The King of Drinks

Schnapps Gin from Modernity to Tradition

Dmitri van den Bersselaar

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By

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Cover Front Henkes prokotional calender, 1994 (detail)
Collection Jenevermuseum Schiedam
Cover Back Poster for 'Capstan' brand schnapps, 1994 (detail)
Collection Jenevermuseum Schiedam

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: FOREIGN IMPORTS, LOCAL MEANINGS

Throughout the southern parts of Ghana and Nigeria, fading billboards still advertise schnapps gin imported from the Netherlands. Somewhat marginalized in the midst of an abundance of colourful billboards that advertise beer, soft drinks, mobile phones, religion, and beauty products as keys to the modern, international world, the schnapps gin adverts are different.[1] Both the illustration and the slogan on these billboards are meant to evoke African tradition and a link to the traditional status of chiefs and elders. In Nigeria, a familiar catchphrase advertises 'The Drink Preferred by Elders'. In Ghana, one particular brand is the 'King of Schnapps', and some of its billboards announce, 'When Tradition Calls, It's Henkes Schnapps' (see Figure 1.1). West African consumers generally agree with this representation of imported gin as central to traditional African ritual and to the authority of those who claim the sanction of custom. In many communities, schnapps is an essential ingredient of marriage and burial customs. Chiefs and elders use it to pour libation and demand it from claimants and defendants when they decide cases. It is also proper custom throughout coastal West Africa to bring a bottle of schnapps and present it as a gift when visiting an elder or a chief. I learnt of this latter aspect during my first research visit to Nigeria in 1994, when I was still a research student and on a limited budget. The need to acquire the proper brand, imported from Holland and hence expensive, came as an unpleasant surprise. I was nevertheless intrigued—how could this custom be explained?

I have to declare a personal interest in the subject: I was born in Schiedam, a small industrial town which is generally understood to be the home of the Dutch gin industry. The distillery of one of West Africa's leading brands was literally next door to my primary school, and the peculiar yeast smell it periodically sent through our classrooms

[1] Isidore S. Obot and Akan J. Ibanga, 'Selling booze: alcohol marketing in Nigeria', *The Globe*, New Series 2.2 (2002) http://www.ias.org.uk/publications/theglobe/02issue2/globe0202_p6.html.

1.1 Billboard advertising Henkes Schnapps. Ghana, around 1970

1.2 Billboard advertising a Christian religious event. Benin City, Nigeria, 2006

has become part of my childhood memories. At the time, the discovery that this product from my hometown was held in such high esteem in Africa seemed to point towards unexpected connections between my own history and those of my Nigerian informants, which I could not explain out of recent histories of migration and globalisation. Both in the Netherlands and in West Africa, Dutch gin is marketed as belonging to ancient local tradition. Yet, while in the Netherlands it is at least possible to claim that the product is locally made and invented (albeit with ingredients from as far away as Indonesia),[2] part of the significance of schnapps in West Africa is its foreign origin. Nevertheless, as Igor Kopytoff noted, 'what is significant about the adoption of alien objects—as of alien ideas—is not the fact that they are adopted, but the way they are culturally redefined and put to use.'[3]

Upon completion of the research project that had first taken me to Nigeria, I began to explore the history of Dutch gin to find an explanation for the special status of schnapps gin in West Africa.[4] This has resulted in the present book, which uses a focus on the trajectory of commoditisation of gin to investigate how imported goods acquire specific local meanings. While a wide literature exists on commoditisation, only one published paper discusses the changing history of Dutch gin in West Africa: Emmanuel Akyeampong's book chapter 'Ahenfo Nsa (the "Drink of Kings")', which deals with Ghana specifically.[5] In the paper, Akyeampong identifies a shift in the appreciation of Dutch gin from social drinking to a use restricted to the ritual sphere;[6] the narrative of my book is largely driven by my attempts to understand and explain this shift. The paper also points out a research area in

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[2] Hans van der Sloot, *Het Echte Schiedamse Jeneverboek* (Ter Aar: Uitgeverij Van Lindonk 1987), 16–21.

[3] Igor Kopytoff, 'The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process' in: Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things. Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1986), 64–91; there 67.

[4] My PhD research was on the role of ideas about languages and culture in Igbo ethnogenesis (see Dmitri van den Bersselaar, 'The language of Igbo ethnic nationalism', *Language Problems and Language Planning* 24.2 (2000), 123–47). I started the gin project in 1999, and conducted the bulk of the research between 2000 and 2004.

[5] Emmanuel Akyeampong, 'Ahenfo Nsa (the "Drink of Kings"). Dutch schnapps and ritual in Ghanaian history', in: Ineke van Kessel, ed., *Merchants, Missionaries and Migrants: 300 Years of Dutch-Ghanaian Relations* (Amsterdam: KIT Publishers 2002), 50–9.

[6] Akyeampong had made this point previously in his work on the social history of alcohol in Ghana, which is discussed in more detail below. See: Emmanuel Akyeampong, *Drink, Power, and Cultural Change. A Social History of Alcohol in Ghana, c. 1800 to Recent Times* (Portsmouth, NH and London 1996).

need of exploration, included in the present book, namely the possible impact of marketing and advertising on African consumers' changing appreciation of Dutch gin.[7] This is especially relevant in terms of gin's trajectory towards 'tradition'. In his study of consumption in Sri Lanka, Steven Kemper observed that advertising constitutes a primary conduit through which Western modernity enters a society, whereby it functions as a site where modernity is domesticated by being translated into a vocabulary that makes sense to local consumers.[8] However, advertising constituted only one among many factors in the commoditisation of gin in West Africa. This book therefore discusses a number of strands alongside each other. The first is that of the material history of production, marketing, availability, and pricing. Another strand is that of the history of ideologies of consumption. These include the West African ritual uses of liquids and the colonial ideology of appropriate consumption, as well as West African consumerism and local modernities. The history of advertising runs alongside these threads, and combines the producers' marketing strategies with the various local West African and international ideologies of consumption (see Figures 1.4 and 1.5). Advertising is itself part of another strand explored, that of the relationship between producers in Europe and the West African market. The different threads of the narrative are tied together by the agency of West African consumers: local consumers, not foreign advertisers, produced the cultural significance of gin.

The history of Dutch gin consumption has gone through five stages. Gin was probably first exported to West Africa towards the end of the eighteenth century,[9] as part of a much bigger and older trade that included a wide range of alcoholic drinks, but also cloth, guns and gunpowder, tobacco, ironware, and so on. West Africa has a long tradition of producing low-alcoholic drinks such as palm wine through fermentation, but it did not have distilled alcohol before the start of the trade with Europe in the fifteenth century. This trade soon escalated into the transatlantic slave trade, and throughout the history of that trade,

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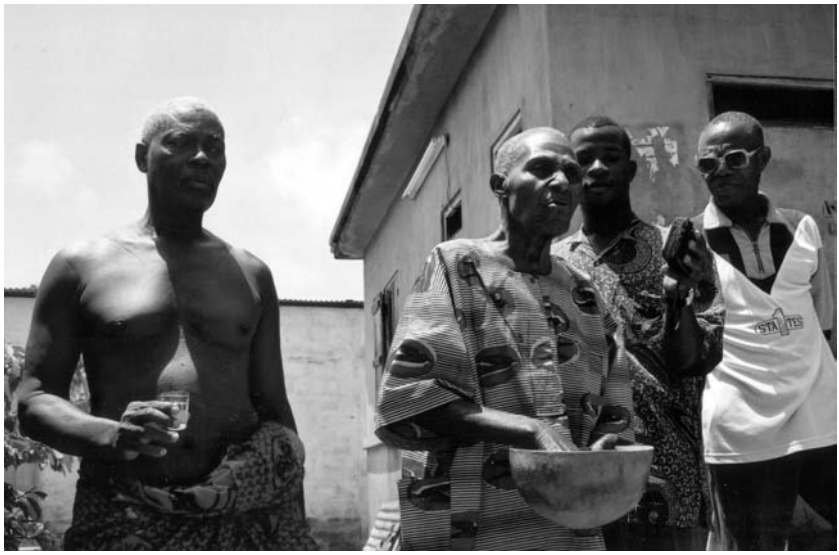
[7] Akyeampong, 'Ahenfo Nsa (the "Drink of Kings")', 51.

[8] Steven Kemper, *Buying and Believing: Sri Lankan Advertising and Consumers in a Transnational World* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press 2001), 3.

[9] This is a guess, based on the history of the gin industry in the Netherlands, and examining lists of goods exported for a mention of gin. Alpern gives 1767 as the date for the earliest explicit reference to gin (Stanley B. Alpern, 'What Africans got for their slaves: a master list of European trade goods', *History in Africa* 22 (1995), 5–43; there 25). See also chapter two below.



1.3 Pouring of libation. Anloga, Ghana, 2000

1.4 Advert for Henkes Star Brand schnapps used in Ghana, around 1950

1.5 Advert for Melchers' range of distilled liquors, late 1940s

distilled liquors were part of the parcel of goods against which enslaved Africans were exchanged. These spirits, especially rum and brandy, were also very central to the rituals of the trade, as slaving captains would entertain their African trading partners with drink, and would often 'dash' rum upon completion of a transaction—rituals that continued after the slave trade came to an end.[10] The share of spirits as part of total imports from Europe and the Americas increased further after the formal abolition of the slave trade. This increase greatly worried Christian missionaries in West Africa and campaigners for temperance in Britain, who feared that even before the evil of the slave trade had been completely stamped out, Africans were becoming victims of the evils of the spirit trade.

During most of the nineteenth century, the spirit trade was dominated by American rum. However, the second half of the century saw an enormous increase in the trade in gin imported from the Netherlands and Germany, and by the end of the century gin imports had overtaken rum imports nearly everywhere along the coast of West Africa. This resulted in the second stage, during which Gin imports peaked. This stage lasted from the 1880s until World War I, with a brief revival during the mid-1920s. During these first two phases, imported gin appears to have had many uses, including consumption through social or individual drinking; ritual uses during weddings, festivals, funerals, and so on; as currency; and as an item for conspicuous display. Imported gin, along with other imported spirits, and as part a broader popularity of European style and fashion, was used by coastal West African consumers to conspicuously display their knowledge of the 'foreign'. As such gin was—among other things—a 'modernising good', used

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[10] *Barbot on Guinea. The Writings of Jean Barbot on West Africa 1678–1712*, edited by Paul Hair, Adam Jones and Robin Law, 2 Vols. (London: The Hakluyt Society 1992), Vol. 2; 396, 441, 559–60, 678–91; Harvey M. Feinberg, *Africans and Europeans in West Africa: Elminans and Dutchmen on the Gold Coast During the Eighteenth Century*. Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 79.7 (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society 1989), 60–4; David Eltis and Lawrence C. Jennings, 'Trade between Western Africa and the Atlantic World in the pre-colonial era', *American Historical Review* 93.4 (1988), 936–59; there 948–52; Daryll Forde, *Efik Traders of Old Calabar* (London: International African Institute, 1956), 54–5; Martin Lynn, *Commerce and Economic Change in West Africa: the Palm Oil Trade in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge and New York, NY: Cambridge University Press 1997); George E. Brooks, Jr., *Yankee Traders, Old Coasters and African Middlemen. A History of American Legitimate Trade with West Africa in the Nineteenth Century* (Boston, MA: Boston University Press 1970). See also: José Curto, *Enslaving Spirits. The Portuguese-Brazilian Alcohol Trade at Luanda and its Hinterland, c. 1550–1830* (Leiden and Boston: Brill 2004).

by social elites to show their connection to the Atlantic economy, their understanding of sophisticated, international style, and their commitment to progress.[11]

The third phase stretches from the 1920s to decolonisation in the 1950s and 1960s. This period witnessed a decline of gin imports. Factors behind this decline include colonial governments' attempts to limit the consumption of distilled liquor through high duties and import restrictions, and the economic downturn of the late 1920s and 1930s that made imported gin prohibitively expensive to most African consumers. The recession coincided with the rapid rise of—initially illicit—local distillation, the products of which could be purchased much more cheaply. Imports suffered further from the disruption caused by World War II. During this stage, the uses of Dutch gin became more restricted to the ritual sphere, as colonial currencies were replacing its use as money, and illicit gin and bottled beers were becoming more and more popular for social drinking. Meanwhile, Dutch gin was almost continually the subject of local West African debates. Within the colonial ideology of appropriate consumption, this import hardly counted as a 'civilising good' and its availability to colonial subjects was therefore seen to be problematic. Local African leaders similarly discussed Dutch gin as potentially problematic in relation to colonial governments, in the context of local political conflicts, and in relation to the distillation of illicit liquor.

