older. Probably about six, and I watched him run to the diving board and jump in. “Well if a stupid old boy can do that, I sure can,” I thought to myself, and before my parents knew it, I was running toward the diving board. When they saw what I was doing, they tried to run after me and stop me. Daddy dove into the deep end of the pool in hopes of catching me, but I would not be stopped. I was not about to let a stupid old boy show me up. So I jumped in, avoiding being caught by my father and happily swam back over to the shallow end and climbed out. My parents were so surprised that I actually did it, that they couldn’t decide whether they were mad at me or proud that I got over my fears and jumped in. The boy and I ended up being friends, though, and I had a playmate for the rest of the weekend.

AMELIA My bathtub has no feet. It is sturdy as can be so I can splash around as much as I desire ... That is, until my waves flood the house (oops!) To keep me still, my dad washes my hair ... Rub ... rub ... rub ... I focus on the purple turtle that whizzes across my soapy ocean. Scrub a dub dub, Mema’s in the tub. Rub ... rub ... rub ... OWW! Sponge woman grows into monstrous proportions and then I wring her out, renewing her absorption abilities. Suddenly, the rubbing ceases and I dread my imminent future. It is time for the RINSE! I’m at the edge of a diving board, The top of a roller coaster, Onstage for the first time; My stomach churns. And just as the bucket of clean warm water is raised above my head, poised to wash the dirty suds to sting my eyes, stuff my nose, clog my ears, and fill my mouth with poison. I AM PROTECTED. Big hands, my father’s giant hands they are the barrier that saves me. No flood waters, monsoons, hurricanes or even soapy bubbles can penetrate to hurt me. Positioned above my forehead, his hands channel the scary toxic suds away from my face and allow the water to



embrace me, clean my hair, and gently flow down my back. I am safe from the soap and the sting. With a dry face and clear eyes, I return to making waves.

**MADÉLINE** Manipulation. Makes me think of water because water is so unavoidably manipulated. Water takes the shape of whatever we put it in, glasses, swimming pools, fish bowls, faucets. Water moves in the way that we want. We pour it, squirt it, push it along with wheels, paddles, pumps, pitchers. We can change the very identity of water, make it a solid, a liquid, a gas, and change it back again. Water is more than flexible. It's formable. But it's not formless. It is always something, but being something comes with the potential to be anything. Water is rushing and still, frozen and hot, rigid, fluid, round, square, small, large, dark, clear and totally endless in the ways that we shape and control it. But while we control it, we cannot create it. Water graciously sits herself in front of us saying, "Use me as you will. Make me into what you need." Our power over water is given to us by water herself, is granted to us. And the funny thing is that when water leaves, she takes that power with her. The less water there is, the less control we have, not just over water but over all of the things that water empowers – sanitation, transportation, respiration, photosynthesis. And we are left looking for something that we can manipulate. And we realize that we are very much at the mercy of the world.

**RECORDER 1** "And we realize that we are very much at the mercy of the world."

*(On the last line "Mercy of the World" the water images freeze.)*

**BEAT THREE**

*(Sounds of water rise and the "Donkey and Fetching Water Scene" is projected on both screens. As the Fetching Water scenes are projected, sounds of water rise to a high pitch as actors rise from their islands as if they are moving through water. They leave their boxes on the island and – feeling the opposing force of the water – the actors rise and begin to search among the water bottles for the special one that they want – they read the various brands and inspect the size and shape of some of the bottles until they find the one they want. When each actor finds the "right" water bottle, they reach to the floor against the force of the water and lie down holding the bottle in various semi-fetal positions with their backs to the audience. The water sounds fade but they can still be heard.)*

Recorders: Savelugu at the pond

**RECORDER 1** Mahmudu and I are leaving Tamale on our way to Savelugu.

**RECORDER 2** The last time I was there it was still a model of community control. The people had negotiated with civil society, the public water company, and the government to take control of their own water.

**RECORDER 1** I am coming back now to see Mariama, Rashida, and Isa, women who worked at the pumps, overseeing the distribution of water.

- RECORDER 2 Mahmudu and I arrive. The women have been waiting for me, and with smiles and laughter, they come to the car. We greet each other with warm embraces.
- RECORDER 1 In this moment it feels like there has been no passage of time between now and when I last saw them. It feels amazingly empowering to be here, with them, now.
- RECORDER 2 They want to take me to the water pumps right away.
- RECORDER 1 It is a bit odd to see the pumps before sitting down to talk. But I follow.
- RECORDER 2 Now I realize the urgency. The pumps are locked. There is no flowing water in any of the standpipes of Savelugu. The only available water is from the nearest pond or dam.
- RECORDER 1 We will go: Mahmudu, Mariama, Rashida, Isa and Mariama's son Ibrahim – we will go to the pond. I want to see for myself how they collect their water – most of the people of Savelugu never had tap water in their homes or private bathrooms with flushing toilets.
- RECORDER 2 We arrive. We walk a small distance to the pond.
- RECORDER 1 On the way, I see a woman scooping water from a hole in the ground.
- RECORDER 2 She has been scooping water from this small hole with quickness and determination, all the while being very careful not to spill the preciousness of her labor.
- RECORDER 1 We walk further down the path and come to the pond. There are men, women, and children all gathered.
- RECORDER 2 Three boys on a donkey are working feverishly hard filling large barrels with water they've tied to the donkey's back. They are going to sell the water for a small and reasonable price.
- RECORDER 1 Enough for their labor and their lives and for those who do not come to the pond.
- RECORDER 2 These boys fetch water from the pond six times a day.
- RECORDER 1 When all the barrels are finally filled to capacity, they begin to pull the donkey out of the pond.
- RECORDER 2 But the donkey cannot withstand the weight.
- RECORDER 1 The donkey falls forward.
- RECORDER 2 Water pours out from all the barrels.
- RECORDER 1 & RECORDER 2 (*Repeat in succession.*) The boys start again.
- RECORDER 1 People gather at the pond: women with large buckets and plastic containers – some balancing the water on their heads, others on a long wooden cart –
- RECORDER 2 There is a man with one arm who steps behind a container because he doesn't want me to see him fetch water –
- RECORDER 1 There are small children who carry buckets half their size and double their weight – one child on one side of the bucket, another on the other side.
- RECORDER 2 This water, here where I stand, every drop is a necessity for life.

- RECORDER 1 This water that is valued here – that is the arbiter between life and death – is not clean.
- RECORDER 2 It is mud-brown.
- RECORDER 1 This water requires sterilization under fire in a large metal pot before it can be consumed.
- RECORDER 2 Over five million people a year die from illnesses linked to unsafe drinking water, unclean domestic environments, and improper sanitation.
- RECORDER 1 They are mostly under 5 years of age.
- RECORDER 2 At any time over half the population in the developing world suffers from one or more of six diseases associated with water and sanitation.
- RECORDER 1 Diarrhea
- RECORDER 2 Ascarsis
- RECORDER 1 Guinea worm
- RECORDER 2 Hookworm
- RECORDER 1 Schistosomiasis
- RECORDER 2 Trachoma.
- RECORDER 1 Later that day, Iliasu came by my flat in Tamale.
- RECORDER 2 I told him I had been to Savelugu earlier. I told him about the scene at the pond.
- RECORDER 1 I told him that as we were leaving the pond– the irony of cosmic opposites boasted and teased because all of a sudden it began pouring down rain – loud and torrential rains.
- RECORDER 2 Iliasu took a deep breath. He spoke about harvesting rainwater and the initiatives he and others were making to preserve water and build hand pumps.
- RECORDER 1 I asked him what happened to Savelugu. During my last trip, the standpipes were flowing, but now they are locked. What happened to the local control and distribution of water that international water activists fight for and that Savelugu made happen?
- RECORDER 2 Iliasu said: “It is not just communities, municipalities, and nation states gaining control and efficiency that are at the root of this problem of water.”
- RECORDER 1 The problem is Development and the effects the global economy has on Development.
- RECORDER 2 You can’t talk about getting at the root cause of water unless you are ready to talk about global capitalism.
- RECORDER 1 And about ownership, distribution, and profit on an international scale.
- RECORDER 2 Iliasu said: “We don’t have water in Savelugu because to service this region of Ghana equitably and fairly
- RECORDER 1 it will take 14 million gallons of water a day
- RECORDER 2 and three major artery pumps connected to one of Ghana’s main water sources.”
- RECORDER 2 Right now he said:
- RECORDER 1 “There is only one pump that is working properly and only 4.5 million gallons of water coming into the area –

RECORDER 2 we are two pumps  
 RECORDER 1 and 10 million gallons  
 RECORDER 2 short of water  
 RECORDER 1 short of water.”

*(As the Recorder ends her monologue, sounds of water with the voices of children are heard in the background. Video of the Fetching Water scene ends with the frozen image of the boy at the pond with his donkey.)*

Ibrahim: the donkey-cart

IBRAHIM My name is Ibrahim, I'm from Savelugu,  
 I'm fourteen years old and I sell water.  
 I'm what the people call a “donkey-cart water seller.”  
 I go down to the pond every day with my donkey and I fetch water.  
 My younger brother goes with me.  
 We travel about five miles every day, back and forth, to the pond.  
 We sell water to the people here.  
 There are other donkey-cart water sellers, but *we* are the best!  
 Some of the old people and the sick people can't carry the water or walk to  
 fetch it;  
 And the people who take care of them are too busy – the pond is too far!  
 Sometimes the pond will dry up and we have to search for water.  
 My brothers and me are very, very happy because we have our own donkey.  
 We are blessed to have this donkey.  
 We get up in the morning before the sun and we get a rope and we tie the rope to  
 many, many buckets around the donkey's back. Then we start our first walk  
 to the pond.  
 Me, my brother, and the donkey get inside the pond where the water is full and  
 plenty.  
 My brother fills up the bowls and pours water in the buckets that we have  
 fastened to the donkey's back. I hold the donkey very, very carefully so the  
 donkey won't slide and fall down and spill the water back into the pond.  
 The water is heavy.  
 My brother pours and pours and I hold on ...  
 When the buckets all filled and my little brother's back is tired, we leave the  
 pond.  
 We start the journey with our donkey to sell water to the people who need it.  
 When the water is sold, we go back to the pond and we start all over again ...  
 I hold onto the donkey and my brother fills up the buckets.  
 We fetch water from the pond six times a day.  
 My mother worries that my brother and me will get the guinea worm from the water.  
 Many people around here have gotten guinea worm from the water.  
 But we have not gotten any guinea worm, not yet.  
 My mother has guinea worm and my little sister.  
 My little sister was sick for a long, long time.

You are very blessed when you don't get guinea worm because you can keep working and fetching water and making money to live.  
 They pulled the worm out of my little sister's leg and in a few days she felt better.  
 Oh, it was a big long guinea worm.  
 It looked longer and bigger than my little sister's leg.  
 My mother said she could not fetch water anymore. So, it's just my brother and me.  
 If I get guinea worm, I will worry.  
 Who will hold the donkey?  
 My mother told me that when she was a young girl they had plenty, plenty water –  
 Water flowed from the pipes. Oh! From the pipes, everyday!  
 They bathed, and washed, and drank, and never got sick –  
 No tired back, no guinea worm, no worry.  
 When my mother was a young girl fresh, clean water flowed from the pipes.  
 Not any more.  
 (On "NOT ANYMORE" the actors start whispering their water stories and the boy Ibrahim joins the other actors on the floor with the bottles. The whispers become a cacophony of whispers. THE SCREEN IMAGE FADES OUT AND THE SOUNDS OF WATER AND CHILDREN END. A SOFT DRUMBEAT SOUNDS as the Recorder now stumbles over the actors and stands centerstage. Recorder Two stands watching Recorder One with great interest and concern from her position at the screen.)

## BEAT FOUR

(During Beat four there are no projections. THE DRUM BUILDS TO A PITCH DURING THE EXCHANGE BETWEEN THE TWO RECORDERS. Recorder 1 is centerstage; Recorder 2 is at the screen. When Recorder 1 moves to centerstage, the actors sit up slowly with a quarter turn to the audience in various exaggerated poses drinking from the bottles. When Recorder 1 speaks they will freeze in position and change freezes on key words as the tension mounts between Recorder 1 and Recorder 2. With the drum still sounding, as Recorder 1 and Recorder 2 exchange lines, Recorder 1 is speaking out to the audience, but Recorder 2 is speaking directly to Recorder 1. Marie will rise on cue from Recorder 1 and do interpretive movements to punctuate the tension between the Recorder's inner battle with herself relative to the tensions between privilege, ethics, and representation.)

Recorder 1 and Recorder 2: "Me and my shadow: we are here"

RECORDER 1 In KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, they arrested Mr. Sule and put him in a prison cell. He had stolen water.

RECORDER 2 What happened?

RECORDER 1 Mr. Sule earned 100 rand a month selling water, but eventually he could not afford to pay the water bill. He also had to pay for food and shelter for his family and school fees for his children. His family needed water and he

could no longer stand by and watch his children beg for it. Mr. Sule made an illegal connection to the supply pipe. When it was discovered, the police came and put him in jail.

RECORDER 2 What does Mr. Sule have to do with you? What are you doing here in Ghana?

RECORDER 1 It's about water ... I need to know more ... I need to do ...

RECORDER 2 (*Mockingly*) Water ... I needed to know ... I need to do ... What is it you need to know ... to do?

RECORDER 1 There are big people with big money who want to own the water.

RECORDER 2 And???

RECORDER 1 AND they want to *sell* it!

RECORDER 2 And???