The fourth period lasted from decolonisation until the late 1980s. During this phase Dutch schnapps, while imported in much smaller quantities than before, and no longer popular for social drinking, gained in importance as the drink connected to rituals, an essential element of local African traditions. Schnapps gin also became integrated in the rituals of independent West African states as an emblem of traditional religion alongside Christian and Muslim prayers. A fifth phase appears to have begun in the late 1980s when the ritual use of gin started to be attacked by the rising movement of born-again Christianity. At the moment it is still unclear whether the born-again challenge will succeed in reducing the importance of gin for African ritual and as symbol of the status of chiefs and elders.

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[11] Arnold J. Bauer, *Goods, Power, History. Latin America's Material Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001), 162–4.

How can we explain this trajectory? How did gin transform from a product, the consumption of which showed access to the modern, international world, to a good that signifies traditional, local culture? Such a transformation is of course not unique to Dutch gin in West Africa. Elsewhere, too, imported products have become emblems of local or national culture. We can think of English tea, or tulips from Holland. There is a difference, though: when tea was first introduced in Britain, it was expensive and its use restricted to special occasions. When tulip bulbs first came to the Netherlands from Turkey and local cultivation started, they were very expensive and started a speculative craze amongst the very wealthy. Over time, both tea and tulips became available for ordinary mass consumption and they have become 'normal' commodities. This seems to be the usual trajectory for new goods to follow.[12] Yet, Hollands gin went the other way in West Africa. Compared to the situation around 1900, instead of becoming more of a consumer good, more widely available, and used in a broader set of circumstances, schnapps gin has become less widely consumed, and its use is now mainly restricted to the ritual sphere, while in the process it acquired a higher status. These differences in how imported goods are localised, illustrate the importance of analysing the process through which a commodity that arrives in a place signifying modernity and access to the global world, can become a signifier of local, traditional culture. This is the contribution which this study of schnapps gin makes to the new and expanding field of study concerned with the history of consumption and commoditisation in Africa. I will return to this body of literature, and how it has informed the present book. However, before I can effectively do this, I first need to explore the impact that nineteenth and twentieth century debates on the importation of liquor have had on the development of the historiography on gin in West Africa.

The impact of contemporary debates on the literature

From the 1880s until the 1930s, the gin trade with Africa was hotly debated in Europe as well as in African missionary and colonial govern-

[12] Peter N. Stearns, *Consumerism in World History. The Global Transformation of Desire* (London and New York: Routledge 2001), 60; Arjun Appadurai, 'Introduction: commodities and the politics of value' in: Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things. Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1986), 3–63; there 25–7; Kopytoff, 'The cultural biography of things', 74.

ment circles, and no research on imported liquor in West Africa can ignore these contemporary debates. In these debates the concerns of a number of British nineteenth-century social movements met, including that of temperance societies, evangelical missions, and the anti-slavery lobby. British industrialists added their economic interests to this mix of social concerns, suggesting that Africans should spend their money on British-manufactured goods rather than on drinks that were predominantly imported from Holland, Germany and the Americas.[13]

A moral concern about the ethics of the trade with Africa first emerged when a vocal anti-slave trade movement developed in Britain during the eighteenth century. Britain's formal abolition of the slave trade in 1807 signalled the moral victory of the anti-slave trade movement. However, it did not result in an effective end to the trade. Different countries prohibited slave trading by their citizens at different times, and it was not until the 1820s that the slave trade had become illegal for all Europeans and Americans involved. More importantly, once declared illegal, slave trading proved almost impossible to stop. The continuation of the trade by Spaniards, Portuguese and Africans, covertly assisted by British and American merchants, inspired continued campaigning by the anti-slave trade movement.[14] As a result, the movement began to shift its attention away from slave traders based in Britain, focusing instead on the African continent itself. It found that the British government's naval campaign off the coast of West Africa (intercepting ships suspected of carrying slaves), did not deal with the source of slaves in the African hinterland. Therefore, the anti-slavery movement encouraged Christian missions and 'legitimate' trade, the first to bring moral uplift into Africa, and the second to generate sources of wealth as alternatives to the slave trade.[15]

A 'legitimate trade' in agricultural produce such as palm oil became morally desirable as part of the attempts to end continuing slavery in

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[13] A. Olorunfemi, 'The liquor traffic dilemma in British West Africa: the Southern Nigerian example, 1895–1918', *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 17.2 (1984), 229–41.

[14] David Eltis, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (New York: Oxford University Press 1987); see also Robin Law, 'Introduction' in: Robin Law, ed., *From Slave Trade to 'Legitimate' Commerce. The Commercial Transition in Nineteenth-Century West Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1995); Brooks, *Yankee Traders*; and Robin Law, *Ouidah. The Social History of a West African Slaving 'Port', 1727–1892* (Oxford: James Currey 2004).

[15] Howard Temperley, *White Dreams, Black Africa. The Antislavery Expedition to the Niger 1841–1842* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1991) 15–25, 58.

Africa by reducing the economic incentive to make and sell slaves. Thus British traders' activities in West Africa had become closely connected with ethical issues: the trade in goods would lift Africans out of the misery of slavery and bring civilisation. However, among the 'civilising goods' exported by British merchants, were large and increasing quantities of strong liquor. When challenged about this, traders argued that they would have to retire from the African trade if they declined to sell alcohol, as Africans were only prepared to sell 'legitimate' trade products such as palm oil and rubber for spirits, and not for other goods or money.[16] In the words of one African merchant: 'without gin and rum, no trade.'[17] Anti-slavery groups observed this development with great horror. They considered strong drinks to be detrimental to the wellbeing of Africans, and regarded the liquor trade as part of the same immoral exchange as slavery. In Britain, the House of Lords debated the matter in 1889, and heard the evidence of Joseph Thomson, who stated:

> It is indeed a scandal and a shame, well worthy to be classed with the detested slave trade, in which we had ourselves ever so prominent a part. We talk of civilising the negro, and introducing the blessings of European trade, while at one and the same time we pour into this unhappy country incredible quantities of gin, rum, gunpowder, and guns…we are ever ready to supply the victims to the utmost driving them deeper and deeper into the slough of depravity, ruining them body and soul, while at home we talk sanctimoniously as if the introduction of our trade and the elevation of the negro went hand in hand.[18]

The moral debate was further complicated by the close links that initially had existed between British missions and traders. For example, when Archdeacon Crowther and the merchant Mr Leed visited the Igbo area, they gave the 'King of Ewaffa' a gift of four pieces of cloth and three

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[16] Editorial, *The Times*, 28 March 1887.

[17] PRAAD/A SC12/12 J. G. Williams to McLaren Bros & Co., 24 November 1899. Williams was part of a family of African merchants from Sierra Leone, who had a number of trading stations along the West African coast, and dealt with commissioning houses in Britain (PRAAD/A SC12/9). Many European and African traders and colonial administrators made claims similar to the one in the quote. John Holt, for instance, always maintained that he was strongly against the gin trade, but in practice he considered participating in the gin trade an economic necessity (Rosalind Tigwell, James Deemin and the organisation of West African trade—1880 to 1915 (M.Phil thesis, University of Liverpool 1978), 322).

[18] *The Times*, 7 May 1889.

cases of gin.[19] In 1882, to avoid any misunderstanding in this matter, all missionary agents of the Church Missionary Society were made to sign a declaration that they, or their wives or family members, were not engaged in trading.[20] Nevertheless, a few years later the venerable Bishop Crowther was accused of building up his mission with money obtained from the liquor trade.[21]

That the liquor trade was seen as a problem was due to the temperance movement, which had emerged in Britain during the 1830s, following the earlier rise of anti-spirit associations in the United States.[22] Although the British temperance movement has been described as ultimately unsuccessful, it had a large impact on Victorian attitudes towards alcohol.[23] The temperance movement consisted of a large number of local associations, often linked to churches, some more radical than others. Many of these associations rallied specifically against gin, which they regarded as a particularly harmful drink that had been corrupting the British working classes since the eighteenth century.[24] Within this wider environment of temperance agitation, the anti-liquor trade movement emerged and became prominent from the 1880s onwards. The membership of well-known bodies such as the *Aborigines' Protection Society* and the *Native Races and Liquor Traffic United Committee* included many British clergy, and missionaries working in Africa. The movement was also supported by some of the merchants who were trading in West Africa, such as Thomas Welsh,[25] and by many ordinary Christians concerned with the plight of Africans. Many of these also supported the anti-slavery movement and Christian missionary enterprise, and thus a number of Victorian social concerns were brought together in the anti-liquor trade movement. Its particular stance against gin, including the claim that gin sold in Africa was 'vastly more pernicious than the

[19] CMS G3 A 3/O 1886/8 Letter from Archdeacon Crowther ('Account of a visit to Bakana and Ewaffa, in the Ibo Country; November 2–6').

[20] CMS G3 A 3/O 1882/82 Declarations by missionary agents.

[21] E. A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842–1914* (London: Longmans 1966), 215.

[22] P. T. Winskill, *The Temperance Movement and its Workers. A Record of Social, Moral, Religious, and Political Progress*, 4 vols. (London: Blackie & Son 1891–92) I, 32–40.

[23] A. E. Dingle, *The Campaign for Prohibition in Victorian England. The United Kingdom Alliance 1872–1895* (London: Croom Helm 1980), 7–10.

[24] Lilian Lewis Shiman, *Crusade Against Drink in Victorian England* (Basingstoke: Macmillan 1988), 15.

[25] 'Obituary', *West Africa*, 22 February 1936.

vilest stuff supplied in the worst and lowest English public houses,'[26] can therefore be related to the British temperance movement's view of the effects of gin in Britain. Rather than African realities, it reflected first and foremost preoccupations in Victorian Britain.