RECORDER 1 AND they want to manage it and make a *profit!*

RECORDER 2 Annnnnnd???

RECORDER 1 AND there will be people who can NOT afford to pay for it!

RECORDER 2 Ohhhhhhhh ... But, what has that got to do with you, nosey woman! Stay out of other people's business. PROFIT and PRIVATIZATION have always been the twins of progress! You know what they say: "God provided the water, but not the pipes."

RECORDER 1 There will be people who can NOT afford to pay for it!!

RECORDER 2 Read my lips (*Emphasizes each word.*) WATERBUSINESS—  
m-a-n-a-g-e-m-e-n-t // d-I-s-t-r-I-b-u-t-I-o-n // m-a-I-n-t-e-n-a-n-c-e // s-a-  
n-I-t-a-t-I-o-n. PIPES! PIPES! PIPES! Water is not free!

RECORDER 1 (*Preachy*) Water Can Not Be Owned! Water is a public good. The public will manage it, the public should profit from it, the public ...

RECORDER 2 (*She laughs.*) The public/Shmub-lic! ... Hah! (*As if reading a headline, then becomes very, very sarcastic.*) The public in the Developing World Economies, oh that public has been VERY successful, so *efficient*, so *honest* and SO concerned about the *public good* – Yes, yes, getting water to allllllll the people alllllll the time, concerned about alllllll its poor citizens, never an ounce of corruption or waste or just NOT knowing what the hell they're doing ... yes, *leave* it to the governments of these countries, after all they have done SO well (*Dramatic change in attitude*) ... done *soooo* well –

RECORDER 1 You don't understand. You haven't been paying attention to ... it is ... it is ... let me explain ... the problem is ...

RECORDER 2 The PROBLEM is the public sector has done so well as the water pipes break down everywhere, as the water collectors take money from the people and put that money in their *own* pockets, as the government water companies overcharge, mischarge, undercharge, or don't charge for water they mismanage, while all the while making a messy waste of natural resources. Some people around here haven't had water flowing from their pipes in weeks! Months!

RECORDER 1 You are not looking below the surface! You don't know what you're talking about. You don't know anything ... It is more complex, it's more complex ...

RECORDER 2 (*Mocking in a high voice*) “It’s more complex, it’s more complex ...” Maybe if the Big people come, with their Big plans, and their Big money, and their Big pipes, and their Big teams, and their Big, Big, Big, Big promises, maybe people in this country can get some water ... clean, fresh, EFFICIENT water

RECORDER 1 You don’t understand what is really going on. You are missing the point. You don’t understand.

RECORDER 2 Then make me understand! Help me understand! Tell me what I need to know and do! Tell me the TRUTH! You are here taking up space and getting in the way ... Tell me what is the truth and what needs to be done ...

RECORDER 1 (*Grasping for words and thinking hard*) The truth is ... The problem ... hm ... It is complex ...

RECORDER 2 (*Exasperated*) What is COMPLEX!

RECORDER 1 I’m learning ... It’s here, I’ve got to get to ... I’m here ... I will be here.

RECORDER 2 Learn what you came here to learn! Don’t give me slogans and platitudes! I am so tired of slogans and platitudes! Can you say something different and more? Recorder! There is no replacement for water! NO Replacement!

RECORDER 1 & RECORDER 2 There is more to know here ... I will be here ...

RECORDER 1 I will be here

RECORDER 2 I will be here ... we

RECORDER 1 We

RECORDER 2 We must.

RECORDER 1 & RECORDER 2 We must.

*(As the dialectic mounts, Recorder 1 tries to see Recorder 2, but cannot locate her. Recorder 1 struggles to see Recorder 2. Soon, they focus on each other. Recorder 1 becomes frustrated and angry; her voice grows louder and more intense. As the two women end their verbal battle, the actors rise one by one. Recorder 2 has the last word and the dance and the drum end.*

BLACKOUT. *Transition: picking back up with Mos Def’s “New World Water.”*)

## PART TWO: WATER BUSINESS

MR. BIG

*(Mr. Big is the platform upstage left – sitting with listeners. Poets are stage right. During Mr. Big’s presentation, the “THREE MYTHS OF PRIVATIZATION” powerpoint plays on both screens.)*

MR. BIG Good Evening. My Name is Mr. Big. Tonight I shall present for you: *THE THREE MYTHS of P-R-I-V-A-T-I-Z-A-T-I-O-N*. Let me introduce myself. My name is “humanity.” I am a human being. I believe that all human beings have the right to life, to liberty, and to *WATER* ... Water ... I love water. I think all God’s children should have water. And speaking of God I like him too. You see, God and I have a lot in common. We are both

*providers.* God provides the water but not the pipes. Then I step in as your Pipe-Provider: Great BIG Pipes with great BIG Water. Clean, safe, AFFORDABLE water. I believe that water is a human right. And because it is a human right, I believe in the sanctity, the efficiency, and the humanity of *ownership* and the private sector –

TRACY A. Mr. Big, oh Mr. Big: You mean “privatization”?

MR. BIG Well, yes. Of course, this is a presentation on *THE THREE MYTHS OF PRIVATIZATION!*

TRACY A. This provocation that is privatization. The public sector demands people before profit cause price is the pollution in these water wars. Water lords juxtaposed with water serfs. We must recover our desire to treat water with respect!

MR. BIG You are a problem.

TRACY A. Right side, cold water! Left side, hot!

*(The sentinel snaps her fingers and gives Tracy a disdainful stare. She fearfully and reluctantly sits down.)*

MR. BIG *(Gets himself back into “performance mode.”)* Privatization is a *complex* phenomenon. Water is a *complex* phenomenon. BUT! When we put them together – oh, it is oh so *easy* –

ASHLEY They say that one third of Africa's people live under scarce water conditions. They say that thirty liters of water a day is what you need to survive. And then they tell me that the average US citizen uses five hundred liters of water a day? What is wrong with my country I wonder? They say that sanitation is the key. They say that 80 percent of sickness comes from water. They say that in certain areas 80 percent of the pollution destroying water comes from untreated human wastes!

MR. BIG Of course it is terrible! terrible! terrible! This is why we must help those people, make life better for them. I know what is best for them.

ASHLEY But Mr. Big, oh, Mr. Big –

MR. BIG Too many questions.

*(Sentinel steps out and stares and Ashley, intimidated by her presence, sits back down.)*

MR. BIG I shall now recite the “The Three Myths of Privatization”: Myth Number One: “Profit Before People” RE-DICULOUS! We believe in EFFICIENCY! – Organized water delivery driven by the competitive forces of the market. In Privatization, Efficiency is not an *option* – it’s a *requirement*. When people can’t develop and manage their own water systems – we develop and manage for them! *Efficiency* – it makes everyone happy! And they will thank us for it!

Cherry Picking? Did I hear someone say Cherry Picking – giving to the rich who can pay, only to take from the poor who cannot – oh! Not nice AT All! Never!

SHANNON *(Very meekly)* But what about the shareholders! Don’t, don’t they de-demand a profit????

MR. BIG *(Barks back)* Are you being difficult, Young Lady?



SHANNON Oh, nononononononono!

MR. BIG I will not answer that on the grounds that it may intimidate me.

KERSTIN The fundamental issue is that the poor are not profitable. God provided the water, but not the pipes. Not to be confused with God, but that pyramid of power, those big rich countries, that WTO, that IMF, they swoop in with their pipes and their pumps and their technology and INSIST that THIS is the way to do it. Don't get in our way or we will mess you up! You want help? Here it is. Don't look a gift horse in the mouth my friend because this horse is sick and untrustworthy, but it's a horse nonetheless.

*(Sentinel steps forward ... Kerstin sits down.)*

MR. BIG Myth Number Two: Lack of Transparency: Hah! As if I had anything to hide! We have been accused of making private agreements with governments and politicians. We have been accused of not listening to the LOCAL people, not recognizing their own local water systems, or not including them in negotiations, OF NOT BEING DEMOCRATIC!!!

CHRISTINA G. Water, water everywhere, and not a drop to drink ... el agua es del pueblo, carajo! The water's of the people, dammit!!

*(Sentinel steps forward ... Cristina sits.)*

MR. BIG Myth Number Three: Conditionality. Number three is a terrible, terrible myth – we have been accused of attaching “strings” to international aid, to loans, to debt relief – they accuse us of such crass, such miserable, such deplorable methods of *forcibly* implementing water privatization. As if anyone *wouldn't* want to privatize in the first place. They say we demand water privatization in return for aid, debt relief, loans ... oh, the things we have to put up with ...

MELORA But wait, there is something wrong here. You are not telling the whole truth! There is more to ...

*(The others join Melora and speak in protest at Mr. Big's presentation. They are about to rise from their seats. The powerpoint presentation ends. The sentinel signals for Mr. Big to leave, and he runs off the stage. The sentinel stands on the platform and takes his place. The protestors freeze.)*

#### FUNKYBREAKDOWN/SPOKEN WORD

MARIE Welcome to the spoken word/FunkyBreakdown!

WATER BOY Water! Water! \$5 a bottle! \$5 a bottle for everyone!

ABRINA THIS IS NOT A POEM ABOUT WATER!

This is *not* about how water is a wondrous source of life

Or how without it we couldn't see, farm, drive, or let's face it survive

This is *not* about why you should care if a corporation owns your water supply

This is *not* about how once water effectively becomes a tradeable commodity

It is a short step to allowing its governance to be dictated by some foreign oddity

And it won't be regulated for the doctrine of common good

But by the regime of private property.

Which means if they find you sauntering through looking for a cool drink  
 To quench your thirst  
 They'll say dammit this ain't Sprite and it sure as hell ain't free  
 If you want to drink this water, you have to sell your soul to me  
 Of course you'll refuse and then they'll say you were trespassing  
 Either they'll call the proper authorities or they'll just shoot your ass in the name  
 of water harassment.

This poem is NOT to make you think about  
 How much water you wasted in the shower this morning  
 Or how while brushing your teeth you left the faucet running  
 I do NOT want to make you reflect  
 I want you to sit in your house and live your life as you have before  
 Feeling okay with the fact that you don't have to think about water wars  
 This is not about how some people will die because they don't have  
 Sanitation or money to fight for the water they need  
 All they've got is two feet  
 To walk and get the water that conveniently comes out of your sink  
 I'm not trying to tell you about all the problems with water  
 Because that means you'd have to do something like change  
 And that is not possible for me to ask you to do because this poem is not about  
 water

or for that matter rights!  
 Asking you to just think might make you uneasy and cause you to have to speak up  
 And I didn't write this poem for that  
 I wrote this poem just because  
 Because people like to hear sweet poems about relationships, or dreams, or love,  
 or ANYTHING

As long as you don't ask them to change  
 So what I understand about this poetry thing is  
 It's fashionable these days and it makes you smile  
 I know I'm supposed to make you feel good  
 Or you just came to hear me speak

But I'm gonna go against the grain and ask you to think.

WATER BOY Water! Water! \$500 a bottle! \$500 a bottle for everyone!

AMELIA I can walk, drive, swim, fly to the store  
 and buy bottles of purified water galore  
 to slurp as I wish and slosh and spit.  
 I'm not concerned that my waste inclination means  
 salination  
 dehydration  
 exploitation  
 discrimination  
 for those without clout in the great global war  
 privatized by lies, they remain poor.  
 When they fight for the right to double H plus O

I know that when the flow runs low  
 I will still have "Pure Water. Perfect Taste."  
 To squander, devour, deplete, and to waste.

WATER BOY Water! Water! \$10,000 a bottle! \$10,000 a bottle for everyone!

MARIE for dem we get basket, we go carry water  
 to take back your water  
 you must fully sacrifice  
 we stipulate,  
 asserting only the right  
 to separate  
 the self from sustaining  
 the world from maintaining  
 its dignity  
 give us your seeds  
 and we'll plant you poison to reap  
 give us your water and we'll pour you a drought to drink  
 for dem we get basket, we go carry water  
 the arsons of our water fire  
 building borderlessly  
 corrupt empires  
 isn't that anarchy?  
 bending the world to the point of breaking  
 while mindlessly shaking our heads at all the destruction  
 how did this happen?  
 we wonder  
 isn't that anarchy?  
 for dem we get basket, we go carry water  
 in order to justify the injustice  
 we thrust this mistrust  
 into empty palms thirsty murder in the perversion of our psalms  
 this deceitfulness in the sweet repeat  
 of profit's conceit  
 the sound defeat  
 of progress  
 it is time to tip the balance  
 to trade in our fearful silence  
 to rename our alliance  
 with people  
 and the power of truth

WATER BOY Water! Water! \$100,000 a bottle! \$100,000 a bottle for everyone!

PAUL Aid, fair Trade  
 Sustainability, and, of course, accountability,  
 Social justice (that's my favourite!),  
 Oh mighty liberal values, to you I do submit!  
 Do you sense the sarcasm in my voice?