The movement attempted to mobilise public opinion to influence policies and traders' activities. Its members sent numerous letters to the leading newspapers, which succeeded in creating moral indignation over the liquor trade. Almost every claim put forward by the movement—from the scale of liquor consumption by Africans, via the quality of spirits exported, to the actual impact of gin consumption upon the health of African consumers—was challenged by traders and colonial officials in West Africa. In a letter to Bishop Tugwell of Lagos, a prominent exponent of the anti-liquor trade movement, the Governor of Nigeria commented on the 'hopelessness of contradicting incorrect statements when they have been widely published,' suggesting that '[y]our practice of sending each letter you write to me to be published in England without waiting for my reply thereto is so unusual that I think it will be better for me not to continue the correspondence.'[27] As a result, comments, discussions, and attempts at formulating policy concerning the liquor trade in Africa, are prominently present in colonial and missionary archives, in local and national newspapers, and in private correspondence and books. As the anti-liquor trade movement's adversaries were so caught up in trying to counter the barrage of claims put out by the movement, and many others simply attempted to find out which of the conflicting claims represented the true picture of liquor in West Africa, the movement succeeded in effectively dictating the terms of the debate. That the overwhelming majority of liquor exported to West Africa came from outside Britain made the 'gin-trade' a fairly easy target for British campaigners. Nevertheless, the anti-liquor trade movement had an international dimension and campaigns were also conducted in France and Germany. These actions led to the discussion of the liquor trade at a number of international conferences, including the 1884/85 Berlin Conference and the 1890/91 Brussels Conference, and to international agreements to restrict the liquor trade, such as the

[26] Aborigines' Protection Society, 'Poison for Africans', *Poisoning of Africa* 1(1895) 1, quoted in: Simon Heap, 'The quality of liquor in Nigeria during the colonial era', *Itinerario* 23.2 (1999), 29–47, there 31.

[27] TC DA44/1/11 Sir Walter Egerton to Herbert Tugwell, 24 December 1909.

Convention of St. Germain and the Brussels Act.[28] However, none of these agreements was sufficiently strict to satisfy the anti-liquor trade campaigners.

These contemporary debates are important for historians studying any aspect of liquor in Africa, because they generated a wealth of sources on how the trade was conducted and on how gin spread through the hinterland. We do not have access to similarly detailed data about the patterns of distribution and social impact of other imported consumer goods in West Africa, such as soap or tea or the Maggi cube, simply because these were not perceived as a problem by European observers; even though what were harmless commodities in the opinion of Europeans, could still be dangerous in the eyes of West Africans, and in need of being rendered harmless through prayer and ritual.[29]

However, the intensity of these discussions also threatens to steer us towards research questions that remain within the parameters of the original debates. A number of scholars have attempted to test the claims of either of the parties against a reconstructed historical 'reality'.[30] Others have critically explored the motivations of one of the parties in the debate, usually that of government and the business community.[31] It will have become clear that in this book I do not deal with the questions emerging out of the contemporary debates: I am not concerned with the motivations of gin traders or protesters; with the question of whether the gin trade was genuinely bad for the health of African consumers; with considering the quality of the spirits exported;

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[28] *Papers relative to the Liquor Trade in West Africa. Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty. May, 1897* (London: HMSO 1897), 40; Lynn Pan, *Alcohol in Colonial Africa* (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies 1975); Leonard Harding, 'Die Berliner Westafrikakonferenz von 1884/85 und der Hamburger Schnapshandel mit Westafrika' in: Renate Nestvogel and Rainer Tetzlaff, eds., *Afrika und der deutsche Kolonialismus: Zivilisierung zwischen Schnapshandel und Bibelstunde* (Berlin and Hamburg: Dietrich Reimer 1987), 19–40.

[29] Birgit Meyer, 'Commodities and the power of prayer: Pentecostalist attitudes towards consumption in contemporary Ghana' in: Birgit Meyer and Peter Geschiere, eds., *Globalization and Identity. Dialectics of Flow and Closure* (Oxford: Berg 1999), 151–76.

[30] Raymond E. Dumett, 'The social impact of the European liquor trade on the Akan of Ghana (Gold Coast and Asante), 1875–1910,' *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 5 (1974), 69–101; Heap, 'The quality of liquor in Nigeria'.

[31] Examples: Harding, 'Die Berliner Westafrikakonferenz', 19–40; Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842–1914*, see chapter 10 'The triumph of gin'; Ayodeji Olukoju, 'Rotgut and revenue: fiscal aspects of the liquor trade in Southern Nigeria, 1890–1919', *Itinerario* 21.2 (1997), 66–81; R. O. Lasisi, 'Liquor traffic in Africa under the League of Nations 1919–1945: French Togo as an example', *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 5.1 (1996), 11–24.

or with the motives of colonial policy formulation as regards to liquor importation. This is not because these are not important issues, but because others have already explored them. Throughout the book I nevertheless have to refer to the debates about gin that were initiated by the anti-liquor trade movement—if only because 'Hollands gin' was singled out for severest criticism—and I consider the impact these debates might have had on the commoditisation and consumption of gin in West African societies.

Alcohol and the study of consumption

The recent secondary literature on alcohol in Africa has emerged from a number of separate strands. Closest to the original concerns of the anti-liquor trade movement are those studies that analyse the current social impact of alcohol, including alcoholism, and evaluate efforts to control drinking practices.[32] While these studies focus on alcohol as problematic and potentially destructive, the strand that has emerged out of cultural anthropology tends to focus on alcohol as constructive. Mary Douglas and others have analysed how drinking may help to build community and define social and power relations within that community.[33] Social historians of Africa have found inspiration in each viewpoint, examining the destructive as well as the constructive potential of alcohol through time. Key themes addressed include colonial attempts to control alcohol, alcohol as focus for resistance, the relation of alcohol with issues of labour and class, and the question of whether the process of commoditisation has resulted in a changed role for alcohol in colonial and postcolonial societies, as compared to that in precolonial Africa.[34]

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[32] Deborah Bryceson, 'Pleasure and pain: the ambiguity of alcohol in Africa' in: Deborah Bryceson, ed., *Alcohol in Africa: Mixing Business, Pleasure, and Politics* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann 2002), 267–91; Isidore Silas Obot, *Drinking Behaviour and Attitudes in Nigeria: A General Population Survey* (of the Middlebelt Region) (Jos: CDS 1993); Lee Rocha-Silva, Sylvain de Miranda and Retha Erasmus, *Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Use Among Black Youth* (Pretoria: HSRC 1996).

[33] Mary Douglas, ed., *Constructive Drinking: Perspectives on Drink from Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1987).

[34] Lynn Schler, 'Looking through a glass of beer: alcohol in the cultural spaces of colonial Douala, 1910–1945,' *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 35.2/3 (2002), 315–34; Emmanuel Akyeampong, 'Drinking with friends: popular culture, the working poor, and youth drinking in independent Ghana' in: Deborah Bryceson, ed., *Alcohol in Africa: Mixing Business, Pleasure, and Politics* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann

Few studies have looked specifically at the history of imported liquor. Most of these have been heavily influenced by the debates generated by the anti-liquor trade movement and tend to focus on the interface between liquor trade and colonial rule. Lynn Pan's pioneering *Alcohol in Colonial Africa* is a case in point.[35] This somewhat misleadingly titled book explores the history of the liquor trade, the measures to limit this trade, and the consequences of alcohol control in colonial West Africa. Aspects of this history have since been worked out in more detail. A. Olorunfemi, for instance, scrutinised the motivations for colonial liquor traffic legislation, while Ayodeji Olukoju explored the racial dimension of colonial liquor legislation.[36] Simon Heap assessed the efficacy of colonial legislation, and also offers a critical examination of the discussion about the perceived poor quality of the imported liquor.[37] A number of studies have pointed out that colonial discussion of limitation or quality control of liquor imports tended to be complicated by the circumstance that a large proportion of colonial revenue came from duties on liquor imports.[38] The literature suggests that, nevertheless, colonial governments throughout Africa were worried about African consumption of alcohol. Marked differences existed between West Africa and Southern Africa in the focus of these concerns, reflecting the differing colonial political economies in these areas. In Southern Africa, colonial concern about social dislocation resulted in an interest in the drinking habits of (migrant) labourers,[39] while in West Africa the main focus was on the increased consumption of imported liquor in an African traditional context, such as during festivals and burials.

2002), 215–30; Emmanuel Akyeampong, 'What's in a drink? Class struggle, popular culture and the politics of akpeteshie (local gin) in Ghana, 1930–67', *Journal of African History* 37 (1996) 215–36; Jonathan Crush and Charles Ambler, eds., *Liquor and Labor in Southern Africa* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press); Justin Willis, 'Enkurma Sikitoi: Commoditization, Drink, and Power among the Maasai', *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 32.2/3 (1999), 339–57.

[35] Pan, *Alcohol in Colonial Africa*.

[36] Olorunfemi, 'The liquor traffic dilemma in British West Africa'; Ayodeji Olukoju, 'Race and access to liquor: Prohibition as colonial policy in Northern Nigeria, 1919–45', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 24.2 (1996), 218–43.

[37] Simon Heap, '"We think prohibition is a farce": Drinking in the alcohol-prohibited zone of Northern Nigeria', *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 31.1 (1998), 23–51; Heap, 'The quality of liquor in Nigeria'.

[38] Simon Heap, 'Before "Star": the import substitution of Western-style alcohol in Nigeria, 1870–1970', *African Economic History* 24 (1996), 69–89; Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria*; Olukoju, 'Rotgut and revenue'.

[39] Crush and Ambler, eds., *Liquor and Labor in Southern Africa*.

Raymond Dumett's study of the impact of the European liquor trade on the Akan in Ghana shifts attention from the colonial and trading community to local African society, although his research question still followed directly from the debates generated by the anti-liquor trade movement. He concluded, and this conclusion still stands, that there is no evidence for the anti-liquor trade movement's claims that there had been an enormous increase in liquor consumption, resulting in widespread drunkenness and social disruption during the course of the nineteenth century. Instead, most of the increase of liquor sales was absorbed in the traditional Akan socio-cultural system.[40]

Following on from Dumett, Akyeampong took the traditional Akan socio-cultural system as the starting-point for his wide-ranging social history of alcohol in Ghana. This is the only attempt so far at a comprehensive approach to the history of alcohol in all its aspects, and for all parts of society, in a West African country, and as such it is extremely important as a starting-point for contextualising gin in relation to other types of alcohol.[41] Here, Akyeampong's exploration of the relation between certain types of alcohol and social identity is particularly interesting. Debates about Dutch gin are analysed in the book, especially in the chapters dealing with colonial legislation, although questions around marketing and branding, the geographical spread of gin, and local meanings of schnapps, for the most part fall outside the reach of the study.[42] Justin Willis' *Potent Brews* offers a similarly comprehensive study for East Africa, and therefore scope for comparison.[43] Compared to the situation in West Africa, it appears that in East African history imported gin was less important, and locally produced fermented and distilled drinks were more important. Nevertheless, the role of alcohol in general was pretty similar in both cases. Willis and Akyeampong both discuss the role of alcohol and drunkenness in the marking and contesting of gender and power, and both use the changing debates and practices surrounding alcohol as a lens with which to focus on wider social and cultural changes in the societies discussed, including the role of alcohol as a site of protest during late-colonial and independence

[40] Dumett, 'The social impact of the European liquor trade'.

[41] Emmanuel Akyeampong, *Drink, Power, and Cultural Change. A Social History of Alcohol in Ghana, c. 1800 to Recent Times* (Portsmouth, NH and London 1996).

[42] Akyeampong discusses local meanings in some detail in his later paper 'Ahenfo Nsa (the "Drink of Kings")'.