Maybe just a bit?  
 Who wants a deal that isn't fair?  
 A handout when there's no food to spare?  
 A project where natural capital's spurned?  
 A government with accounts in ... Switzerland?  
 And social justice?  
 Raise your hand if you desire a society that's unjust ...  
 Good! I'm glad we've gained each other's trust.  
 You see, these values are self-evident,  
 Since the days of the Enlightenment,  
 Locke and Marx could both agree,  
 The integrity of society is a necessity!  
 And there's nothing wrong with these lofty thinkers' lofty thoughts and lofty  
 visions,  
 Except their loftiness,  
 It's high time we got to work, I think, and put them into practice!  
 In communities around the world,  
 We need to see the *We* working,  
 And that is the problem with privatization!  
 We have a W but no *We* in the WB!  
 Did I hear you ask, "What is the WB?"  
 Coz it ain't the channel with Smallville and Felicity!  
 Or did you say the "WC," as in the Water Closet?  
 It might as well be,  
 When the World Bank lock ups water in corporate deposits.  
 I-M-F-ing tired of the "I" in "IMF!"  
 It stands for individual, not international,  
 If services are served to a single transnational!  
 WATER BOY Water! Water! \$10,000,000 a bottle! \$10,000,000 a bottle for  
 everyone!  
 TRACY W. Dasani, Sapphire Hills, Poland Spring, Spring Mills, Mountain  
 Glacier, Mountain Valley, Crystal Geyser, Perrier, Aquafina, Aqua Fiji,  
 Appalachian, Alpine,  
 America! Our bottled water lines betray our privilege.  
 We buy evian-evi-expensive \$2, \$3, \$5 bottles thinkin' we gettin' shit from some  
 nymph in a natural spring somewhere. Somewhere, some nymph handing  
 out some natural life elixir.  
 No one wants to think, I mean, you all might not want to think that 25 percent  
 of those nymphs look a lot like your kitchen sink. We have flavored water,  
 sparkling water, vitamin water,  
 energy water, and designer water sold in  
 glass containers.  
 While America has top quality  
 drinking water at our finger tips  
 we buy plastic bottles to take our sips.

We buy plastic bottles to have our water  
 fresh our water clean our water pure our water  
 natural.

Our thirst for quote purity is our country's drive for quote purity  
 our flight from mental poverty because we feel  
 our privilege when we ignore our tapped water privilege  
 as we are so privileged when we drink our bottled water.

Now ... I want to make a statement about privilege.

Privilege is just another word for degree of separation, of remove.

We are so removed from want, from true want for the necessities  
 of life that we claim brand loyalty for the necessities of life.

We can claim brand loyalty to our source of survival like  
 we claim fidelity to a football team, that's why we are privileged.

Our privilege is as marketed as our bodies have become and  
 both slip most easily into civil invisibility ...

We are picky about our water. We ARE. I am.

I have a bottled water brand preference  
 and I WILL exercise my right to buy that brand.

That's privilege. This is privilege. But this is America.

What we must know is that our privilege has costs  
 and that corporations will take water from foreign lands  
 to feed our inclination toward brand filtration. To maintain our  
 disbelief in our own water quality and the healing powers of  
 purified labeling.

They will push the privatized privilege on foreign lands  
 until water itself seems like a privilege for those who can  
 afford to pay for it. Water? A Privilege?

WATER BOY Water! Water! \$500 billion a bottle! \$500 billion a bottle for everyone!

*(As Madeline speaks, her image is projected behind her from a live feed.)*

MADELINE What do I have to say for myself? I have something to say to *you* my  
 friend, with your dreadlocks and padlocks, chaining yourself to the doors of  
*my* conference room saying, "This is what democracy looks like?" Well. If *this*  
 is what democracy looks like, democracy is lying on the dirty ground with  
 dirty faces and dirty words and dirty clothes, that I'm *sure* were bought with  
 dirty money because you bought them in America, honey, and our dirt  
 pervades everything you touch, everything you buy, *especially* everything  
 you buy, because I'll give you a news flash, hippie – our money is *all* dirty,  
 according to your ideals.

*(As Sonny speaks, her image is projected behind her from a live feed.)*

SONNY Money is life

This world won't let people live without it

Capitalistic, unrealistic, imperialistic, won't-give-a-damn-when-they're-just-  
 another-statistic

This world commodifies health and prices well-being  
 Drams, shillings, rupiahs, pesos, Jamaican dollars, reals, bolivianos or marks  
 The equation is always the same  
 Money equals life because life equals water and water equals money  
 A simple deduction of the private sector's construction  
 When Kikuyu mothers in Nairobi can't afford to bathe their children in clean  
 water  
 When a little Javanese girl in Indonesia drinks from a polluted stream  
 When a mestizo family in Colombia goes without water for days because they  
 can't pay the tariff  
 When water is owned and pipes run dry, the first order of business is to replenish  
 the money supply

MADELINE Your democracy is drumming and shouting and the limp energy of a  
 crowd that celebrates smallness, as if any of you were really small to begin  
 with. The difference between you and me, my friends, is not that I have  
 power but that I *use* that power to get to the root of international problems.  
 While you are busy talking about the root of a single tree, holding your hands  
 around that tree saying kumbaya or fuck you depending on how close the  
 bulldozer is coming. And as you play ring around the rosie, I am working,  
 climbing, and controlling the entire forest.

SONNY Money is life  
 At least that's what they'd have us believe  
 This global economy, this privatized world auctioning off water to the highest  
 bidder, or the Third World country with the most resources to exploit  
 The Third World country with the largest export revenue-earning capacity  
 Or the Third World country most willing to sell its soul for a loan, the gift that  
 keeps on killing  
 Is privatizing life the solution to our world water problem?  
 When Bolivian muchachas protest in the streets of Cochabamba against corpo-  
 rate greed  
 The reports will say  
 Privatization was cancelled before starting  
 When Tanzanians are on their knees, facing Mecca, praying to Allah that they  
 will remember what drinking clean water feels like  
 The headlines will announce  
 Privatization is ongoing but with serious problems  
 When Jamaicans are telling the tourists that "e'ryting's irie, mon" when they  
 frolic in polluted water because the government can't afford for it not to be  
 The answer will be the same  
 Privatization has ended following poor performance.

MADELINE What do I do with this power, this money, this sometimes sinister  
 influence in the global system? I give, give, give and loan, loan, loan to the  
*Third World*. You bristle at that term, because that's what you do. And while  
 you're bristling, I'm taking thousands, millions, billions of dollars and

putting them into the lands of those Africans, Indians, Asians that need it. The entire income of these countries combined it wouldn't match the big guns that I carry. After all, heavy machinery is dangerous. So, we manage the arsenal, we use it on behalf of our little brothers and sisters. We use the big guns, firing away at poverty with:

Export regulations

Privatization

Trade liberalization and Globalization.

And we know it works because we know our theories. We *have* the instruction manual, and it says

Exactly what it's been saying for the past thirty years.

Privatize

Liberalize

Globalize

Has anything *changed*?

SONNY The policies are undemocratic, undiplomatic and motivated by greed

Profit over people, industry over the individual

When there are Albanians who hope that one day their government will cease their euphemistic, duplicitously propagandistic, *is-this-your-idea-of-humanistic* rhetoric about the "effluents" in their water and just tell them they won't have to drink their own shit anymore

Kurdish farmers in Yerevan who don't want to worry about DDT cocktails coursing through the roots of the vegetables they took pains to grow in contaminated water

Bulgarians who have more heavy metals in their water than water because industrial waste is a by-product of the industry that feeds the global economy

The Third World is given money to drink and money to thrive

As long as two plus two equals five

MADÉLINE We follow the recipe when *we* cook and that recipe doesn't change. A cake is a cake is a cake no matter where you are, and the ingredients say:

Privatize

Liberalize

Globalize

You, you don't know what kind of things you need. You yourself can't possibly figure out how to solve your own problems, with your nonexistent education, your dilapidated institutions, your traditions of failure. You can't be so damn picky every time we try to give you something.

Beggars can't be choosers, after all.

Sure, sometimes we give cake to a diabetic.

Sometimes we give cake to those of you who have that bizarre allergy to wheat.

Sometimes our cake goes to people who have no milk to wash it down.

Sometimes our cake goes to people who have cookies already and have no more room in their fridge.

SONNY An attempt to own water is an attempt to own people, labor, and resources through water

When miners in Rio de Janeiro know that the same mines they work ... make their water undrinkable

When Trinidadians flock to the Carnival, listening to soca, dancing the cha cha, salsa, rumba, merengue, eating samosa, paying homage to their African ancestors while celebrating the unity in diversity ... and they can't have a glass of clean water to quench their thirst

When activists in Manila can't think of enough ways to curse out their government in Tagalog and English combined that will most effectively get their point across that they *need* water

To cook

To bathe

To drink

To quench

To cool

To boil

To freeze

To enjoy

To live

MADELINE And every once in a while one of you people (*shift focus back to the hippies*) will whine or someone will yell at us, WHY WON'T YOU LISTEN? And I reply the same way that I always reply. You're either a beggar or a chooser. And if you have such a problem with it, get out of the street, get out of your hemp clothes and your teeshirts with defiant phrases and your classrooms where you discuss over and over again what's *wrong* with the international system. Stop throwing around your buzzwords and get out of your idea that *you* are going to change anything by being small. *Especially* you, who was born big, was born with privilege and money and the stamp *American* that won't come off no matter how hard you rub it or how many tattoos you put over it. You accomplish nothing by celebrating your smallness. And the only thing I have to say for myself is piece of advice for you. Become a chooser – maybe you'll be a better listener than me. Maybe you'll start taking specialized orders at *this* bakery. Maybe you'll rewrite the manual. Until you do, I'm afraid I can't help you.

SONNY No more water.

### PART THREE: WATER WARS

#### BEAT ONE: DON'T BLAME ME!

*(The speaking actors are at a cocktail party. Waiters with water are scattered around them. Recorder 1 and Recorder 2 are standing at a diagonal from each other. None of the actors are paying attention to the Recorders but the Recorders are curiously watching all of them. The actors stop and pause as each performs their lines – they maintain eye*



*contact with each other and speaking actors respond to each other with strong support. The non-speaking actors listen but do not move.)*

PERFORMER 1 I'm tired of hearing about how America and Europe are to blame for everything that goes wrong with the Third World!

PERFORMER 2 Those Third World countries murder and torture their own people, but they always blame us for their problems. They do terrible things remember Rwanda? ...

PERFORMER 3 What about the Congo and Uganda? They make soldiers out of their own children!

*(PERFORMER 1 gets drink.)*

PERFORMER 4 Why that Mugabe is ripping his country apart! I have many black friends and I know some African people too and they think the same way I do.

PERFORMER 1 And those Latin American countries are no different! They're all turning communists!

*(PERFORMER 2 gets drink. Everyone gasps in terror.)*

PERFORMER 3 They blame everything on the World Bank and the IMF. *(Allan gets drink.)* Well I tell you, if it weren't for the World Bank and the IMF trying to help these poor countries they would all be living in the Dark Ages ... well darker than they are now!

PERFORMER 1 *(Spans stage from Recorder 1 to Recorder 2 to PERFORMER 3 to original location downstage.)* I read in the *New York Times* just the other day how the World Bank gave 4 BILLION dollars to Chad to build a pipeline. Now, that poor little African country is bringing in hundreds of millions of dollars! They have oil money up the wazoo! So why are the poor in Chad still suffering? I will tell you why, because the money is going into the pockets of corrupt leaders! Because of bureaucratic mismanagement! They don't know what they're doing, AND, get this, the government passed a law saying instead of the money going to the poor, it should go to fight off a rebellion! Do you believe these people? So the World Bank said N.O. we will suspend all loans to you because the oil revenue is supposed to go to the poor Not corrupt, inefficient leaders!

PERFORMER 4 So now, the World Bank is the bad guy again, because it's putting "conditions" on loans to a "poor African Country." *(Mockingly)* I try and try, *(Speaking sincerely)* but I just don't understand why these people are so angry with the World Bank when all the Bank is trying to do is make things better.

PERFORMER 2 What I want to know is what are these African countries doing with all that oil money – Nigeria too – while their people starve!

PERFORMER 4 Well, I do consider myself a liberal. But, when some of us try to help these people we are called neocolonialist, but if we don't try to help, then we are ignoring the world's problems. Maybe we should just take care of ourselves and mind our own business.

PERFORMER 3 I'm tired of hearing about how people in rich countries use ten times more water than those in poor ones, SO WHAT! *(Gets drink from*

*Melora.*) We use the water that falls on us. If we didn't use it, it's not as if someone else will. We aren't depriving anyone else of their water ... why blame us because you don't have water!

PERFORMER 1 Yeah! Why are Third World countries always looking for developed nations to take care of them? Why don't they take care of themselves!

PERFORMER 4 (*To Performer 1, then gets drink from Melora.*) It's a population problem. The water shortage is only one of the problems caused by the real enemy and that is the population explosion! Instead of worrying about the IMF, the WTO, and the World Bank we all need to attack the population explosion and all the other problems will go away.

PERFORMER 3 (*First to Performer 1, then gets drink from Ashley.*) I understand the fear over privatization in these poor countries. I really do. BUT, people need clear water and sanitation. The private sector with their training, experience, and efficiency will guarantee that everyone will get the water they need – even if the corporation must replace the government. These governments aren't really working anyway.

PERFORMER 4 I feel terrible about world poverty and I pray for peace, but I just don't understand why they hate us.

(BLACKOUT – set stage for the water war stories.)

#### BEAT TWO: WATER WAR STORIES/INTERVIEWS

##### Maji-Maji story

(*Kindunda, a strong-willed sixty-five-year-old headman from Ifakara, is sitting center-stage, staring out at the Dar es Salaam skyline. Mkihu, Kindunda's inquisitive eight-year-old granddaughter, enters stage right carrying a large jug of water on her head. She places the jug on the floor in front of her grandfather.*)

KINDUNDA What took you so long? Is there no water left in Dar es Salaam?

MKIHU (*Bending down to drink*) I'm so thirsty, Grandpa.

KINDUNDA Not yet. First, the water must be boiled.

(*Mkihu relaxes on the floor. Kiwanga, Kindunda's fashionable fifteen-year-old grandson, bursts into the room from stage left. He is listening to a pop song on a walkman.*)

KIWANGA (*Singing*) Young plants need rain, businesses need investment. Our old industries are like dry crops and privatization brings the rain.

KINDUNDA What is all that noise?

KIWANGA It's the new song by Captain John. Do you want to listen, Grandpa?

KINDUNDA No.

KIWANGA I love the video. It's sponsored by the UK Department for International Development.

KINDUNDA Do not believe everything you see and hear, Kiwanga. The price of water has doubled since the British and German companies arrived in Tanzania.

(*Kiwanga sits down on the floor next to Mkihu.*)

MKIHU Grandpa, when will the taps be turned on again?

KINDUNDA I don't know.

MKIHU I'm tired of carrying water. Brother Kiwanga never has to carry the water.

KINDUNDA Come, MKIHU. Remember what we say in Tanzania: "One who bathes willingly with cold water doesn't feel the cold."

MKIHU I just want to know what happened to the water in the taps, Grandpa. Who controls the water?

KINDUNDA It is City Water, a foreign company, who controls the water pipes in Dar es Salaam. But it has not always been this way. There was a time when we Tanzanians controlled all of the water, and there was enough for everyone. But, of course, this was a time when foreigners controlled our land.

*(Pause. A soft drum beat begins.)*

KINDUNDA Magwira, my grandfather and your great-great grandfather, fought against the Germans and Arabs, who had forced us to pay taxes and grow cotton against our will. The rebellion was called the *Maji-Maji*, or water-water, because all the different peoples of Tanzania united through a sacred water rite. When the *hongo* priests distributed *Maji*, the magic water, they would say, "This medicine will change the Europeans' bullets into water." And so when we sprinkled the *Maji* on our bodies, we believed we were invincible. But better still, the *Maji* had brought us together. There was no tribalism in obeying the leaders. We were firmly united ...

KIWANGA What happened next, Grandpa? Did we win the war?

KINDUNDA I'm afraid not, my child. The Germans had powerful weapons.

*(The drums create a heavy, frenetic sound, comparable to machine-gun fire.)*

KINDUNDA Your great-great grandfather was with the Ngindo when they marched on the Germans at Mahenge. And he was with them when they were mown down in their thousands. When the warriors fled, they screamed, "The *Maji* is a lie! The *Maji* is a lie!" *(Pause)* But for my grandfather, Magwira, the *Maji* was not a lie. After all, the *Maji* had united our country. We had worked together to control our own land and our own resources.

MKIHU That was a good story, Grandpa. May we have some water now?

KINDUNDA Yes, but be careful. The water is still hot.

MKIHU *(Playfully sprinkling Kiwanga)* This water is our *Maji-Maji*.

KINDUNDA Yes, it will always be our water. And we must fight to keep it that way.

### Interview

RECORDER I People are suffering, but they are also resisting. Your organization works with social justice movements all over the world. But in your work, you have been very critical of International Financial Institutions, especially the WTO and trade policies.

CITIZEN I First, I know there are people in these organizations that are sincere: I have worked with many of them. They are trying to do the right thing. But,

too many of their policies have still failed, even with their recent changes to be more inclusive and more democratic. They are not bad people; they have bad philosophy on how the world should work.

RECORDER I What do you mean?

CITIZEN I Trade. Why do you think we make so much noise about trade? A rice farmer in Ghana still can't sell his rice because the imported American rice is so much cheaper. These are poor people so they buy the American rice. This puts the local farmer out of business. He can't sell his rice as cheap as the American rice dumped in his country, because he must buy seed, and a plow, and fertilizer for the land. The farmer works the land and then must travel miles and miles to local markets to try and sell his rice, but no one can buy it. They buy the American rice. What is the future for this farmer and his family? Western goods can still freely go into poor countries and poor people are forced to buy them because they are cheap, but how can poor countries pay the higher tariffs that are forced upon them to export their goods to Western countries? All this is still a reality for too many people in the world right now.

RECORDER I What can people of conscience do about it?

CITIZEN I Remember Seattle? I don't care what people say, it was not a failure. People came from all over the world to form a unified front against unfair trade. It created a ripple in the power structure. Now we've got to keep picking away till we make waves. We can do it again, but we must do it better and more often. Civil disobedience is not a cliché. When those guys have their big world meetings, you got to be there too! They can't just show up by themselves! And one more thing, well ... this may be a bit off the subject, but can you imagine what would happen if everyone made a real effort or just refused to buy products from the exploitation and blood of other people's pain and labor ... we might start with our coffee and end up with our diamonds.

### Cochabamba story

*(Marcela braids Claudia's hair as Claudia sings. Ana sleeps on the other side of the room. Ana begins talking in her sleep. She is having a terrible nightmare.)*

ANA No, no, ¡cómo lo puede hacer?! ... no es justo, it's not fair! ... no, we deserve our rights!! ... *(Alternates between yelling and crying.)* El agua es nuestra, carajo! The water is ours, dammit!

CLAUDIA *(Claudia goes over to Ana.)* ¡Despiértate! Wake up! *(Ana is yelling and wakes up shocked and disoriented until she realizes she has just cursed in front of her mother, covers her mouth, sheepishly.)* M'ija, you said the water protests were for a good cause, a fight for the common people, and instead you've begun to curse! What great habits these protests have taught you! Ana, I would like you to meet Señora Daza.

ANA *(Tries to regain composure.)* Mucho gusto. Nice to meet you.

MARCELA Likewise, corazón.

ANA Sorry, Mami y perdón, Señora. It is just a chant that we yell as we peacefully march down the street: El agua es nuestra, carajo! The water is ours dammit! Try it! (*Claudia gives her a look.*) If you don't like that, we also yell, El pueblo unido jamás será vencido! The people united will never be defeated! Do you prefer that?

MARCELA Ay, sí. You know for the first time it is the women, las mujeres, who are leading this protest! They realize the gringo corporation Bechtel has bought our water and is now making a profit from what we need to survive.

CLAUDIA (*Goes back to Marcela for her braiding.*) Yes, and I struggle to feed my five children every day of my life. When the gringos came, the water prices rose. How would you decide what is more important, an education, shoes on your feet, electricity, health care or basic food and water? See that pot of water? ... that is all the water we are allowed in ONE day, for EVERYTHING, cooking, cleaning, bathing, drinking, and even that is more than most people in this community have. I must wash our clothes at night so the neighbors do not get angry!

ANA (*Gets up and walks over to the women.*) They have purchased the rights to the water that falls from the sky. Then they will own the soil, then the air. Soon we will be unable to utter our own words. (*She lies down next to her mother.*) Mama, you know that beautiful lullaby you sang to me when I was a baby ...

(*Claudia begins to sing.*)

ANA (*Very emphatic*) Those corporations will privatize your song, control the copyright, and then charge YOU every time you sing it! Señora, it is illegal to gather falling rainwater. I see little children running in the streets with their mouths open to catch the raindrops and I say to them, "Chiquitos, close your mouths. You could be sued!"

(*The older women laugh. Ana does not.*)

MARCELA These young people these days are too smart for their own good ... I have not seen my son for two days. But I refuse to worry. I know he will come back to me and he will be fine. I ask myself ... where did that boy go? But I know he is somewhere off with his "comrades." He is a protestor too, like your daughter Ana. Oh, these young people think they can change the world!

ANA But Mrs. Daza, we CAN change the world and we WILL. The government is slaughtering its people! "Tending to our needs" with rifles and billy-clubs. We ask for justice; they give us bullets. Mama, there was a boy – he was protesting against the gringo water company – they killed him yesterday in the plaza. They shot him! Those people want to own the whole universe!

(*The two women panic.*)

CLAUDIA (*Jumps up, extremely upset.*) I don't want you out there anymore!

MARCELA Stop! Who was the boy! Tell me now! Who was the boy? Was his name ... Victor?

ANA (*Simultaneously says, while comprehending the situation.*) Victor Daza.

(*Claudia, very upset and angry, speaks in Spanish as she holds on to Ana. The lights fade.*)

## Interview

RECORDER 1 People are fighting and dying over water. Water is life, but where do these Water Wars come from? What is all this talk about privatization? and why is your organization waging its own war against it?

CITIZEN 2 Who has the right to drain water from the ground, the rivers, and the ponds, leaving local people thirsty and desperate for water? Who decides what river or what ground water belongs to what community of people? Who controls the water is at the bottom of the Water Wars. For every glass of Brazilian orange juice drink, twenty-two glasses of processing water and a thousand glasses of irrigation water are required.

CITIZEN 3 Those in favor of privatization have argued that the poor are willing to pay for good water but this argument misses the point. Most poor people cannot pay! We must be focused on affordability not willingness ... The foreign companies that may eventually manage our drinking water will not pump water to low-income areas, knowing that these people cannot afford to pay the kind of tariff that will give a private investor his huge profits ... the "investor" has no contractual obligation to supply water to the poor; on the other hand, the government, which has such an obligation, is not allowed under an IMF/WORLD BANK condition to subsidize the consumption of the poor.

CITIZEN 2 In poorer areas of Ghana shallow hand-dug wells have become important sources of drinking water. Some of these wells are situated near large open drains and some are very close to pit latrines, with a high possibility of leakage and seepage. The poor in the cities are not unaware of the health implications of drinking from shallow wells but, given the current tariff levels, they hardly have any choice. In the rural areas, especially in some parts of the Northern region, even among the few communities that have access to bore holes for their water supply many have gone back to the use of river-water ponds and shallow untreated hand-dug wells.

CITIZEN 3 Look, most of us in the anti-privatization movement are not totally against privatization. The local water sellers in the cities and rural areas are private. They bring water to people with no other access and if they charge fair prices for their labor, how can we be against that?

CITIZEN 2 We are not even against some corporations and businesses coming in as subcontractors to perform certain tasks – this has actually been successful in some areas – but don't manage the system and take control away from the public, because the people will eventually suffer.

## Haitian story

NADÈGE Dlo se lavi – water is life.

VIRGINIE The quest for water begins just after sunrise when the roosters crow in Cité Soleil, a sprawling slum of concrete-block hovels dotting the harbor of Port-au-Prince.

- NADÈGE The slum is deserted of cars, whole blocks have burned and fallen to rubble and I don't even flinch when machine-gun fire shatters the lazy heat of morning. Joining a steady stream of young girls – some *restaveks*
- VIRGINIE child slaves
- NADÈGE lugging empty antifreeze jugs, medical-waste containers, old paint cans and bright-colored buckets, we make our way through the ashen streets each morning to the *fountain dlo*
- VIRGINIE water fountain.
- NADÈGE But careful – children are run over by cars in the attempt to rush to the water.
- VIRGINIE Our mother does not like for me and my sister to wander around. Cité Soleil is not safe. But while she and Papa are at work at the factory, me and my sister want to do something. We know we need water. Our mother tells us about when it used to be her job to get water from the water pumps for our household.
- NADÈGE Fifty-eight people, mostly small children.
- VIRGINIE Workers used to be so kind to her. But then the gangs took over the pumps.
- NADÈGE Chimes – gangs – are constantly watching. Boys of twelve or thirteen stalk their precious territory, AK-47s ready to retaliate against any disruption.
- VIRGINIE And instead of a kind word, we get mean stares and threats from little boys with big guns.
- NADÈGE The gangs control the fountain – they make you pay for the public water.
- VIRGINIE Sometimes the different gangs fight over who lords the water pumps.
- NADÈGE The biggest public fountain in Cité Soleil is always changing hands – fighting to control the profit. It becomes violent, but that is the usual, that is the norm. And in a shantytown with tin walls and no clear battle-lines, even the living wounded often don't know who shot them.
- VIRGINIE One little girl died recently during their gunfire.
- NADÈGE *Sak Pase?*
- VIRGINIE We are tentative to approach.
- NADÈGE *Nap Boule.*
- VIRGINIE They grant us the priceless necessity.
- NADÈGE The rainfall in Haiti is more than enough to give us water, but there is no way to store it.
- VIRGINIE There is no way to dispose of the sewage. There is a terrible smell in Cité Soleil.
- NADÈGE And when it rains we cannot stop the mud from coming and blocking up the lakes.
- VIRGINIE Everything must be hung because of the flood.
- NADÈGE In the slums, people stand on their beds during the nights of rain as it swells the canals of sewage that run alongside our shanties. The mixture of rocks and mud and sewage floods the dirt floors by nearly a foot.
- VIRGINIE Babies cry and there is no sleep. Rats swim where they can and otherwise drown. Even after the water subsides, the mud remains and we

sink into it up to our knees as we make our way to the clean water the next day. It is so expensive to get water. Usually we only eat one meal a day if we are lucky. But you can't go that long without water. We must get more water than that.

NADÈGE Something has to improve because mama and papa worry the boys patrolling the streets with guns now use the UN peacekeepers for target practice – and gun wars erupt daily.

VIRGINIE Anmwe

NADÈGE help

VIRGINIE It's not up to us, but it's up to God to bring more water to this island.

NADÈGE God or the government.

VIRGINIE Anmwe.

NADÈGE Dlo se lavi.

VIRGINIE Dlo se lavi.

### Interview

RECORDER 2 What can people of conscience do about this situation?

CITIZEN 3 You so-called free countries are based on democratic principles, yet you don't know what your governments are doing. I mean what they are really doing and the influence they have on these corporations and International Financial Institutions that push this privatization issue.

CITIZEN 2 You need to find alternative sources of information beyond your own borders and learn about yourselves; you need to stop saying things are so bad and begin to worry your politicians – call them, write to them, picket their offices, sign petitions, let them know you don't like them, don't vote for them, and campaign against them.