[43] Justin Willis, *Potent Brews: A Social History of Alcohol in East Africa, 1850–1999* (Athens: Ohio University Press 2002).

periods. Furthermore, both have detailed chapters on the colonial governments' attitudes towards liquor and their attempts to regulate the production, distribution and consumption of alcoholic drink. However, where Willis' focus here is on the production and distribution of locally produced drink, Akyeampong in these chapters also explores the debates surrounding imported liquor. To some extent, this latter emphasis reveals a difference between East and West African alcohol consumption, but it equally reflects the impact of the anti-liquor trade movement on colonial policy formulation, and the different colonial societies that were emerging in South and East Africa, as compared to West Africa.[44]

In the growing historiography on commoditisation and consumption in colonial and postcolonial Africa there have been few studies that treat an alcoholic drink as a commodity that can be studied from this perspective. In addition to Akyeampong's chapter on gin in Ghana, discussed above, there exists Susan Diduk's discussion of imported alcohol in Cameroon. Diduk explains the increasing popularity of bottled beer by tracing its distribution and marketing, including advertising, changing consumer demands, and changing patterns of consumption.[45] These two contributions do not engage with the theoretical framework that developed during the 1980s and 1990s for the study of the history of consumption in Britain, continental Europe and North America.[46] I am not suggesting that we should superimpose a European model of consumption on African societies, and follow Peter Stearns in understanding the development of African consumption as a late instance of a process that originally occurred in Europe and North

[44] See also Charles Ambler, 'Alcohol, racial segregation and popular politics in Northern Rhodesia', *Journal of African History* 31.2 (1990), 295–313.

[45] Susan Diduk, 'European alcohol, history, and the state in Cameroon', *African Studies Review* 36.1 (1993), 1–42.

[46] Frank Mort, *Cultures of Consumption: Masculinities and Social Space in Late Twentieth-Century Britain* (London 1996); Roland Marchland, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1930–1940* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 1985); Jill Greenfield, Sean O'Connell and Chris Reid, 'Fashioning masculinity: *Men Only*, consumption and the development of marketing in the 1930s', *Twentieth Century British History* 10.4 (1999), 457–76; Christopher Breward, *The Hidden Consumer: Masculinities, Fashion and City Life 1860–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1999), chapter 1; Susan Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian 1989). For a discussion, see: Frank Trentmann, 'Beyond consumerism: new historical perspectives on consumption', *Journal of Contemporary History* 39.3 (2004), 373–401.

America.[47] Insights derived from the study of consumption in Europe may, nevertheless, be usefully applied to African history, as can be seen in Timothy Burke's work on marketing and consumption in colonial Zimbabwe.[48] Not only does his approach fit in with studies of the role and development of retail trading in Europe,[49] his analysis of the potentially subversive nature of African consumption and the colonial attempts at control—to discourage 'excessive' and encourage 'appropriate' consumption—ties in with similar debates about Britain.[50] However, while the particular strength of Burke's book lies in its exploration of the intersection between marketing and colonial discourses, the agency of African consumers is less central to his work.

African agency is essential in Nancy Rose Hunt's analysis of objects relating to the colonial-era process of medicalisation in Belgian Congo. Hunt shows how imported objects such as clysters and bicycles acquired new meanings that had not been intended by producers, European medical practitioners, or the colonial government, and that these new meanings were the result of complex histories of appropriation and revaluation, commoditisation and de-commoditisation. Many of these objects were initially regarded and adopted by Congolese middle classes as luxuries, and subsequently acquired more ambivalent meanings relating to power, sexuality, and abjection.[51] Imported European styles appear to have been appropriated in less ambivalent ways in colonial Libreville, Douala, and Brazzaville, where individuals used clothing, consumer goods, and leisure in processes of individual self-fashioning in much the same ways as people did in London, Paris, or Rio de

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[47] Stearns, *Consumerism in World History*.

[48] Timothy Burke, '"Fork up and smile": marketing, colonial knowledge and the female subject in Zimbabwe', *Gender & History* 8.3 (1996), 440–56; Timothy Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption, and Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe* (London: Leicester University Press 1996).

[49] Uwe Spiekermann, *Basis der Konsumgesellschaft. Enstehung und Entwicklung des Modernen Kleinhandels in Deutschland, 1850–1914* (Munich 1999); Margot Finn, 'Scotch drapers and the politics of modernity: gender, class and national identity in the Victorian tally trade' in: Martin Daunton and Matthew Hilton, eds., *The Politics of Consumption. Material Culture and Citizenship in Europe and America* (Oxford: Berg 2001), 89–107.

[50] Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England. Advertising and Spectacle, 1851–1914* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press 1990); Erika Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2000).

[51] Nancy Rose Hunt, 'Bicycles, birth certificates, and clysters: colonial objects as reproductive debris in Mobutu's Zaire' in: Wim M. J. van Binsbergen and Peter L. Geschiere, eds., *Commodification. Things, Agency, and Identities (The Social Life of Things Revisited)* (Münster: Lit Verlag 2005), 124–41.

Janeiro.[52] Yet, as Jeremy Rich notes, 'Libreville-bred people did not merely imitate European tastes entirely; they embroidered their own notions of refinement out of diverse materials.'[53] A further complication resulted from the context of colonial rule, in which the appropriation of European styles could threaten the colonisers' view of themselves and of colonial subjects. Hence, 'from Zanzibar to Brazzaville, changes in dress were intertwined with assertions of distinction often contested by other Africans and Europeans.'[54]

Combining a focus on the agency of African consumers with an analysis of international trade, Jeremy Prestholdt's recent study of the consumption of North American-produced commodities in East Africa has shown how decisions and actions of consumers in a peripheral market impacted on producers in the centre. Drawing on his own East African primary research data, as well as on the secondary literature on pre-colonial West Africa, Prestholdt shows how through the centuries, African consumers have been very specific in their demands, rejecting those foreign imports that did not meet their criteria. He also shows that these demands changed with local fashions, rather than through the manipulations of foreign traders, and, furthermore, that demands were of a bewildering regional and local diversity.[55] The resulting picture is one of foreign traders desperate for up-to-date market information, and of imported goods having to be locally adapted or re-assembled to meet African taste before they can be sold. Prestholdt's perspective thus helps us to nuance the export-centred model along the lines proposed by Benjamin Orlove and Arnold Bauer: the need to 'examine closely the temporal patterning and social dimensions of the consumption of imports, rather than assuming that these follow directly upon the dynamic of the export economies.'[56] Prestholdt notes

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[52] Jeremy Rich, 'Civilized attire: refashioning tastes and social status in the Gabon Estuary, c. 1870–1914', *Cultural and Social History* 2 (2005), 189–213; Lynn Schler, 'Bridewealth, guns and other status symbols: immigration and consumption in colonial Douala', *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 16.2 (2003), 213–34; Phyllis Martin, *Leisure and Society in Colonial Brazzaville* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1995).

[53] Rich, 'Civilized attire', 190.

[54] *Ibidem*.

[55] Jeremy Prestholdt, 'On the global repercussions of East African consumerism', *American Historical Review* 109.3 (2004), 755–82, http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/109.3/prestholdt.html (viewed 12 July 2004).

[56] Benjamin Orlove and Arnold J. Bauer, 'Giving importance to imports' in: Benjamin Orlove, ed., *The Allure of the Foreign: Imported Goods in Postcolonial Latin America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 1997), 1–30, there 7.

that global economic systems are largely determined by the cultural logics of consumer demand, and stresses that even in very unequal exchanges the reciprocities among actors allowed marginalized people to profoundly affect distant societies and globalising world systems.[57] The recognition of this degree of interconnectedness and the power of peripheral consumers, allows us to regard the importation of foreign commodities on the local level as part of a process of appropriation by African traders and consumers. From this perspective, the mass consumption of foreign imports can be a strategy to overcome alienation and create local identity.[58] This perspective also contains an implicit critique of approaches that regard the act of consuming as essentially individualistic, self-centred acquisitiveness. Clearly, consumption is as much about the production of locality through the managing of kinship and social relationships.[59]

Consumption, knowledge, and the social life of imported goods

Birgit Meyer observed that since people confront the global mainly through foreign commodities, the anthropology of consumption has become an important topic in the study of the interaction between the local and the global.[60] In this light, to approach the history of imported gin in West Africa from the perspective of the anthropology of commodities and consumption offers a number of advantages. If

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[57] Prestholdt, 'On the global repercussions of East African consumerism'.

[58] Meyer, 'Commodities and the power of prayer', 171. See also Erick D. Langer, 'Foreign cloth in the lowland frontier: commerce and consumption of textiles in Bolivia, 1830–1930' in: Benjamin Orlove, ed., *The Allure of the Foreign: Imported Goods in Postcolonial Latin America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 1997), 93–112 and Benjamin Orlove and Arnold J. Bauer, 'Chile in the Belle Epoque: primitive producers, civilized consumers' in: Benjamin Orlove, ed., *The Allure of the Foreign: Imported Goods in Postcolonial Latin America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 1997), 113–50.

[59] Arjun Appadurai, 'The production of locality' in: Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis and London 1996), 178–99; Hendrickson, Hildi, 'Introduction' in: Hildi Hendrickson, ed., *Clothing and Difference. Embodied Identities in Colonial and Post-Colonial Africa* (Durham and London: Duke University Press 1996), 1–16; Sumberg, Barbara, 'Dress and ethnic differentiation in the Niger Delta' in: Joanne B. Eicher, ed., *Dress and Ethnicity. Change across Space and Time* (Oxford and Washington, DC: Berg 1995), 165–81.

[60] Meyer, 'Commodities and the power of prayer', 170; see also: Eicher, Joanne B., and Barbara Sumberg, 'World fashion, ethnic, and national dress' in: Joanne B. Eicher, ed., *Dress and Ethnicity. Change across Space and Time* (Oxford and Washington, DC: Berg 1995), 295–306.

we define consumption as the reliance on commodities produced by others, then, as Daniel Miller notes, 'there is the equality of genuine relativism that makes none of us a model of real consumption and all of us creative variants of social processes based around the possession and use of commodities.'[61] This is of particular relevance when attempting to understand an aspect of history for which the sources are very asymmetrical. Furthermore, this perspective helps us to avoid the still-common notion that mass consumption of global products destroys cultural authenticity, as it directs our focus towards the processes through which these imported goods acquire local meanings. Appadurai has drawn our attention to the specific and changing forms of knowledge that accompany long-distance flows of commodities. This knowledge comes in two types: the knowledge needed to produce the commodity, and the knowledge needed to appropriately consume the commodity.[62] It is the latter type of knowledge that concerns us here: the knowledge that allows consumers to evaluate commodities, their value, their exclusivity or authenticity, their appropriate use, as well as the question of who has—or should have—access to them. In the context of long-distance commodity exchange, for one and the same good, such knowledge and meanings will diverge widely over time and with the distance travelled.

Miller's observation that 'societies on the periphery of the industrial world often seize readily upon new possibilities of consumption and use them to embody elements of modernity,'[63] points up that these new meanings do not only relate to the commodity and its consumption, but also to the consumers' self-image. This history of the consumption of gin therefore also highlights the various ways in which the concept of 'modernity' could be used and interpreted on a day-to-day level. In doing so, it not only explores how modernity was consumed locally, not simply as an outcome of the spread of capitalism to African colonies, or as the adoption, or perhaps mimicry, of an assumed colonial project of modernity, but rather as the articulation of African local modernities through processes of selection and rejection, and the investing of

[61] Daniel Miller, 'Consumption and commodities', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995), 141–61; there 144.
[62] Appadurai, 'Introduction: commodities and the politics of value', 41.
[63] Miller, 'Consumption and commodities', 150.

the modern with particular, local meanings.[64] The rise of marketing and the mass production of consumer goods are generally regarded as key aspects in the development of 'modern' consumer societies. At the same time, colonialism tended to promote both 'modernity' and the turning of Africans into consumers. The specific meanings that Africans gave to imported gin, and their rejection of the meanings presented by Christian missionaries, colonial governments, and foreign marketing strategies, shows how Africans negotiated various possible interpretations of modernity and tradition, as well as African nationalist, local African and colonial agendas.