CITIZEN 3 If you want to do something write a check *regularly* to civil society organizations and stakeholders in this struggle for economic justice and human rights – we all need your money to do our work. Better yet, get involved and join them. But the best thing you can do is to be informed and to teach – teach your husbands, your wives, your children, your parents ... It's those everyday forms of resistance that build and matter.

CITIZEN 2 And don't let people say ignorant things to you, correct them, teach them! You say you are going to do a performance? Then do it!

### Indian story

*(Sahana and Mylamma have been walking while carrying heavy water jugs for 5 km. They sway back and forth and look exhausted. Sahana sings weakly or hums.)*

MYLAMMA Please, Sahana, stop singing. *(Sahana stops, then starts again, softly and slowly.)* Please stop, Sahana. *(Sahana starts again, slowly, without even realizing it.)* Sahana, I told you to stop! Please! You know how to be quiet, I know you do!



SAHANA If I want to pass the time when I am walking for kilometers upon kilometers, it is my right to do that. If you want to make your face wrinkled with bitterness and make every step longer and heavier, you may do that too.

MYLAMMA Why are we walking, Sahana? Why do we walk and carry this heavy water, over and over again, up and down hills? It is not for exercise.

SAHANA No. It is not for exercise. It is because our village is without water. We do not have expensive pumps. We cannot reach the water that deep in the earth. We don't have the pumps to reach it.

MYLAMMA We bow. We bow to the powers of Coca-Cola, who has taken our water for their factories. Oh, those trucks, those Coca-Cola trucks.

SAHANA But there are good things, Mylamma. See the good things. We are the women of Plachimada village. The Adivasi women. We come together. We provide water for the village. Rajani and Pooja (*Gestures forward.*) walk ahead of us, proud to provide. We all walk at the same time, helping each other see that we are not alone in our good work.

MYLAMMA There are hundreds of bottles on those trucks ... so many liters. And we watch them every day, spitting gas and smoke into our faces. How can we be proud of our work when our faces are dark with soot, dark with the shadow of the passing trucks? Did you know that it takes nine liters of clean water to make just one liter of Coke? Nine liters! And the Coca-Cola truck speeds by with many many liters of Coca-Cola while we struggle with our small water jugs. Sahana, I am tired of this walking, everyday. Tired of my feet cracking in the dust! Are you not tired of your back bending against the weight of your jug? We must do something. And there is nothing, nothing we can do.

SAHANA You are right, we must do something, but I do not believe there is nothing we can do! I can never believe that.

MYLAMMA We are already losing the battle! Our fields no longer grow rice. More than 200 wells in our area are dry because of the factories. Our farmers are killing themselves over water. Killing themselves! We are the Adivasi women and our bodies are strong but they will break when even the little water we find is tainted, is dirty.

SAHANA I cannot listen to this anymore. You are very different now, from when we were girls.

MYLAMMA But what should we do? What can we do? Instead of standing up to Coca-Cola, we walk. We walk for many kilometers to fetch water. Instead of standing, we walk. Oh, we are on our feet, but as long as we walk, we are lower than we have ever been.

SAHANA (*Like an epiphany, she suddenly realizes and speaks slowly and thoughtfully.*) Oh, my friend, you are right. You are right. We must stop walking ... we must stop standing altogether. We can stop standing! We can *sit*. We can stop our walking and instead, we can sit. We WILL sit! We will sit here and we will watch our neighbors pass by us, and pass by us, until they finally join us. Their feet are tired too, and they need to sit! And we will sit here for as long as we must, as long as it will take for our sisters, daughters, and mothers to come together in hope and strength.

MYLAMMA Ach. You have finally gone crazy. What will sitting do? Go to the village and you will find people sitting all the time in their houses, and nobody notices.

SAHANA No. This is different. We will sit where we can be seen. (*Thinks for a moment.*) We will sit outside the Coca-Cola factory! And the government won't be able to ignore us. The chief minister and the panchayat council will respond to us! They will say, "The Coca-Cola company has no rights over what is under our ground. Coca-Cola cannot take our water." It's like you said, we must do something. We will stop Coca-Cola! They will stop taking from us at least until the monsoons come.

MYLAMMA (*A little convinced*) Yes, but the words of the panchayat are not as large as the factories of Coca-Cola, and they are not as powerful.

SAHANA Our people are powerful. I believe in our people. I believe in our women. Together, we are powerful.

MYLAMMA Do you really believe that? Do you really think that all we have to do is get together, to be a group and we are no longer so small?

SAHANA Yes – it is the way – the *only* way for us to be big. There are many of us – and our numbers are all we have. But we can use them. To sit.

MYLAMMA (*Slowly, reflexively*) Well. My feet need a break. I could sit. And rest a bit. (*She thinks for another moment and looks at Sahana.*) I can sit. I will sit.

SAHANA You must.

MYLAMMA *We* must. I am not quite as crazy as you, and I do not want to do this alone.

SAHANA You will not do this alone. *We* must keep crying. We must keep standing. We must keep sitting.

MYLAMMA (*Hopefully*) We will go to the village to tell the others? We will go?

SAHANA We will go. And sit.

MYLAMMA We will go. Together.

(*Lights down on Indian story, up on Professor Annan*)

### Interview

PROFESSOR ANNAH Ladies and Gentleman, you ask Why is Africa so poor? Africa has been a free source of raw material for Europe and America for centuries – their modern economy was built on the backs of African people and now the global economy prospers from that past history and the present state of economic arrangements. People don't want to hear about colonization or slavery – they are tired of it – even though those epochs of history stole Africa's Industrial Revolution and a third of its population. Even though those historical epochs stifled Africa's economic development and threatened its human development. People say that African Americans should be happy there was a trans-Atlantic slave trade or they would be living in the poverty and the backwardness of Africa – well if there weren't over four centuries of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and colonial rule would Africa suffer the backwardness and poverty that it does? You blame the victim for the victor's evils.

I don't believe my people are backward – can you recite our oral poetry, do they understand the complexity of our culture, the history of our political thought, and origins of our civilization and governance? We have a history of technology and science and political institutions before America was even born and before Europe achieved statehood. This is not Afrocentric romanticism, it is a documented fact of history. To say that Africa is a poor developing continent dependent on Western benevolence is like going into the theatre late – missing more than half the performance – and believing you know the whole show. Yes, many African countries are rich with oil, and many African countries are suffering from genocidal war, and many of them are plagued by corrupt leaders but do you know your history? What happened to Patrice Lumumba? What happened to Kwame Nkrumah? What happened to Amilcar Cabral? What led to their downfall? If the West has a history of bringing down our most progressive and democratic leaders, even murdering some of them, why can't they bring down the ones who are brutally corrupt? The history of Latin America is fraught with the West supporting brutal regimes, is that any different from Africa? No. We Africans must take responsibility for our bad leaders and our bad wars and our bad history of human rights, but do you not know that there are multitudes of us in the village, in the city, in the universities, in the union, and even in government trying to do just that – we are trying to take back our continent ... don't resist us by funding and propping up corruption for the benefit of oil companies, diamond investors, and corporate greed.

You must be informed. Seek information, travel to Africa – go beyond the boundaries of your own country – experience how others experience you. Ask yourself what is a democratic socialist agenda? I'm not talking about banal activism, I'm talking about changing structures of power – International Financial Institutions, yes, but to do that you have to envision a different nation, a different world. It starts with the search for information, then the search for the right language to speak so people will want to listen to you, then the search for more comrades, and more comrades and more comrades and more and more and more ...

#### Ghanaian story

AMA My name is Akosua. I live in Accra, Ghana. I had a son and his name was Kwame. He was four years old. He had the brightest smile and he loved to eat rice and chicken. He would say to me “Mama you eat your fufu and palm nut soup and I will eat my rice and chicken!” Oh, he could tell a story and make our hearts laugh. But my little Kwame was a trickster. He liked to play tricks on me. We had a game. He'd say, “Mama look over there; I see Anansi and he wants to play with me.” I'd say, “Kwame, I don't see nothing over there.” Kwame'd say, “Mama look, look, don't you see Anansi? He wants to play with me. He's behind the tree – go look mama, go look.” I'd go behind the

tree and then my Kwame would hide. I'd pretend I didn't know where he was. I'd say, "Oh what happened to my Kwame, Oh brother Kweku – Anansi, pleaaaaase bring my Kwame back to me. He is my whole world!" Kwame'd begin to laugh from his hiding place, but I pretended not to hear him. "Brother Kweku-Anansi, did you eat my Kwame?!!!" Kwame's laughter would grow louder, but I continued my search. "If I don't find my precious Kwame soon then Bro Kweku-Anansi, I must beat you with my stick!!" Then Kwame would come running from his hiding place and jump into my arms – "Mama I fooled you. You couldn't find me, you couldn't find me!" He'd jump down laughing and running in circles around me, "Mama couldn't find Kwame, Mama couldn't find Kwame" until he made himself dizzy with laughter falling to the ground. (*Pause*) It is the rainy season now. All of a sudden Kwame got very weak. He started vomiting and he couldn't stop. He lost all the fluids from his little body. The fever and the pain in his legs took away my Kwame's bright smile. As tears covered his face, with all the strength my small boy could gather he said "Mama ... Mama ... will you tell me a story before I sleep?" My whole world is gone. But the mothers, we are all here. Our pain makes us strong. Our love for our children makes us stronger. Cholera. It kills our children. It breeds in bad water. It breeds in the mix of water and waste. But we are the "Mother's Club" and the "Mother's Club" demands clean water for our children – we challenge the powerful with our words, our bodies, and our stories. We talk to our people, in the market, in the schools, in the mosques, and in the churches about Cholera. We have teach-ins in the village. We make plays and sing songs about protecting ourselves from Cholera. We are The Mother's Club and we have saved many, many children. We will win. Kojo watches me and he is laughing with Anansi behind the tree.

BEAT THREE: ME AND MY SHADOW: TRUTH

*(Recorder 1 and Recorder 2 go back and forth in a less contested dialogue than the one before. This time they are reaching for a greater sense of purpose through contemplation and self-reflection. During their conversation, a slideshow of fieldwork images plays on both screens.)*

RECORDER 1 Truth is elusive.

RECORDER 2 But it demands our attention.

RECORDER 1 It doesn't stay in one place or breathe inside one story.

RECORDER 2 But, it can. We've got to find those *one* places and those *one* stories. We've got to search. Truth demands our attention in the multitudes of its yearnings. We've got to fight for it. We are not alone.

RECORDER 1 Can we see and listen deeply, past the obtuse blindness of appearances and the paralyzing silence of too much noise?

RECORDER 2 Deep past the Lies reborn again and again by the greedy and the lazy.

- RECORDER 1 We will search for Truth in the multitudes of the *one* story.
- RECORDER 2 The one story that is always here and there and in the everywhere details of life lived on the hard, edged blade of truth's teeth.
- RECORDER 1 It will hurt, it always does. Because truth's blade cuts deep, deep at the skin and bone of what it implies.
- RECORDER 2 The implication.
- RECORDER 1 Yes. The implication that breaks your heart and demands the search for more truth. More truth. More.
- RECORDER 2 Do we feel our hearts breaking from the teeth?
- RECORDER 1 Sometimes. But more than breaking, we feel our hearts swelling as if they are about to burst open into flames.
- RECORDER 2 Burst from what?
- RECORDER 1 Burst from the fear and hope of finding the right question to spark the right story that will unleash an avalanche of truths.
- RECORDER 2 Bursting from the fear and hope of how we will carry these stories back, so they will not soften the teeth of truth or dull its blade.
- RECORDER 1 We are bursting from how we will listen and wrap words around the stories that we must carry back
- RECORDER 2 Back home
- RECORDER 1 Back here
- RECORDER 2 Back everywhere. The words we wrap around Truth's teeth will fly past us and carry themselves beyond our reach. We make Retold stories.
- RECORDER 1 Every Retold story becomes a traveling story. Retold far beyond the presence of our own body.
- RECORDER 2 Retold for truth's sake? to harden the teeth and sharpen the blade?
- RECORDER 1 Yes. Our hearts are bursting and not breaking from the weight of the search, the weight of the question, the implication, but most of all, most of all, from the weight of carrying these truths *truly*?
- RECORDER 2 Yes, beyond our reaches and beyond the starting point of the one true story?
- RECORDER 1 What gives us the right to search for true stories? How can we hang words upon them?
- RECORDER 2 We are not of this place. This is not our home.
- RECORDER 1 We live in the richest country in the world.
- RECORDER 2 That is a fact. What should we do about it?
- RECORDER 1 Use it like a blade on fire against its own flame.
- RECORDER 2 For Truth's sake?
- RECORDER 1 Yes, and for the sake of hearts that are on the verge of exploding.
- RECORDER 1 & RECORDER 2 Yes, and for the sake of hearts that are on the verge of exploding.

## Bibliography

- Agger, Ben. *Postponing the Postmodern: Sociological Practices, Selves, and Theories*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1992.
- Ahmed, Sarah. *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*. London: Routledge, 2000.
- Ake, Claude. *A Political Economy of Africa*. New York: Longman, 1981.
- Alcoff, Linda. "The Problem of Speaking for Others." *Cultural Critique*, (Winter 1991–92), 5–32.
- Alexander, Bryant Keith. *Performing Black Masculinity: Race, Culture, and Queer Identity*. New York: AltaMira Press, 2006.
- "Performance and Pedagogy" in Madison and Hamera (eds.).
- "Performance Ethnography: The Reenacting and Inciting of Culture" in Denzin and Lincoln (eds.).
- Althusser, Louis. *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster. London: New Left Books, 1969.
- Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster. London: New Left Books, 1970.
- Amenga-Etego, Rudolf. "National CAP (Coalition Against Privatisation) of Water" in *National Coalition Against the Privatisation of Water*. Ghana, National Coalition Against the Privatisation of Water, 2001.
- American Anthropological Association. *Code of Ethics of the American Anthropological Association*. June 1998, [www.aaanet.org/committees/ethics/ethcode.htm](http://www.aaanet.org/committees/ethics/ethcode.htm)
- American Anthropological Association. *Commission to Review the AAA Statement on Ethics Filial Report*. May 1995, [www.aaanet.org/committees/ethics/ethrpt.htm](http://www.aaanet.org/committees/ethics/ethrpt.htm)
- American Folklore Society. *AFS Position Statements: Human Subjects and Ethnographic Research*. (n.d.), [www.afsnet.org/aboutAFS/humansubjects.cfm/](http://www.afsnet.org/aboutAFS/humansubjects.cfm/)
- Amin, Samir. *Capitalism in the Age of Globalization*. London: Zed Books, 1997.
- Amnesty International, IANSA, and Oxfam. "Shattered Lives: The Case for Tough International Arms Control." *Control Arms*, 1999, [www.controlarms.org/en/documents and files/reports/english-reports/shattered-lives-report](http://www.controlarms.org/en/documents and files/reports/english-reports/shattered-lives-report)
- An-Na'im, Abdullahi Ahmed. "Human Rights" in *The Blackwell Companion to Sociology*, ed. Judith R. Blau. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001.
- Human Rights in Cross-Cultural Perspectives: A Quest for Consensus*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992.

- (ed.). *Cultural Transformation and Human Rights in Africa*. London: Zed Books, 2002.
- Anzaldúa, G. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Spinster/Aunt Lute, 1987.
- “La conciencia de la mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness” in Madison (ed.). Appiah, Kwame Anthony. “Grounding Human Rights” in Ignatieff.
- In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*. London: Methuen, 1992.
- Aquinas, Thomas. *The Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province. New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947.
- Ashby, Warren. *A Comprehensive History of Western Ethics*. New York: Prometheus Books, 1997.
- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Asiama, Elias Kwaku. *Oral History and Cultural Practices of the Buem People*. Ghana, 2003.
- Atchity, Kenneth. *A Writer's Time: A Guide to the Creative Process, from Vision through Revision*. New York: Norton, 1986.
- Austin, J. L. *How To Do Things with Words*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975.
- Bacon, Wallace A. *The Art of Interpretation*. New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1979.
- (ed.). *Festschrift for Isabel Crouch: Essays on the Theory, Practice, and Criticism of Performance*. Las Cruces: New Mexico State University Press, 1987.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, ed. Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.
- Balibar, Étienne. *Politics and the Other Scene*, trans. Christine Jones, James Swenson, and Chris Turner. London: Verso, 2002.
- Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard. London: Jonathan Cape, 1982.
- Bauman, Richard. *Verbal Art as Performance*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 1977.
- Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*, trans. and ed. H. M. Parshley. New York: Knopf, 1952.
- Berner, Baureen and James K. Galbraith. *Inequality and Industrial Change: A Global View*. Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- “The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination, and the Discourse of Colonialism” in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, eds. R. Ferguson *et al.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990.
- “Postcolonial Authority and Postmodern Guilt” in *Cultural Studies*, eds. Lawrence Grossberg *et al.* New York: Routledge, 1992.
- “The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha” in *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. J. Rutherford. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990.
- Black, Maggie. *The No-Nonsense Guide to Water*. Oxford: New Internationalist, 2004.

- Blau, Judith and Albert Moncada. *Human Rights: Beyond the Liberal Vision*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005.
- Boal, Agosto. *The Rainbow of Desire: The Boal Method of Theatre and Therapy*, trans. Adrian Jackson. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- The Theatre of the Oppressed*, trans. Charles A. McBride and Maria-Odilia Leal McBride. New York: Theatre Communication Group, 1979.
- Boas, Franz. *Anthropology and Modern Life*. New York: Norton, 1928.
- The Mind of a Primitive Man*. New York: Macmillan, 1931.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Acts of Resistance against the Tyranny of the Market*. New York: New Press, 1998.
- Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice. London: Routledge, 1986.
- Brecher, Jeremy, Tim Costello and Brendan Smith. *Globalization from Below: The Power of Solidarity*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000.
- Brecht, Bertolt. *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. John Willett. London: Eyre Methuen, 1974.
- Bruner, Edward M. "Experience and its Expressions" in *The Anthropology of Experience*, ed. V. Turner and Edward M. Bruner. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986.
- Brysk, Alison (ed.). *Globalization and Human Rights*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.
- Buergenthal, Thomas. "International Human Rights in an Historical Perspective" in *Human Rights: Concept and Standards*, ed. Janusz Symonides. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000.
- Busia, Abena P. A. "Performance, Transcription and the Languages of the Self: Interrogating Identity as a 'Post-colonial' Poet" in James and Busia (eds.).
- Butegwa, Florence. "Mediating Culture and Human Rights in Favor of Land Rights for Women in Africa" in Blau (ed.).
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" in *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, ed. Sue Ellen Case. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990.
- (ed.). *More Gender Trouble: Feminism Meets Queer Theory*, special issue of *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 6.2–3 (1994).
- Cabral, Amilcar. "National Liberation and Culture (Return to the Source)" in *African Philosophy: An Anthology*, ed. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze. London: Blackwell, 1998.
- Campbell, Tom. *Justice*. New York: St. Martin's, 2001.
- Carlson, Marvin. *Performance: A Critical Introduction*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Certeau, Michel de. *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Stephen Rendall. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.
- Chomsky, Noam. *Rogue States*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000.
- Coalition on the Women's Manifesto for Ghana. *The Women's Manifesto for Ghana*. Accra: Coalition on the Women's Manifesto for Ghana, 2004.



- Cohen-Cruz, Jan. *Local Acts: Community-Based Performance in the United States*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005.
- “The Problem Democracy is Supposed to Solve” in Cohen-Cruz (ed.). (ed.). *Radical Street Performance*. New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Conquergood, Dwight. “Communication as Performance: Dramaturgical Dimensions of Everyday Life” in *The Jensen Lectures: Contemporary Communication Studies*, ed. John I. Sisco. Tampa: University of South Florida Press, 1982.
- “Health Theatre in a Hmong Refugee Camp,” *The Drama Review*, 32 (1988), 174–208.
- “Lethal Theatre: Performance, Punishment, and the Death Penalty,” *Theatre Journal*, 54 (2002), 339–67.
- “Of Caravans and Carnivals: Performance Studies in Motion,” *The Drama Review*, 39.4 (1995), 137–41.
- “Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research,” *The Drama Review*, 46 (2002), 145–56.
- “Performing as a Moral Act: Ethical Dimensions of the Ethnography of Performance,” *Literature in Performance*, 5.2 (1985), 1–13.
- “Poetics, Play, Process, and Power: The Performative Turn in Anthropology,” *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 9 (1989), 82–88.
- “Rethinking Ethnography: Cultural Politics and Rhetorical Strategies,” *Communication Monographs*, 58 (1991), 179–94.
- “Rethinking Ethnography: Towards a Critical Cultural Politics” in Madison and Hamera (eds.).
- “Street Literacy” in *Handbook of Research on Teaching Literacy Through the Communicative and Visual Arts*, eds. James Flood, Shirley Brice Heath, and Diane Lapp. New York: Macmillan, 1997.
- Courville, Cindy. “Re-examining Patriarchy as a Mode of Production: The Case of Zimbabwe” in , James and Busia (eds.).
- Dailey, Sharon J. (ed). *The Future of Performance Studies: Visions and Revisions*. Annandale, VA: National Communication Association, 1998.
- Davies, Charlotte Aulle. *Reflexive Ethnography: A Guide to Researching Selves and Others*. London: Routledge, 1999.
- Davis, Tracy (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Performance Studies*. Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Davis, Tracy and Thomas Postlewait. *Theatricality*. Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi. London: Athlone Press, 1988.
- Denzin, Norman K. *Interpretive Ethnography: Ethnography Practices for the 21st Century*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997.
- Interpretative Interactionism*, 2nd edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2001.

- Performance Ethnography: Critical Pedagogy and the Politics of Culture*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003.
- and Yvonna S. Lincoln (eds). *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.
- Diamond, Elin (ed.). *Performance and Cultural Politics*. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- di Leonardo, Micaela. *Exotics at Home: Anthropologies, Others, American Modernity*. University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- “New Global and American Landscapes of Inequality” in *New Landscapes of Inequality: Neoliberalism and the Erosion of Democracy in America*, eds. Jane L. Collins, Micaela di Leonardo, and Brett Williams. Santa Fe, NM: School for Advanced Research Press, 2008.
- Dolan, Jill. *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1988.
- “Geographies of Learning: Theatre Studies, Performance, and the Performative,” *Theatre Journal*, 45 (1993), 417–41.
- “The Polemics and Potential of Theatre Studies and Performance” in Madison and Hamera (eds.).
- Donnelly, Jack. “Cultural Relativism and Universal Human Rights,” *Human Rights Quarterly*, 6 (1984), 400–19.
- Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. London; New York: Routledge, 1966.
- Durland, Steven. “Witnessing: The Guerilla Theatre of Greenpeace” in Cohen-Cruz (ed.).
- Ehrenberg, John. *Civil Society: The Critical History of an Idea*. New York: NYU Press, 1999.
- Emigh, John. “Performance Studies, Neuroscience, and the Limits of Culture” in Stucky and Wimmer (eds.).
- Emoto, Masaru. *The True Power of Water*. Hillsboro, OR: Beyond Words Publishing, 2005.
- Escobar, Arturo. *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton University Press, 1995.
- Estroff, Sue. “Whose Story Is It Anyway? Authority, Voice, and Responsibility in Narratives of Chronic Illness” in *Chronic Illness: From Experience to Policy*, eds. S. Kay Toombs, David Barnard, and Ronald A. Carson. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.
- Fabian, Johannes. *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.
- Falk, Richard A. *Human Rights Horizons: The Pursuit of Justice in a Globalizing World*. New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove, 1963.
- Ferris, Margaret H. “When the Well Runs Dry: An Exploration of Water Conservation and Blue Theology,” *Water: Resources & Discourses*, special

- issue of *Reconstruction*, eds. L. Scott-Coe and W. Scott Howard, 6.3 (2006), <http://reconstruction.eserver.org/063/Ferris.shtml>
- Fine, Elizabeth C. *The Folklore Text: From Performance to Print*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.
- Fine, Gary Allen. "Ten Lies of Ethnography: Moral Dilemmas of Field Research," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 22.3 (1993), 267–94.
- Fiske, John. *Understanding Popular Culture*. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith. London: Tavistock, 1972.
- Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan. London: Penguin, 1991.
- The History of Sexuality*, vol. I: *The Will to Knowledge*, trans. Robert Hurley. London: Penguin, 1998.
- Freeman, Mark. *Re-Writing the Self: History, Memory and Narrative*. London: Routledge, 1993.
- Fusco, Coco. *English is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas*. New York: New Press, 1997.
- "The Other History of Intercultural Performance" in *The Routledge Reader in Politics and Performance*, eds. Lizbeth Goodman and Jane de Gay. London: Routledge, 2000.
- Galbraith, James K. "A Perfect Crime: Global Inequality," *Daedalus: Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 131 (2002), 11–25.
- Galbraith, John Kenneth. *Economics and the Arts*. London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1983.
- Gaonkar, Dilip Parameshwar. "Alternative Modernities," *Public Culture*, 11 (1999), 1–18.
- Gates, Henry Louis. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism*. Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. London: Fontana, 1993.
- Giddens, Anthony. *Beyond Left and Right: The Future of Radical Politics*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994.
- Giddings, Paula. *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*. New York: Bantam Books, 1984.
- Glassie, Henry. *Passing the Time in Ballymenone: Culture and History of an Ulster Community*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982.
- Gómez-Peña, Guillermo. *The New World Border: Prophecies, Poems, Loqueras for the End of the Century*. San Francisco: City Lights, 1996.
- Goodall, H. L. *Writing the New Ethnography*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira, 2000.
- Grossberg, Lawrence. "Bringin' It All Back Home – Pedagogy and Cultural Studies" in *Between Borders: Pedagogy and the Politics of Cultural Studies*, eds. Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Caught in the Crossfire: Kids, Politics, and America's Future*. London: Paradigm Publishers, 2005.
- Grotowski, Jerzy. *Towards a Poor Theatre*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968.
- Guattari, Félix. *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, trans. Paul Bains and Julian Pefanis. Sydney: Power Publications, 1995.