Consumerism, the situation that people take some of their identity from a procession of new items that they buy and exhibit,[65] can be observed, not only in twenty-first-century Britain, but also in nineteenth-century West Africa. Meyer has shown that for those Ewe who had been in contact with Christian missions, consumption was 'a vehicle for the construction of a new, modern and "civilized" identity,'[66] even if the extent and nature of this consumption was frowned upon by the missionaries. The enthusiastic adoption of imported gin in West Africa seems to fit this pattern. Carolyn Brown noted that among the Igbo successful 'big men' (*Ogaranyan*) influenced the consumptive habits of many aspiring men through their conspicuous consumption of yams, slaves, Dane guns, and, indeed, cases of imported gin.[67] However, the subsequent relocation of gin from the realm of modernity to that of tradition, and from mass consumption to restricted circulation, is at least as important. To develop an understanding of such changing knowledge and meanings of goods, we need to systematically trace their

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[64] Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 2005); Richard Rathbone, 'West Africa: modernity and modernisation' in: Jan-Georg Deutsch, Peter Probst and Heike Schmidt, eds., *African Modernities: Entangled Meanings in Current Debate* (Oxford: James Currey 2002); Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge, 'Public modernity in India' in: Carol Breckenridge, ed., *Consuming Modernity: Public Culture in a South Asian World* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press 1995), 1–22.

[65] Stearns, *Consumerism in World History*, ix.

[66] Birgit Meyer, 'Christian mind and worldly matters. Religion and materiality in the nineteenth-century Gold Coast' in: Richard Fardon, Wim van Binsbergen and Rijk van Dijk, eds., *Modernity on a Shoestring. Dimensions of Globalization, Consumption and Development in Africa and Beyond* (Leiden and London: EIDOS 1999), 155–78; there 170.

[67] Carolyn A. Brown, *'We Were All Slaves' African Miners, Culture and Resistance at the Enugu Government Colliery* (London: James Currey 2003), 35, 44.

life histories, or 'cultural biographies'.[68] The approach taken towards consumption in this book, therefore, is not to reconstruct a West African consumer society, but rather to trace the changing meanings of one commodity alongside the changing implications of its consumption.

To trace the life history of Dutch gin in West Africa means to explore the diverse local meanings that were acquired by this foreign import. This includes an examination of the different functions of a bottle of gin at different times, at different places and for different people. For the merchant on the coast around 1900, a case of gin constituted an item of trade in return for which palm oil and other agricultural produce could be acquired,—according to one trader 'not a bit more offensive, and far easier to handle, than a bale of stockfish.'[69] Indeed, bottles of gin were used as currency throughout Southern Nigeria. For a chief or a traditional priest, however, a bottle of gin is the drink he needs to pray to certain deities and ancestors (although some gods do not take gin). In Nigeria, powerful shrines existed that had been constructed out of hundreds of empty gin bottles. Yet, these same empty bottles have also been very popular with children for trapping fish. Throughout coastal West Africa, schnapps gin is required for funerals and marriage rituals, but there have been marked regional differences in its use over time. Until the 1920s, east of the Volta river (as far as Southern Nigeria), gin was the most widely consumed liquor, while west of the Volta this position was taken by rum. Dutch gin was regularly used for social drinking around 1900 (especially in coastal towns), but by the end of the twentieth century such use had become rare throughout West Africa.

Through time and in the various contexts, a bottle of gin has remained essentially the same commodity in material terms: distilled liquor of around 40% alcohol, flavoured with herbs and spices, sold in square bottles.[70] In cultural terms, however, it acquired different, often

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[68] Kopytoff, 'The cultural biography of things', 64–91; Hunt, 'Bicycles, birth certificates, and clysters', 123–41.

[69] J. M. Stuart-Young, letter to the editor, *West Africa*, 25 July 1931. Stuart-Young was not a typical British trader in West Africa. He had literary aspirations, forged letters, and created various identities for himself (for instance, the correspondent Odeziaku who appears in chapter five of this book, is Stuart-Young in another guise). Nevertheless, his contributions to the debate on the liquor trade seem a useful reflection of many traders' views on the subject. On Stuart-Young, see: Stephanie Newell, *The Forger's Tale: The Search for Odeziaku* (Ohio: Ohio University Press 2006).

[70] Britain employed very specific definitions to decide which gin could be imported into its West African colonies. In 1924, for instance, it was 'Gin i.e. a spirit (a) produced

conflicting, meanings, and these meanings changed over time. Dutch gin evolved from a new, fashionable product linked to 'the global', to become a 'traditional' drink associated with rituals, the sanction of tradition, and with distinctly local African identities. At each moment in time, and in every context, what a bottle of gin meant, was the result of a coming together of many different ideas and meanings, including those derived from African traditional culture, individual African consumers, colonial governments, Christian missions, the anti-liquor trade movement, local traders and importers, and, last but not least, gin producers and their efforts at branding and marketing. Examining these changing meanings of gin in such detail contributes to our understanding of patterns of consumption, rejection and appropriation within processes of identity formation, elite formation, and the redefinition of community.

Definitions and sources

The geographical focus of this book is West Africa (see Figure 1.6). Within West Africa, it is mainly concerned with the southern parts of Ghana (known as Gold Coast until independence in 1957) and Nigeria. The restriction to the south reflects the circumstance that the trade in Hollands gin, and its use for traditional customs, did not extent beyond a belt of a few hundred kilometres width, running along the coast. This 'gin belt' coincides roughly with the West African 'Bible belt' (see chapter seven). In areas to the north of the gin belt far less liquor was consumed. This partly reflects a different role of alcohol in African social-religious systems there as large parts were Islamic. It was also the result of an agreement between colonial powers to prohibit the sale of spirits in those areas not already engaged in the spirits trade.[71] I decided to look at the two former British colonies that taken together contain the vast majority of the population of the West African gin belt, so that I could construct a general narrative with some comparative elements. On the one hand, this comparison is between the diverse responses

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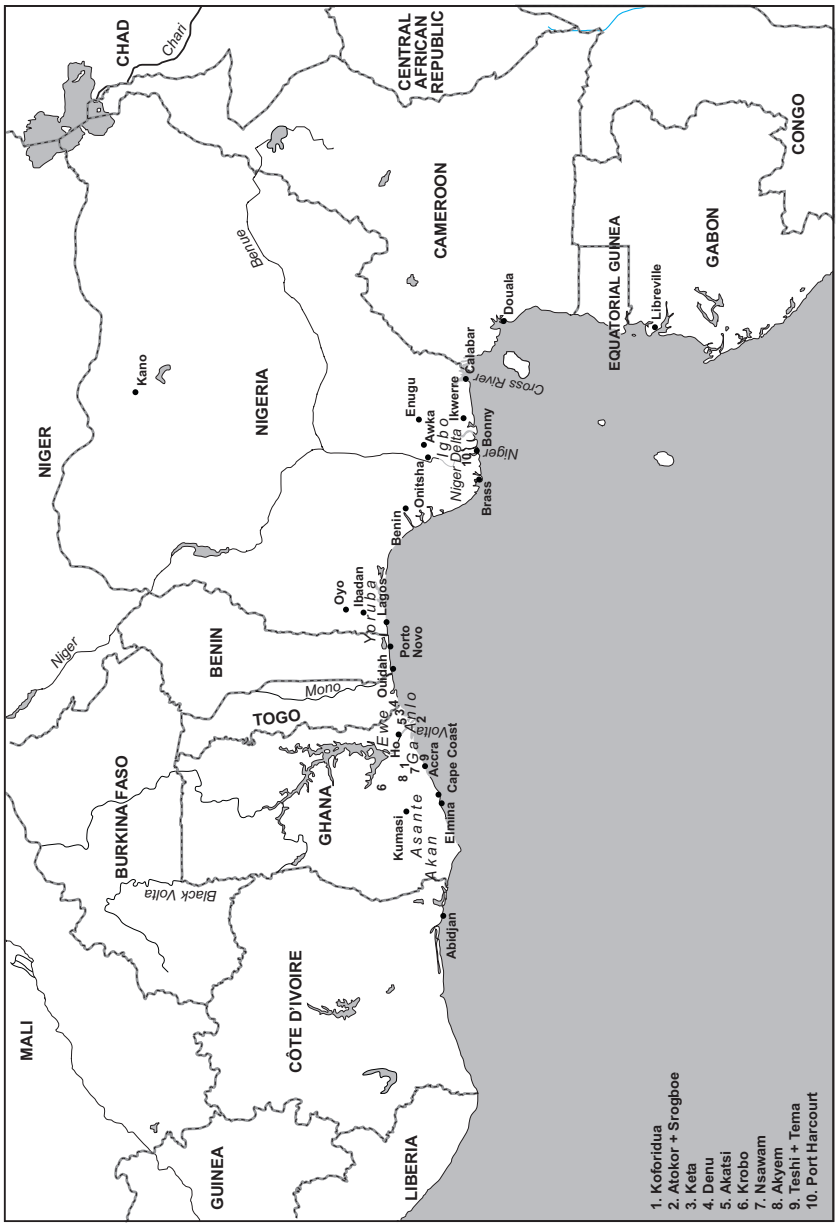
by distillation from a mixed mash of cereal grains only, saccharified by the diastase of malt and then flavoured by re-distillation with juniper berries and other vegetable ingredients, and (b) of a brand which has been notified as an approved brand by notice in the "Government Gazette".' (NAI; CSO 26/1 09165 vol. II Warner to De Marees van Swinderen, 15 March 1924).

[71] Lasisi, 'Liquor traffic in Africa', 14, 17; Heap, '"We think prohibition is a farce"', 23.



1.6 Map of West Africa, indicating places mentioned in the text

to gin by different categories of African consumers, defined by such factors as class, gender, religion and ethnicity. On the other hand, it is between different colonial governments with diverging liquor policies. It would have been interesting to include formerly French-administered territories. However, to try and extend the comparison this far would have been at the expense of much of the details of local interaction that are essential for understanding the changing meanings of Hollands gin. I nevertheless expect that the processes described for Ghana and Nigeria will turn out to be representative for developments elsewhere in the gin belt. At least on a general level, the history of gin in Togo, Benin and parts of Cameroon does not appear to be very different from that described here.[72] The gin trade also extended to Gabon, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Ivory Coast, and the Gambia,[73] but I do not have the material on the basis of which I can speculate as to similarities or differences with the case presented.

This brings me to the issue of sources. The most extensive body of written sources on the subject is formed by the wealth of written reports, accusations, and petitions produced by the anti-liquor trade movement. This perspective is impossible to ignore, and it was prominently present in British newspapers such as *The Times*, in local African newspapers such as the *Gold Coast Leader*, the *Lagos Observer* or the *Nigerian Pioneer*, and in the London-based commercial weekly *West Africa*. I have made extensive use of these newspapers as a source for public opinion on gin. In addition to the perspective of the anti-liquor trade movement, we find here the perspective of those defending the trade. An African voice is certainly present in the writings of both camps, especially—but not only—in the newspapers published in West Africa itself, but until after World War II, African access to this medium was restricted to members of a relatively small Western-educated African middle class. I also systematically sampled the West African newspapers for the period 1880–1980 to discover to what extent imported gin was advertised, and to trace changes in the way in which it was marketed. However, this offered access to only one, limited aspect of marketing, because business and government assumed that gin was predominantly consumed

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[72] Diduk, 'European alcohol, history, and the state in Cameroon'; Lasisi, 'Liquor traffic in Africa'.

[73] Henkes Archive Box 39/66, File 'Oude Jeneverorders'; Blankenheym & Nolet Archive 216/68 Exportorderboek Afrikaanse Westkust 1908–1909; *Papers relative to the Liquor Trade in West Africa*.

by illiterate Africans, and that the Western educated Africans who constituted the readership of the local West African press, preferred whisky and brandy.[74] I found further information about the marketing of Dutch gin and about its production and export procedures in the surviving archives of Lucas Bols BV Distilleries (which company has over the years acquired most of the gin brands discussed in the book) and Blankenheym & Nolet Distilleries.

Other sources include archaeological evidence from research by Yaw Bredwa-Mensah at the University of Ghana, as well as additional archive collections. I studied missionary records from the Church Missionary Society (CMS) and from the Tugwell Collection, both held at the University of Birmingham, UK, and also made extensive use of Colonial Office records held at the National Archive in Kew, London and of official records in archives in Nigeria (in Ibadan and Enugu) and Ghana (PRAAD in Accra and in Ho). Of the latter, the records of the West African Court of Appeal were particularly interesting because court cases about alleged infringements of trademarks contained very detailed witness statements about purchase and consumption of gin. Meanwhile, the local-level Civil and Criminal Record Books contained a wealth of data on local uses and on the (smuggling) trade in gin for the period from the 1880s to the 1940s.

In addition to these written sources I also made use of a set of about fifty interviews conducted in Ghana and Nigeria on the subject of the use and the buying and selling of gin. Most interviews were held in the Anlo Ewe area of eastern Ghana. I selected the Anlo area as a case 'in the middle': while the Ewe are not representative for Ghana as a whole, their history of gin consumption has more in common with that of Togo, Benin, and Western Nigeria, than that of the Akan or Ga has.[75] In Ghana, I conducted the interviews together with Cephas Afetsi, while 'S. K.' Nworgu helped me with the Nigerian interviews (see Figure 1.3). Our selection criterion for interviewees was age, not because elders would necessarily have privileged knowledge of traditions or consumption patterns, but because they have first-hand experience of most of the period covered in this book. The information I sought

[74] PRO CO583/108 Clifford to Churchill, 11 February 1922.

[75] Chapter two includes a discussion of differences during the nineteenth century in the relative appreciation of gin and rum east of the river Volta (from eastern Ghana through to Cameroon) and west of the Volta; chapter three discusses the same for the twentieth century.

and the organisation of the interviews had more in common with the oral history interviews of British social history, than with the collecting of oral histories and the unravelling of African traditions that are more commonly associated with African historical research.[76] For example, I asked my interviewees what they, or their parents, used gin for, and whether other alcoholic or non-alcoholic goods could be used for the same purpose? I also asked them what types of gin they remembered; the different names they used for them; and the ways in which they distinguished between types and brands of gin. I enquired who used gin; who purchased gin and from whom; what it was that they would be paying attention to when selecting gin for purchase; and so on. Most of the interviews were with one single individual, or with two or three people who knew each other. In a few cases, however, a much larger group had assembled, which resulted in a couple of very lively discussions, but made it difficult to attribute statements to particular individuals.[77] Sometimes, my interviewees gave an answer in the form of an oral tradition. While I have not found out how representative such traditions were, I did make use some of them as a starting-point for thinking about local perspectives on consumption, and about the sort of issues that were thrown up in these narratives and that required further exploration.

Let me end this section with a justification for what may come across as a rather loose use of the terms, (Dutch) schnapps; aromatic schnapps; Schiedam; Hollands (gin); and geneva. The English words gin and geneva derive from the Dutch term *jenever*. The term refers to one of the characteristic ingredients of the drink: the juniper berry (*jeneverbes*). During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, hundreds of small distillers existed throughout the Netherlands and neighbouring countries. Most of these produced their liquors for a small, local market. They came in many different flavours, all much stronger than the gins of today. The names were also very diverse, although the term

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[76] Carolyn Keyes Adenaike and Jan Vansina, eds., *In Pursuit of History. Fieldwork in Africa* (Portsmouth, NH and Oxford: Heinemann 1996); Jamie Monson, 'Maisha: life history and the history of livelihood along the TAZARA railway in Tanzania' in: Toyin Falola and Christian Jennings, eds., *Sources and Methods in African History: Spoken, Written, Unearthed* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press 2003), 312–28.

[77] I have of course a record of the names of all those present, and transcripts of the discussions, but I can not always match up who said what. In these cases my footnotes refer to the group as a whole.

jenever (also: *genever*) was increasingly used.[78] The majority of the export distilleries were located in and around the town of Schiedam, where they benefited from close proximity to the port of Rotterdam. In 1795 there were as many as 188 distilleries in Schiedam, exporting 85% of their production.[79] As a result, the term 'Schiedam' acquired the meaning of 'authentic' Dutch gin. Many brands sold in West Africa therefore printed the name 'Schiedam' on their labels, even if the distillery that produced them had no connection with the town whatsoever.[80] Towards the end of the nineteenth century gin producers started to use varying proportions of cheap, industrially produced alcohol in their gins. The resulting drinks were cheaper, and had a lighter flavour than the traditionally distilled gins. They proved popular with consumers, but also attracted the accusation that they were inferior products. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, distillers marketed a rich variety of *jenevers* of differing quality and flavour under different names.[81]

According to the Dutch distillers, the terms (aromatic) schnapps, Hollands (gin), geneva, and so on, that were used in West Africa, referred to subtle differences between products sold under these different names. However, while in the Netherlands the differences between *korenwijn, oude genever* and *jonge jenever*, are generally recognised (if not always clearly understood), the distillers did not succeed in effective explaining the existence of such differences to either colonial authorities or African consumers.[82] In fact, African consumers created their own categorisations of gin (discussed in chapter four), which could be quite different from those intended by the producers. These were different from the categories West Africans used in their communication with colonial authorities, when they often employed the terms Hollands gin

[78] J. A. van Houtte, *Economische Geschiedenis van de Lage Landen 800–1800* (Haarlem: Fibula-Van Dishoeck 1979), 146, 200, 215; Van der Sloot, *Het Echte Schiedamse Jeneverboek*, 16–21, 47–9.

[79] Van Houtte, *Economische Geschiedenis*, 215; Richard Griffiths, 'Ambacht en nijverheid in de Noordelijke Nederlanden 1770–1844', *Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 10 (Haarlem: Fibula-Van Dishoeck 1981), 219–52; there 223–5.

[80] Wim Snikkers, 'Schiedam, spiritus en schnapps (3). Enige invloeden op de ontwikkeling van de moutwijnindustrie', *Scyedam* 23.2 (1997), 59–68, there 61–2.

[81] Coen Kramers, *De Moutwijnindustrie te Schiedam* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Lieverlee n.d. [c. 1946]), 176–8; Van der Sloot, *Het Echte Schiedamse Jeneverboek*, 119–22; C. M. Stöver, Schiedam onder invloed. De invloed van de branderijen op de economische ontwikkeling van de stad Schiedam in de periode 1850–1914 (Doctoraalscriptie Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam 1991), 47.

[82] NAI CSO 26/1/09651 Vol. V, Gin: Importation of, 1948–51.

and geneva to refer to drinks marketed as schnapps, gin, and Hollands geneva. In colonial sources that discuss specific instances of the use of gin, which are clearly translated from a discussion in a local language—such as Ewe or Twi—into English, terminology is even more inconsistent and confusing. In many instances the term 'rum' is used where the drink referred to is clearly a type of Dutch gin. A further complication is caused by the term 'dry gin'. While some Dutch distillers also exported this type of drink to West Africa,[83] dry gin was not considered the same thing as Hollands gin or schnapps, and regarded as a British drink instead. Dry gin never reached the same popularity amongst African consumers, or the same ritual importance, as Dutch gin. Throughout the book, I use the term 'gin' to indicate the types of gin (including schnapps) imported from Germany and the Netherlands, the term 'Dutch gin' describes gins (including schnapps) imported from the Netherlands, while 'dry gin' denotes the type of gin imported from Britain. I reserve the terms (Dutch) schnapps and aromatic schnapps for those gins that were (and are) specifically marketed in West Africa under those names.

Structure

In the following chapters I will trace the cultural biography of Dutch gin with an emphasis on marketing, consumption, and consumerism. The organisation of the chapters is broadly chronological. In the next chapter I will explore the rise of gin during the nineteenth century, focusing on how the trade in gin was organised, and on how the remarkable increase of gin imports from the middle of the nineteenth century can be explained. While in Britain and the United States, the rise of mass consumer goods occurred alongside both an increase and a qualitative change in media advertising, this was not relevant for selling such goods in West Africa at the time.[84] How did knowledge about gin spread, and by which criteria did African consumers take decisions to buy gin, rather than other alcoholic or non-alcoholic imports? I point towards a combination of factors, the most important of which are: the fact that distilled liquors had been imported from Europe and North America for centuries; the changes in the West African economy and

[83] NAI CSO 26/1/09651 Vol. I 128/1921 Bols, Erven Lucas.
[84] Stearns, *Consumerism in World History*, 48.

society during the nineteenth century, which resulted in more African consumers being able to afford (relatively small amounts) of imported commodities; and changes in the production process of gin in Germany and the Netherlands, which enabled a significant reduction of the price of gin imported from these countries.

Starting from the situation around 1900, when imported gin had a range of functions in African societies, chapter three explores why gin became the dominant drink to use for traditional rituals, and why it lost its other uses. I argue that the eventual ritual dominance of gin followed from the situation that the use of distilled liquors for rituals had already become widespread in coastal West African societies during the centuries of the transatlantic slave trade. Therefore, when gin was used for rituals around 1900, this was because gin was a foreign spirit which, at this time, was relatively cheap and widely available; a different type of liquor such as brandy or rum could also have been used. This changed around World War I when liquor imports contracted. In subsequent years gin became harder to get and more expensive, and gained in status at the same time. I show that gin's ritual role resulted from the changes in the liquor trade between 1900 and the 1930s, which ended up privileging Dutch gin among imported liquors because of the resulting combination of price, availability and status. Gin's appearance and packaging also played a role in this process: African consumers interpreted its colourlessness, bottle, label, and closure as indications that imported Dutch gin was particularly 'pure' and therefore appropriate for ritual use. Branding and product recognition thus help to explain the ritual status of gin, not because this was intended by the producers, but as a result of the specific ways in which African consumers read the branded product.

In the following chapter, I look at brands and marketing of gin during the interwar years. This is also the period when gin, from being a product exported from both Germany and the Netherlands, became associated with 'Holland' only. This chapter explores the impact of the colonial ideology of appropriate consumption on marketing and advertising for Dutch gin. While conventional advertising was largely absent, Dutch gin producers nevertheless developed brands for the African market, whereby packaging and labels on bottles were of particular importance. It appears that African gin consumers in the interwar period were clearly brand conscious. However, they also used gin for different purposes than intended by the producers in Europe. Furthermore, the criteria they used to select one brand of gin over another indicate that

they read the gin labels in a different way from that intended by the Dutch producers. African consumers gave their own meaning to the emblems used by gin manufacturers on bottles and cases.