- Gunner, Liz. *Politics and Performance: Theatre, Poetry, and Song in Southern Africa*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1994.
- Gutmann, Amy. "Introduction" in Ignatieff.
- Gyekye, Kwame. *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Habermas, Jürgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992.
- The Theory of Communicative Action: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, vol. II, trans. Thomas McCarthy. Boston: Beacon, 1987.
- Hall, David and Emanuele Lobina. *Pipe Dreams: The Failure of the Private Sector to Invest in Water Services in Developing Countries*. London: World Development Movement, 2006.
- Hall, Stuart. "New Ethnicities" in *Black Film/British Cinema*, ed. Kobena Mercer, BFI/ICA Documents 7. London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1988.
- "What is this 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?" in *Black Popular Culture*, ed. Gina Dent. Seattle: Bay Press, 1992.
- (ed.). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London; Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997.
- Hallie, Philip P. *The Paradox of Cruelty*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1969.
- Hamera, Judith. *Dancing Communities: Performance, Difference, and Connection in the Global City*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- "Performance Studies: Pedagogy and Bodies in/as the Classroom" in Stucky and Wimmer (eds.).
- Hansen, Karen T. "Fashioning: Zambian Moments," *Journal of Material Culture*, 8 (2003), 301–09.
- Haraway, Donna. *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science*. London: Routledge, 1989.
- Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. *Empire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000.
- Holland, Ann-Christin Sjolander. *The Water Business: Corporations Versus People*. London: Zed Books, 2005.
- hooks, bell. *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*. Boston: South End Press, 1989.
- Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*. Boston: South End Press, 1990.
- Hord, Fred Lee and Jonathan Scott Lee, (eds.). *I Am Because We Are: Readings in Black Philosophy*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995.
- Horne, Donald. *The Great Museum: The Re-presentation of History*. London: Pluto Press, 1984.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *Theory of Parody*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2000.
- Ignatieff, Michael. *Human Rights as Politics and Idolatry*, ed. Amy Gutmann. Princeton University Press, 2001.
- Jackson, Adrian. "Introduction" in Agosto Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*. New York: Routledge, 1992.

- Jackson, Angela. "Shango Diaspora: An African American Myth of Motherhood and Love" in Madison (ed.).
- Jackson, John L., Jr. *Harlemworld: Doing Race and Class in Contemporary Black America*. University of Chicago Press, 2001.
- Jackson, Shannon. "Ethnography and the Audition: Performance as Ideological Critique," *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 13 (1992), 21–43.  
 "Genealogies of Performance Studies" in Madison and Hamera, (eds.).  
*Professing Performance: Theatre in the Academy from Philology to Performativity*. Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- James, Stanlie M. and Abena P.A. Busia (eds.). *Theorizing Black Feminisms: The Visionary Pragmatism of Black Women*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Johnson, Patrick. *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Blackness*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003.  
*Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South: An Oral History*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008.
- Jones, Joni. "The Self as Other: Creating the Role of Joni the Ethnographer for Broken Circles," *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 16 (1998), 131–45.
- Keeling, K. *The Witch's Flight*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007.
- Kershaw, Baz. "Cross-Cultural Performance in a Globalised World," *Theatre Forum*, 8 (1996), 67–72.  
*The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention*. London: Routledge, 1992.  
*The Radical in Performance: Between Brecht and Baudrillard*. London: Routledge, 1999.
- Kinchloe, Joe L., and Peter McLaren. "Rethinking Critical Theory and Qualitative Research" in Denzin and Lincoln (eds.).
- Kincaid, Jamaica. *A Small Place*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000.
- Klein, Naomi. "Let's Make Enemies," *The Nation*, April 19, 2004.
- Kleinau, Marion. "Notes on the 'Encounter': Toward A Model of Performance Process" in Bacon (ed.).
- Langellier, Kristen. "Personal Narratives: Perspectives on Theory and Research," *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 9.4 (1989), 243–76.  
 and Eric E. Peterson. *Storytelling in Daily Life: Performing Narrative*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004.
- Lauren, Paul Gorden. *The Evolution of International Human Rights: Visions Seen*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *La Présence et l'absence*. Paris: Casterman, 1980.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1998.  
*Time and the Other*, trans. Richard A. Cohen. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1987.
- Linton, Jamie. "The Social Nature of Natural Resources: The Case of Water," *Water: Resources & Discourses*, special issue of *Reconstruction*, eds. L. Scott-Coe and W. Scott Howard, 6.3 (2006), <http://reconstruction.eserver.org/063/linton.shtml>

- Locke, Alain. "The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts" in *The New Negro*, ed. Alain Locke. New York: Athenaeum, 1925.
- Long, Beverly. "Performance as Doing: A Reconsideration of Evaluating Performed Literature" in Bacon (ed.).
- Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984.
- Lugones, Maria. "Playfulness, 'World'-Travelling, and Loving Perception" in Madison (ed.).
- Madison, D. Soyini. *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005.
- "My Desire is for the Poor to Speak Well of Me" in Pollock (ed.).
- "Performance, Personal Narratives, and the Politics of Possibility" in Dailey (ed.).
- "Staging Fieldwork/Performing Human Rights" in Madison and Hamera (eds.).
- "That Was My Occupation: Oral Narrative, Performance, and Black Feminist Thought," *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 13.3 (1993), 212–32.
- (ed.). *The Woman that I am: Literature and Culture of Contemporary Women of Color*. New York: St. Martin's, 1994.
- and Judith Hamera (eds.). *The Sage Handbook of Performance Studies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006.
- Manuh, Takiyaa. "Doing Gender Work in Ghana" in *Africa After Gender?* eds. Catherine M. Cole, Takiyaa Manuh, and Stephan F. Miescher. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007.
- Marable, Manning. *Speaking Truth to Power*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996.
- Marx, Karl. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, 3 vols, ed. Friedrich Engels, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1954.
- Mazur, Jay. "Labor's New Internationalism," *Foreign Affairs*, 79 (2000), 79–93.
- McConachie, Bruce. "Approaching the 'Structure of Feeling' in Grassroots Theater" in *Performing Democracy: International Perspectives on Urban Community-Based Performance*, eds. Susan C. Haedicke and Tobin Nellhaus. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Humanism and Terror: An Essay on the Communist Problem*, trans. John O'Neill. Boston: Beacon, 1969.
- Miller, William Ian. *The Anatomy of Disgust*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997.
- Minh-ha, Trinh T. *Woman, Native, Other*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989.
- Mohanty, Chandra T. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse" in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984.
- Moran, D. *Introduction to Phenomenology*. London: Routledge, 2000.
- Morrison, T. "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation" in Madison (ed.).

- Muñoz, José Estaban. "Stages: Queers, Punks, and the Utopian Performative" in Madison and Hamera (eds.).
- Myerhoff, Barbara. "Life History Among the Elderly: Performance, Visibility, and Re-membling" in *A Crack in the Mirror: Reflexive Perspectives in Anthropology*, ed. Jay Ruby. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982.
- National Reconciliation Commission of Ghana. *The National Reconciliation Commission of Ghana Report*. Accra: National Reconciliation Commission of Ghana, 2003.
- Nfah-Abbenyi, Juliana Makuchi. *Gender in African Women's Writing: Identity, Sexuality, and Difference*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997.
- Nkrumah, Kwame. *African Philosophy*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998.
- Dark Days in Ghana*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1968.
- Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*. New York: International Publishers, 1966.
- The Struggle Continues*. London: Panaf Books, 1968.
- Noblit, George W., Susana Y. Flores, and Enrique G. Murillo, Jr. (eds.). *Postcritical Ethnography: Reinscribing Critique*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton, 2004.
- Oliver, Kelly. *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.
- Orend, Brian. *Human Rights: Concept and Context*. Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2002.
- Orentlicher, Diane F. "Relativism and Religion" in Ignatieff.
- Pangalangan, R. C. "Sweatshops and International Labor Standards" in Brysk (ed.).
- Patraka, Vivian M. "Spectacles of Suffering" in Diamond (ed.).
- Perry, Michael. *The Idea of Human Rights: Four Inquiries*. New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Pineau, Elyse Lamm. "Performance Studies Across the Curriculum: Problems, Possibilities, and Projections" in Dailey (ed.).
- "Re-casting Rehearsal: Making a Case for Production as Research," *Journal of the Illinois Speech and Theatre Association*, 46 (1995), 43–52.
- "Teaching is Performance: Reconceptualizing a Problematic Metaphor," *American Educational Research Journal*, 31.1 (1994), 3–25.
- Pogge, Thomas. *Freedom from Poverty as a Human Right: Who Owes What to the Very Poor?* Oxford University Press, 2007.
- "Human Rights and Human Responsibilities" in *Global Justice and Transnational Politics: Essays on the Moral and Political Challenges of Globalization*, eds. Pablo De Greiff and Ciaran Cronin. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002.
- Pollock, Della. "Making History Go" in *Exceptional Spaces: Essays in Performance and History*, ed. Della Pollock. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.
- Telling Bodies Performing Birth: Everyday Narratives of Childbirth*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.

- “Telling the Told: Performing ‘Like a Family.’” *Oral History Review*, 18.2 (1990), 1–36.
- (ed.). *Remembering: Oral History Performance*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Probyn, Elspeth. *Outside Belonging*. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1971.
- Reinelt, Janelle. *Crucibles of Crisis: Performing Social Change*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996.
- and Joseph R. Roach (eds.). *Critical Theory and Performance*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992.
- Renteln, Alison Dundes. *International Human Rights: Universalism Versus Relativism*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1990.
- Roach, Joseph. *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.
- Robbins, Bruce. *Feeling Global: Internationalism in Distress*. New York: NYU Press, 1999.
- Robertson, Geoffrey. *Crimes Against Humanity*. New York: New Press, 1999.
- Said, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Knopf, 1993.
- The World, The Text, and The Critic*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983.
- Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Schechner, Richard. *Between Theatre and Anthropology*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985.
- Performance Studies: An Introduction*. London: Routledge, 2002.
- Performance Theory*, rev. ed. New York; London: Routledge, 1998.
- “What is Performance Studies Anyway?” in *The Ends of Performance*, eds. Peggy Phelan and Jill Lane. New York: NYU Press, 1988.
- Scott, James. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.
- Scott, Joan W. “Experience” in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, eds. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Sen, Amartya. *On Ethics and Economics*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987.
- Shiva, Vandana. *Water Wars: Privatization, Pollution, and Profit*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2002.
- Shivji, Issa G. *The Concept of Human Rights in Africa*. London: Codesria, 1989.
- Shome, Raka. “Space Matters: The Power and Practice of Space,” *Communication Theory*, 13.1 (1991), 39–56.
- Shove, Elizabeth. *Comfort, Cleanliness and Convenience*. Oxford: Berg, 2003.
- Smith, Adam. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, eds. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976.
- Smith, Anna Marie. *Laclau and Mouffe: The Radical Democratic Imaginary*. New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Smith, Anna Deavere. *Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights, Brooklyn, and Other Identities*. New York: Doubleday, 1993.



- Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*. New York: Doubleday, 1994.
- Smith, Keri-Iyall. "Transformations: The State and Indigenous Movements". Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2002.
- Soja, Edward W. *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988.
- Spry, Tami. "A Performative-I Copresence: Embodying the Ethnographic Turn in Performance and the Performative Turn in Ethnography," *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 26.4 (2006), 339–46.
- Stiglitz, Joseph E. *Globalization and its Discontents*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2003.
- Strine, Mary S. "Critical Theory and 'Organic' Intellectuals: Reframing the Work of Cultural Critique," *Communication Monographs*, 58 (1991), 195–201.
- and Beverly Long and Mary Frances Hopkins. "Research in Interpretation and Performance Studies" in *Speech Communication: Essays to Commemorate the Seventy-fifth Anniversary of the Speech Communication Association*, eds. Gerald Phillips and Julia Wood. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990.
- Stucky, Nathan and Cynthia Wimmer (eds.). *Teaching Performance Studies*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002.
- Taussig, Michael. *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Taylor, Diana. *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's "Dirty War."* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997.
- Tedlock, Dennis. "On the Translation of Style in Oral Narrative," *Journal of American Folklore*, 84 (1971), 114–33.
- The Spoken Word and the Work of Interpretation*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983.
- Thomas, Jim. *Doing Critical Ethnography*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1993.
- Tocqueville, Alexis de. "Some Observations on the Drama Amongst Democratic Nations," trans. Henry Reeve, in *The Theory of the Modern Stage*, ed. Eric Bentley. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968.
- Torres, Rodolfo D., Louis F. Miron, and Jonathan Xavier Inda. *Race, Identity, and Citizenship: A Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1999.
- Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen: Marginality in an Out-of-the-Way Place*. Princeton University Press, 1993.
- Turner, Victor. *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974.
- From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*. New York: Performing Arts, 1982.
- and Edith Turner. "Performing Ethnography," *The Drama Review*, 26 (1982), 33–50.

- United Nations. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. December 10, 1948, [www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/](http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/)
- United Nations Development Programme. *Human Development Report 2001*. New York: United Nations Development Programme 2001.
- Van Maanen, John. *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*. University of Chicago Press, 1988.
- Visweswaran, Kamala. *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.
- Walker, Alice. *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1974.
- Warren, John T. *Performing Purity: Whiteness, Pedagogy, and the Reconstruction of Power*. New York: P. Lang, 2003.
- West, Cornel. *The Ethical Dimension of Marxist Thought*. New York: Monthly Review, 1991.
- Williams, Patricia. *The Alchemy of Race and Rights: Diary of a Law Professor*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991.
- Worthen, William. "Disciplines of the Text, Sites of Performance," *The Drama Review*, 39 (1995), 13–28.
- Zarrilli, Phillip B. (ed.). *Acting (Re)Considered*. London: Routledge, 1995.
- Zizek, Slavoj. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso, 1989.