Chapter five then considers changing attitudes towards Dutch gin in relation to regulation or even prohibition, during the colonial period. While the existing literature on Ghana and Nigeria has already discussed these changes,[85] it is still important to include a detailed discussion of them here, because they greatly influenced the development of the marketing of imported gin (discussed in chapters six and seven). Therefore, this chapter's main focus is on the complex interaction between African public opinion, the various levels of colonial administration, and the anti-liquor trade movement in Britain and among mission circles in West Africa. The rise of 'illicit' local distillation of liquor during this period provides an important background to changes in the appreciation of imported gin. The Gold Coast government, for instance, was committed to the eventual prohibition of Hollands gin in 1930, but by 1943 was concerned about securing sufficient imports into the colony.[86] These changing attitudes translated directly into marketing opportunities: once the anti-liquor trade movement lost momentum and West African (colonial) governments no longer regarded the importation of gin as harmful and undesirable, gin importers and producers could advertise openly. In doing this they could refer to the medicinal use of gin; which use had been indicated by some elements of local West African opinion as an argument in support of the continued importation of the drink.

Chapter six discusses the decolonisation period. I examine how gin producers changed their marketing strategies to respond to the opportunities provided by rising incomes for West Africans, and by the expectation that independence would be experienced through consumption. There were also challenges, such as the continued availability of cheap 'illicit' liquor, and the start of legal distillation of local quality gins. Advertising in this period tended to focus on the medicinal qualities of schnapps gin, on its Dutch origins, or on the association of gin with Western-style middle class modernity: a high-class spirit for social drinking by successful African males who were firmly connected to the

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[85] Especially, for Ghana, in Akyeampong, *Drink, Power, and Cultural Change*, and, for Nigeria, in Chima J. Korieh, 'Alcohol and empire: "illicit" gin prohibition and control in colonial Eastern Nigeria', *African Economic History* 31 (2003), 111–34.

[86] PRAAD/A CSO 6/3 Minute by H. W. R. Chandler, 13 December 1943.

international, modern world. However, advertisers who tried to sell gin as social drink for successful, modern West Africans had misunderstood the extent to which gin had become a drink connected with ritual, and traditional culture. As in the earlier period, African consumers decided on their own categorisation of drinks and what they could be used for, and advertising had little effect on this.

In a final chapter I examine the position of Hollands gin since the 1960s in relation to locally produced gin and other drinks. This position is reflected in further changes in the marketing of gin during this period. By 1970, advertising represents Hollands gin as the drink of traditional leaders, and as an emblem of traditional, local African culture. This change in marketing reflects the changing position of Dutch gin that has been described in the preceding chapters: from a mass consumer commodity, an iconic consumption item of modernity, it had become a good with restricted, ritual circulation, an aspect of African 'traditional' culture, its use bound up with ritual and the authority of those who claim the sanction of custom. This relatively late change in marketing strategy reflects the failure of foreign producers to determine the local meanings of their products through advertising. From the ways in which their new African competitors marketed 'foreign'-style gins that had been locally distilled, Dutch producers learnt that to remain relevant they had to catch up with local understandings. They were not the only ones: throughout the twentieth century, colonial governments, anti-liquor trade campaigners, foreign advertisers, missionaries and churches, all attempted and failed to shape African understandings and uses of imported gin. The cultural importance of gin was created by local African consumers.

CHAPTER TWO

THE RISE OF GIN

The Fon in Benin used to place forged iron staffs (*asen*) on family shrines as memorials to the dead. One of such staffs, from the important former slave trading port of Ouidah and most likely dating from the second half of the nineteenth century, depicts a figure seated at a table arranged with containers of types that would normally contain imported liquor. The figure probably represents Yovogan, a special minister appointed by the king of Dahomey to oversee foreigners and trading houses in Ouidah. There are numerous references to Western material culture: the central figure is seated on a chair at a table, wearing a top hat and holding a pipe. Behind him is a cross, and next to the table are flags. The containers on the table represent various types of imported drinks. The large vessel in the middle of the table has the shape of a demijohn: a large, small-necked bottle, usually cased in wickerwork. In West Africa, demijohns typically contained rum, even though they were also used for other products such as palm oil. The smaller containers arranged on the table around the demijohn have the characteristic shape of gin bottles, in West Africa called 'square face' or 'four cornered'. The symbols on such *asen* are notoriously difficult to interpret, and it has been remarked that only the maker and the donor who commissioned the memorial staff understand all the references.[1] Nevertheless, the prominent display of imported liquors, including gin, is striking. This *asen* is an elaborate example, but it is not unique: many artefacts originating from nineteenth-century coastal West Africa contained references to gin. Most of these artefacts had ritual functions, while others—such as the Asante gold weight in the shape of a gin bottle illustrated in Figure 2.1—were connected to trade. As such, these artefacts serve as powerful reminders of the importance that West Africans attached to rum and gin by the second half of the

[1] *Selected Works from the Collection of the National Museum of African Art.* 1 (Washington, DC: Smithsonian 1999), 63. An image of the *asen* described can be viewed on the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston website: www.mfa.org/collections/search_art.asp (the accession number is: 1992.400).

nineteenth century. They also indicate that imported liquor was only one amongst a range of foreign imports that achieved prominence in West African societies. Finally, the fact that the *asen* originated in Ouidah, reminds us that imported liquors reached West Africa as part of the transatlantic slave trade, and highlights that to understand the rise of gin, we need to consider the organisation of the trade in which rum and gin became important.

Wine, brandy, and rum have long been part of the trade between Europe and West Africa.[2] When the French trader Jean Barbot visited Accra around 1700, he paid for slaves and gold with brandy, knives, cloths, guns, gunpowder and various beads. He also made payments in brandy to African leaders for the right of anchorage. However, when trading at Cape Coast, he was forced to sell his brandy cheaply, as English trading ships had been selling great quantities of rum and other spirits just before his arrival.[3] During the eighteenth and the first decades of the nineteenth century, distilled liquors formed one of the main categories of goods imported into West Africa, alongside various types of cloth, iron and ironware, crockery, guns and gunpowder. Liquors did not dominate the import trade, but they always constituted a substantial part of the parcel of goods exchanged. Rum was by far the most important liquor while, until the middle of the nineteenth century, gin did not figure prominently.[4] I found no evidence in the sources for Emmanuel Akyeampong's claim that 'three centuries of Dutch-dominated liquor trade on the Gold Coast had definitely popularised Dutch gin labels over British labels.'[5] Eighteenth-century Dutch vessels carried French brandy as well as rum, but there is no mention

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[2] Robin Law and Kristin Mann, 'West Africa in the Atlantic community: the case of the Slave Coast', *William and Mary Quarterly* 56.2 (1999), 307–34, there 313; Marion Johnson, 'The Atlantic Slave Trade and the Economy of West Africa' in: Roger Anstey and P. E. H. Hair, eds., *Liverpool, the African Slave Trade, and Abolition* (Liverpool: Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire 1989[2]), 14–38, there 18–9.

[3] *Barbot on Guinea. The Writings of Jean Barbot on West Africa 1678–1712*, edited by Paul Hair, Adam Jones and Robin Law, 2 Vols. (London: The Hakluyt Society 1992), II, 435, 441, 396.

[4] Edward Reynolds, *Trade and Economic Change on the Gold Coast, 1807–1874* (London: Longmans 1974), 89, 137, 183, 188; David Eltis and Lawrence C. Jennings, 'Trade between Western Africa and the Atlantic World in the pre-colonial era', *American Historical Review* 93.4 (1988), 936–59; Stanley B. Alpern, 'What Africans got for their slaves: a master list of European trade goods', *History in Africa* 22 (1995), 5–43.

[5] Emmanuel Akyeampong, *Drink, Power, and Cultural Change. A Social History of Alcohol in Ghana, c. 1800 to Recent Times* (Portsmouth, NH and London 1996), 85.

of Hollands gin.[6] British traders complained about unfair competition from those merchants who had cheap and easy access to American rum. In an 1822 petition to the Governor of the Gold Coast, British traders claimed that the West African consumers preferred American rum 'to any other in the proportion of four to five.'[7] Rum imports continued to be important until World War I, especially for the Gold Coast where the value of rum imports consistently represented between one tenth and a quarter of total imports into the colony. Nevertheless, the amount of Dutch and German gin that was imported into West Africa as a whole, increased rapidly, and overtook that of rum, in the second half of the nineteenth century.[8] On the eve of World War I, Dutch and German gin had become so dominant, that contemporary observers of the trade tended to use the terms 'liquor trade' and 'gin trade' interchangeably, while merchants claimed that the gin trade was an essential prerequisite for the trade in other goods.[9]

How can we explain this soaring of gin imports? Was it a specific feature of the product or of the way in which it was marketed that specifically appealed to West Africans? By the middle of the twentieth century, Hollands gin had acquired a special place in traditional ritual that set it apart from other distilled drinks. However, this does not yet appear to have been the case during the nineteenth century. To explain the rise of gin we need to consider a number of factors, including: the changes that occurred in the economy of West Africa around the ending of the transatlantic slave trade and the rise of the palm oil trade; the specific way in which gin was packaged and distributed; changes in the production methods and taste of gin around 1880; and the price of gin in relation to that of other drinks and other luxury goods. I therefore start this chapter with a description of the spread and use of imported liquors in West Africa during the centuries before the spread of gin. In

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[6] *Barbot on Guinea*, II, 396, 559–60; Harvey M. Feinberg, *Africans and Europeans in West Africa: Elminans and Dutchmen on the Gold Coast During the Eighteenth Century*. Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 79.7 (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society 1989), 60–1, does mention Dutch *Brandewijn*, which is a Dutch product, but different from gin.

[7] George E. Brooks, Jr., *Yankee Traders, Old Coasters and African Middlemen. A History of American Legitimate Trade with West Africa in the Nineteenth Century* (Boston, MA: Boston University Press 1970), 246.

[8] *Ibidem*, 258, 281; J. J. Rankin, The History of the United Africa Company Limited to 1938 [1938], 71.

[9] Letter to the editor by J. M. Stuart-Young, *West Africa*, 25 July 1931; Letter to the editor by G. T. Carter, *The Times*, 8 June 1895.

the next section I offer a discussion of the changes in the production of gin in Holland and Germany during the nineteenth-century that made the drink affordable to West African consumers. I then follow this by an analysis of the transformations that occurred in the West African economy following the abolition of the slave trade, which resulted in changing consumer demand for imported liquor. Finally, I address the question of how imported gin reached nineteenth-century African consumers in a brief section on the marketing of gin.

Alcohol in West Africa before the spread of gin

Before the arrival of imported distilled liquors, West Africans mainly enjoyed two types of alcoholic drinks: palm wine and *pito*, a beer made from millet or guinea corn. These drinks are still common in the region, and nowadays include variants of *pito* based on non-indigenous crops such as maize and plantain. They are produced through fermentation, and have to be consumed within days or weeks of production. Palm wine is consumed in the forest belt along the West African coast, as here is where the palm trees grow, the juice of which is used to make the wine. *Pito* is the drink of the savannah areas north of the forest zone. Imported liquor gained most of its popularity in the areas in which palm wine is drunk, but its spread has not been restricted to the palm wine areas.[10] Furthermore, *pito* was not unknown in forest areas,[11] and eighteenth-century observers reported the sale of *pito* beer in coastal markets.[12]

While the production and sale of *pito* was often in the hands of women,[13] the tapping, distribution and consumption of palm wine was the domain of males.[14] Akyeampong has noted that in precolonial Akan,

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[10] R. O. Lasisi, 'Liquor traffic in Africa under the League of Nations 1919–1945: French Togo as an example', *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 5.1 (1996), 11–24; Simon Heap, '"We think prohibition is a farce": Drinking in the alcohol-prohibited zone of Northern Nigeria', *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 31.1 (1998), 23–51.

[11] Heap, 'We think prohibition is a farce', 26; N. W. Thomas, 'Notes on Edo burial customs', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 50 (1920) 377–411, there 400, 402.