## Index

- abruni 121, 161, 192  
Abu-Jamal, Mumia 160  
Abu-Lughod, Janet L. 205  
activism 159 *see also* Ghana Socialist Forum,  
    performance analytic, performance  
    ethnography, social justice  
    civil disobedience 186  
    design 103  
    engaged action 166  
    everyday acts of resistance 98  
    everyday forms of resistance 159  
    globalization from below 103, 166  
    incite 49  
    local activism 44  
    mobility 43  
    participatory democracy 166, 169  
    participatory evolution of a particular  
        alternative 214  
    praxis 49, 102  
    purposeful action 164  
    purposeful design 103  
    radical act 18  
    radical act of translation 124  
    radical democracy 5  
    radical intervention 46  
    radical performance 2, 23, 59  
        agitprop performance 103  
        changing script 10, 165  
        inversion 103  
        sitting down as striking performance 183  
            (sitting down 185)  
        surprise 102  
    symbolic acts of resistance 118  
    top-to-bottom approach 205  
Adam, Al-Hassan 98–102  
Adam, Iliasu 116–17  
Adam, Nasser 2–5  
Adedome 74, 86, 87, 88, 89  
Adinkra symbol 86, 87, 88  
affect 8–10  
affective energy 5, 6  
    space of affect 126  
aim to provoke 49, 139, 145  
Ake, Claude 72  
Alexander, Bryant 12, 117  
alterity 43, 60, 83, 86  
American Indian Movement 185  
An-Na'im, Abdullahi Ahmed 178  
Anyidoho, Kofi 60–64  
Ark Foundation 174, 216  
Asiama, Elias Kwaku 203  
Aubrey, Lisa 158, 161, 166  
Awusu, Kwesi 121  
Baldwin, James 170, 172  
Bhabha, Homi K. 49, 82  
black Diaspora 112, 163  
black Diaspora citizenship 157, 158  
Black Humanity Development Research  
    Center 68  
Black, Maggie 109–10  
Blau, Judith 182, 183, 185  
body as conduit of being 117  
    as materiality 117  
    body intrudes 185  
    body out of place 185  
    body protesting 185  
    body-to-body engagement 46, 137  
    corporeality and signification 212  
    embodied epistemology 2, 7, 13  
    embodiment 6, 7  
    performatives of feeling–sensing  
        bodies 118  
    site of knowing 117  
Brecht, Bertolt 12–14  
Cabral, Amílcar 118–19  
Christian agenda 39  
    chauvinism 39, 64  
    missionary movement 39  
Civic Response 98  
Civil Rights 185  
Cochran, David Carroll 183, 185  
coevalness 25, 137

- Cohen-Cruz, Jan 165, 201, 214  
 active culture 215  
 communal context 215  
 hyphenation 215  
 reciprocity 215  
 colonial legacy 47, 71, 72  
 colonial epoch 71  
 neocolonialism 21  
 postcolonial theory 21  
 Commission on Human Rights and  
 Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) 56  
 Conquergood, Dwight 1, 25, 47, 48, 153  
 conscience-ization 204  
 Convention People's Party (CPP) 4  
 Cooper, Anna Julia 162  
 Cortes, Ernesto J., Jr 166, 168  
 critical considerations 41, 42, 43  
 evaluation 43, 44, 45
- Dagbani 3, 99  
 Denzin, Norman 12, 26  
 Derridean metaphysics 50  
 Diallo, Amadou 28, 159, 160, 165  
 di Leonardo, Micaela 19, 23  
 disgust 154  
 dirt 153  
 economic and political condition as  
 dirt 154  
 Domestic Violence Bill 166, 172, 189  
 durbars 196, 197, 198  
 Dwamena-Aboagye, Angela 172, 174,  
 181–83
- Emoto, Masaru 115  
 epiphenomenon of representation 50  
 Escobar, Arturo 70–71, 111  
 ethics 10–18  
 ethical ground 50  
 ethical responsibility 11  
 ethics and advocacy 11, 13 *see also* human rights,  
 performance ethnography  
 ethnographic inquiry 1  
 small story 118, 119 *see also* performance  
 ethnography  
*Eve's Bayou* 172  
 Ewe 47, 61
- female genital mutilation 120–21  
 Ferris, Margaret H. 112  
 Fiashidi 63–85  
 Fine, Elizabeth 166, 169  
 food security 182
- Gandhi, Mahatma 183, 185  
 Gaonkar, Dilip 40, 43
- Gender Violence Survivors Support Network  
 (GVSSN) 216  
 Ghana Criminal Code 170, 172  
 Ghana Socialist Forum 7  
 Ghana Water Company (GWC) 108, 122  
 Glassie, Henry 48  
 gospel of efficiency 111  
 Grossberg, Lawrence 40  
 guinea worm 105, 136  
 dracunculus medinensis 105  
 guinea worm infection 105  
 Gutmann, Amy 182  
 Gyekye, Kwame 41, 43, 71
- Hamera, Judith 10  
 Hansen, Karen T. 195  
*Hidden Message of Water* 115  
 human rights 25, 34  
 activist approach 178  
 advocacy 158  
 advocacy and ethics 2, 10–18  
 advocates 11  
 civil and political rights 182  
 collective public action 186  
 collective rights and individual rights 182, 183  
 cross-cultural dialogue 178  
 cross-cultural universals 178  
 human rights advocate 182  
 human rights and social justice 1–27  
 indigenous human rights activists 73  
 internal cultural discourse 178  
 local rights 1  
 negative right 182  
 negative rights versus positive rights 182  
 positive or subsistence rights 182  
 positive right 182  
 relativism 176  
 socio-economic rights 182  
 universal human rights 175, 176  
 universalism versus relativism debate  
 177, 178  
 weak cultural relativism 178
- ideology of phallocentrism 70  
 Ignatieff, Michael 177, 183  
 imaginary 49  
*Insight, The* 99  
 Institute for Policy Alternatives 122  
 International Needs Ghana (ING) 36, 51–54  
 International Needs Vocational Training Center  
 86–91  
 intersubjectivity 10, 166, 167, 168  
 intimate habitation 24, 25, 27  
 intimate conversation 48  
*Is It a Human Being or a Girl?* 14, 28, 158, 165

- Jackson, Angela 112  
 Jones, Joni 161
- Kershaw, Baz 19, 166, 167  
 Klikor 62, 67–83  
 Kotodama as spirit of words 115  
 Kotoko International Airport 157  
 Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology 107
- Lefebvre, Henri 82–85  
 Liberation Ceremony 37–60  
   Flaxxoror 57  
   libation 55  
   sacred and secular mandates 59  
 lie meters 101–03  
 Linton, Jamie 111  
 local and transnational structures 2 *see also*  
   political economy  
   developing world economies 149  
   economic globalization 2  
   international financial institutions 97  
   international loans 108  
   International Monetary Fund (IMF) 100  
   local world 66  
   World Bank 98, 101, 110  
   World Health Organization 119  
   World Social Forum 102, 194  
   World Water Council in Kyoto 99, 100, 101
- Makola Market 201, 202  
   Makola market women 202, 215  
 Marley, Bob 100  
 Massiasta, Dale 68, 93  
 Mbang-ba, Suhuyini 99, 102  
 Mensah, Wisdom 44, 45  
 micro-credit schemes 88  
 micro-enterprise development 89  
 modernity 34, 39, 40  
   alternative modernities 39, 43  
   alternative realities 43  
   hybrid modernities 43  
   natural transmission 41  
 Morrison, Toni 13  
 Muñoz, José Esteban 49, 212  
 Muntu as power of words 115
- National Democratic Committee (NDC) 201  
 National Patriotic Party (NPP) 201  
 neoliberalism 18–23, 109  
   neocons 109  
   neoconservatism 19, 20  
   neoliberal agenda 109  
   neoliberal forces 158  
   neoliberal global economy 10  
   neoliberal ideology 19  
   neoliberalism 111  
   neoliberal policies 109  
   neoliberal political economy 23  
   neoliberal tradition 183  
 Network for Women's Rights (NETRIGHT) 216  
 Nkrumah, Kwame 3  
 Northern Ghana 3, 97, 119
- Oliver, Kelly 5, 11  
   bearing witness 10  
   response, response-ability, responsibility 11  
   response-ability 10  
 oral history 27, 157  
   oral history performance 168–71  
   poetic transcription 169  
   poetic verse 157, 166, 167, 168  
   verbal artistry 157  
 Oxfam International 121  
 Oxford Street 200
- patriarchal relations 71  
 performance analytic 2 *see also* activism,  
   performance ethnography  
   agitprop performance 103  
   disturbance 44  
   emergence 5  
   emergent performance 2–10  
   flow 6  
   postcolonial theory 21  
   spontaneous *communitas* 166  
   symbol-making practices 50  
   theatricality 8  
 performance ethnography 12, 23, 124, 126  
   affectionate attention 51  
   bottom-up approach 205  
   community-based performance 201–16  
   co-performative witnesses 25  
   co-performer 86  
   cultural performance 12  
   deep involvement 6  
   deep particularities 60  
   deep paying attention 50  
   dialectic theatre 151  
   dialogic performance 47, 48, 49  
   dialogic performative 47  
   effective dialogue 50  
   modes of performance 34  
   necessary reflexivity 13  
   Other's gaze 163  
   Other-than 82  
   paying attention 50  
   performance community 111  
   performances of possibilities 158  
   performative 49

- performative intervention 166  
 performative politics 50  
 performative witnessing 24, 25, 27  
 performativities 42  
 positionality 1  
 positive naivete 207  
 self-reflection 43  
 speech acts 49  
 symbolic acts 5  
 transnational performance 2  
 utopia 212
- Perry, Michael 177  
 Pimpong, Reverend Walter 36–90  
 Pineau, Elyse Lamm 7  
 political economy 2, 70, 71, 72, 73, 103, 108, 118  
   African patriarchal mode of production 72  
   colonial capitalist 71  
   commodity production 71  
   corporate capital 110  
   corporate monopolies 109  
   corporate privatization 97  
   economic justice 97, 159  
   free market policies 147  
   free trade 109  
   global capitalism 73  
   global South 106  
   local commodity production 72  
   monopoly colonial capitalism 72  
   political and economic development 71  
   political economy of water 27, 109, 111  
   pre-capitalist 71  
   profit-driven tariffification 110  
   structural adjustment programs 110  
   tariff 110  
 politics of emotion 212  
 politics of performance 166 *see also* activism, performance analytic, performance ethnography  
 Pollock, Della 1, 168  
 Pratt, Kwesi 7, 8, 9  
 Private Newspaper Publishers Association of Ghana (PRINPAG) 7  
 privatization 97, 101, 108, 133  
   anti-privatization activists 100  
   myths of privatization 141–43  
   privatization ideology 103  
   privatization of utilities 108  
 Probyn, Elspeth 161  
 public 6, 157  
   private and public ceremony 58  
   public discourse 2, 6  
   public event 59  
   public performance 6  
 punctum 49  
 radical 18 *see also* activism, Ghana Socialist Forum, performance analytic, performance ethnography, socialist, social justice  
 Regenerative Health and Nutrition Program 216  
 Reinelt, Janelle 166  
 resource identity 111
- Sam, Bernice 192  
 Sankofa 40, 58, 66  
 Savelugu 97, 118, 119, 121  
 Savelugu Water Board 122  
 sense of being present 124–27, 128–31, 138, 139  
 Schechner, Richard 1  
 Scott, James 159  
 Serageldin, Ismail 97  
*Shango Diaspora* 112  
 Shiva, Vandana 124  
 simulation 138  
 Sisters' Keepers 186, 187  
 social justice 1–27, 100, 102  
   comrades 44  
   democratic discourse 159  
   imperialist forces 64  
   socialist 7, 8  
   social movements 99  
   social processes 49  
   subaltern 11, 103  
 Soja, Edward W. 83  
 street performance 27, 157, 165–68  
   street performance as radical performance 165  
   Teaser 192–200  
   Teaser as street performance 195
- tactics 2, 36, 102  
   Pimpong's rhetorical tactic 59, 65  
   subversive tactics 1  
   tactical and emergent performance 2–10  
   tactical performance 1, 2, 5, 7  
 Tamale 116, 119  
 Taylor, Diana 159  
 Theatre for Development (TFD) 73, 79, 201–16  
 Third space 81, 82  
   discursive space 158  
 Tongu 13, 62, 74, 79  
 tradition 38–85  
   breakaway shrines 62  
   modern-day slavery 34  
   sexual bondage 35, 36  
   sexual servitude 34  
   shrine owners 46, 51  
   shrine priest 34, 37, 46  
   traditional Ghanaian religion 36  
   traditional law 35, 63  
   traditional religion 40, 59, 64, 65

- tradition (cont.)  
     traditional religious practice 63, 65  
     tradition versus modernity 41  
 Trokosi 34–91  
 Trokosi/Fiashidi 59–85  
 Trokosi/Troxovi 55–82  
     reparation 82  
     slaves 36, 51  
     Trokosi practice 62  
     Trokosis as wives of the gods 36  
     Troxovi shrine 38  
 Tugbui Addo VIII 73, 77, 78  
 Turner, Victor 12  
  
 UNICEF 211  
 University of Ghana 61  
 Volta region 45, 46, 51, 62, 86  
 Volta River 37  
  
 Walker, Alice 158  
 water activism 98  
     blue theology 112  
     boreholes 116, 117  
     community water rite 135  
     harvest water 107  
     loving water 113  
     polemics of water justice 113  
     spirituality of water 113  
     water as mythic 113  
     water as resource 117  
     water democracy 27, 111  
     water democracy advocates 97  
     water distribution 122  
     *Water is Life* 121  
     water justice 29, 111  
     WaterMother 112  
     *Water Rites*, performance of 97, 110–18, 127–31,  
         133–35, 141–46, 149–51  
 Women in Law and Development in Africa  
     (WILDAF) 187, 192, 216  
*Women's Manifesto for Ghana* 38, 47, 71,  
     188–92, 216  
     Discourse on Women's Manifesto  
         190–92  
     issues 188  
     themes 189