[12] *Barbot on Guinea*, II, 546.

[13] Heap, 'We think prohibition is a farce', 26, 31, 34.

[14] Akyeampong, *Drink, Power, and Cultural Change*, 5, 15; J. N. Oriji, 'A re-assessment of the organisation and benefits of the slave and palm produce trade amongst the Ngwa-Igbo', *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 16.3 (1982), 523–48; there 539; Susan Martin, 'Gender and innovation: farming, cooking and palm processing in the Ngwa

Ga-Adangme, and Ewe societies, male elders exercised a monopoly over palm wine. The elders incorporated the ritual use of palm wine in all important social contracts and occasions, and their use of palm wine in communication with gods and ancestors reinforced their secular power. Control over palm wine thus enhanced the social superiority and identity of male elders, who aimed to exclude women and young men from using alcohol.[15] The ritual use included the consumption of palm wine, as part of yam festivals, annual customs, and funeral rites, as well as the libations needed when praying to gods and ancestors. By 1900, in most of such instances, distilled liquor was used rather than palm wine, even though there were some ritual circumstances and deities (sometimes described as 'old fetish') for which palm wine was required.[16] Our understanding of the earlier importance of palm wine in Ghana is therefore mainly based on the oral traditions told by the elders.[17] Thus, while some evidence exists for similar links between palm wine and the authority of male elders in Nigeria and Congo,[18] there is no documentary evidence that can support the assumption that the ritual use of palm wine actually preceded the introduction of rum and brandy into West Africa.

This description of palm wine consumption as limited to the ritual domain and elite control reflects the consensus in alcohol studies. In this view, alcohol use in Africa has shifted from 'integrated' traditional drinking to become increasingly commoditised. According to Akyeampong and others, the move from the non-commercial exchange of alcohol in the past, to the present time of sale, was accompanied by increasing

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Region, South-Eastern Nigeria, 1900–1930', *Journal of African History* 25.4 (1984), 411–27, there 417.

[15] Akyeampong, *Drink, Power, and Cultural Change*, 15–6.

[16] PRAAD/A ADM 11/1/1661 Awuna Adda & Akwamu Confidential (1912); *Notes of Evidence*; Interview with Mr. Dakpo Akoto, Akatsi, 28 July 2000.

[17] As used by Akyeampong. Also, from my own interview data: interview with Hunua Yao Gakpo Dziekpor, Victor Gasu, Jimmy Dziekpor and Agumenu Dziekpor, Atiavi, 4 August 2000; interview with Midawo Shitor Dzigbah and Henry Aflakpui, Anyako, 3 August 2000; interview with Torgbui Kposegi III, Anyako, 3 August 2000. Interestingly, Chief Avlavi II argued the exact opposite: that palm wine was an ordinary drink, freely available to all in the community (interview with Torgbui Avlavi II, Dzita, 1 August 2000).

[18] Philip E. Leis, 'Palm oil, illicit gin, and the moral order of the Ijaw', *American Anthropologist*, new series 66.4 part 1 (1964), 828–38, there 832; Martin, 'Gender and innovation', 539.

social dislocation.[19] However, a number of transformations took place in African societies at the same time, and the process of commoditisation of alcohol was only one of many changes. As these changes affected local and wider politics, religion, trade, labour, and the organisation of the economy, there are likely to have been multiple sources of social dislocation. Furthermore, Justin Willis has questioned whether such a straightforward transition from non-commercial traditional alcohol to commoditised alcohol ever really took place. He rather points to the situationality of commoditisation. He shows that this has allowed twentieth-century Maasai men to accept the sale of alcohol, while still asserting their authority over younger men and women through claiming privileged access to drink. Thus rather than alcohol having been fully commoditised, it has become both a commodity and a ritual resource, and the boundary between the two aspects has remained continually contested.[20] There are indications that situational commoditisation was equally a feature of African societies in the past. Palm wine was sold in Ghanaian markets around 1700, and Barbot observed that palm wine was brought to coastal markets for sale at the same time as fishermen arrived back.[21] This indicates that palm wine at that time was not entirely captured by ritual use and the control of male elders.

The related matters of the uses of palm wine in traditional West African societies and processes of—partial—commoditisation of alcoholic drinks are relevant to our understanding of the rise of imported liquors. Did the introduction of imported liquors contribute to the commoditisation of alcohol, or were such imports rather de-commoditised in African societies? To what extent were palm wine and alcohol regarded as both belonging to the same category of 'alcoholic drink'? And if the suggested link between palm wine and the power of elders is correct, how did this change with the advent of imported liquor? Did access to rum or gin allow people to make the same claims to status? Also, what was it that defined imported liquor as special? Was it the alcoholic content? Or was it the fact that it was imported, as Joseph Miller has

[19] Justin Willis, 'Enkurma Sikitoi: Commoditization, Drink, and Power among the Maasai', *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 32.2/3 (1999), 339–57.

[20] *Ibidem*, 357.

[21] *Barbot on Guinea*, II, 546; the diary of the late eighteenth-century Calabar trader Antera Duke reports the existence of a 'mimbo market', where Antera Duke sent one of his servants to buy palm wine to present to visiting traders (Daryll Forde, *Efik Traders of Old Calabar* (London: International African Institute 1956), 55).

suggested for Western Central Africa?[22] Another question here is: when did imported liquors first reach African consumers? Discussions of historical shifts in alcohol use in Africa often equate 'pre-colonial' and 'traditional', but many societies had become accustomed to imported liquor long before the advent of colonial rule.

The use of imported liquor was already widespread along the West African coast by the late seventeenth century. This included its use in African traditional religious practice and festivals. Around 1700, Barbot observed the practice of libation using brandy or rum, the function of which, he speculated, might have been to show respect to the dead. When he made enquiries into the meaning of this ritual, he found that 'at present few or none understand why they do it; and only allege it is custom transmitted to them from their ancestors.'[23] Barbot also describes an alleged incident where he had to give brandy in compensation after desecrating a *grigri*:

> I remember a Black, from whose neck I pulled away a *Grigri*, or spell, made a hideous noise about it, telling me, that *Gune* had beaten him most unmercifully the next night; and that unless I would, in compassion, give him a bottle of brandy to treat *Gune*, and be reconciled to him, for having suffered me to take away his *Grigri*, he was confident he should be infallibly kill'd by him.[24]

Barbot explains that imported brandy was used for annual public celebrations and for festivities on the occasion of victory achieved in war, and that people at those occasions could become very drunk. Meanwhile, Barbot's contemporary Van Nyendael reported a difference in alcohol consumption between the elite and the majority of the population in Benin: most people drank water and palm wine, while the wealthy preferred brandy whenever they could get hold of it.[25] This observation, if correct, invites a further qualification of the connection between the power of male elders and the control of access to palm wine described earlier: perhaps around 1700 in Benin the status of palm wine had been degraded already as a consequence of the introduction

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[22] Joseph C. Miller, *Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade, 1730–1830* (London: James Currey 1988), 71–9.

[23] *Barbot on Guinea*, II, 136, note 11.

[24] *Ibidem*, II, 136, note 11; Barbot must have liked this story, as an almost identical episode is described on page II, 579, only this time the incident is said to have occurred in Accra and involved the handing-over of gold as well as brandy.

[25] Willem Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea* (London 1905), 200.

of imported liquor, and brandy had taken its place as a signifier of social superiority? Barbot does not comment on the use of brandy in this way, but he, too, notes that the occasional use of palm wine was widespread, while the people did not use much European wine. Indeed, he describes Africans as considerably more moderate than the European traders and sailors, because not only did the latter spend most of their salaries on African prostitutes, they also habitually consumed so much alcohol that they ended up sleeping in the open air.[26] African 'fetish priests', on the other hand, were 'very serious people' who led a prudent life and avoided alcohol.[27]

One century later, around 1800, a slightly different picture emerges from the writing of European observers such as J. A. de Marrée and Thomas Bowdich. They, like their predecessors, report widespread palm wine consumption. De Marrée is quite positive about palm wine and compares its taste to that of champagne, but he nevertheless informs that in those places where a particular type of palm wine was consumed, the men suffered from enormously swollen scrotums.[28] Where Barbot had characterised Africans as essentially moderate drinkers, De Marrée suggests that coastal West Africans had an 'insatiable desire for strong liquors', and that they preferred imported liquor to locally produced alcohol.[29] Although this 'insatiable desire' is almost certainly an exaggeration, De Marrée offers numerous examples of the use of brandy or rum for public rituals, visits to shrines, and as part of local judicial procedures, that suggest that European liquors had become an important part of local African customs. He describes how, when an inhabitant of the area around Elmina was abused or insulted by someone, the victim would take one or two bottles of brandy to the elders, present the drink to them and explain his case. This would then lead to a public tribunal and, eventually, a fine for the insulter. De Marrée also specifies that those who visited a shrine—including ancestor shrines—brought with them a bottle of brandy, because 'the Guinea gods do not drink water,' and that the priests used brandy and rum for their prayers. By this time, coastal West African marriage customs

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[26] *Barbot on Guinea*, II, 396–7.

[27] *Ibidem*, II, 580.

[28] J. A. de Marrée, *Reizen op en Beschrijving van de Goudkust van Guinea, Voorzien met de Noodige Ophelderingen, Journalen, Kaart, Platen en Bewijzen* ('s-Gravenhage and Amsterdam: Gebroeders van Cleef 1817), 94–5.

[29] De Marrée, *Reizen*, 31 (my translation), 32–3.

included the transfer of brandy (in addition to tobacco, pipes and gold) from the groom to his in-laws.[30] Public festivals involved the consumption of rum, as Bowdich witnessed during the 1817 *odwira* festival in Kumasi. He describes the ritual consumption of rum on the fourth day of the festival, when the Asante king ordered 'a large quantity of rum to be poured into brass pans' and the population—including slaves, women and children—were 'drinking like hogs'.[31]

From these and other observations by European visitors it becomes clear that during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries West Africans attached special significance to imported liquor. The ordinary social drinking of imported liquors was not often reported, and in those cases where this was mentioned, it was specified that this referred to a wealthy elite only. It was the ritual use of alcohol that caught the attention of observers, and most of these rituals involved the use of brandy or rum to connect with the ancestors and gods. This can be seen in the case of libation, and in the use of alcohol when visiting shrines. Liquor was also required for marriages and burials, events that impacted on the lineage and therefore had to be communicated to the ancestors through alcohol. The ancestors might also be the reason why liquor had to be offered when applying to the elders to adjudicate. In such cases, according to elders I interviewed for this book, the liquor was needed so that the chiefs and elders could pour libation to tell the stool and the ancestors the outcome of the judicial case and how they had gone about resolving it.[32] The *odwira* festival witnessed by Bowdich was also linked to the ancestors, as it was held to honour the dead Asante kings and to purify the nation.[33] Thus imported liquor functioned as a medium through which the living could communicate with their gods and ancestors.

It is unclear what people used for these rituals before the arrival of rum and brandy. It would appear logical that this must have been one of the local alcoholic drinks, such at palm wine or *pito*. Indeed, Raymond Dumett has suggested that among the Akan, palm wine was used long

[30] *Ibidem*, 65–107.

[31] Thomas Edward Bowdich, *Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee* (London: Frank Cass [3rd ed.] 1966), 278.

[32] Interview with Martin Dey, Wilfred Acolatse, and Lucian Fiadzo, held at Keta, 2 August 2000.

[33] Akyeampong, *Drink, Power, and Cultural Change*, 6.

before rum, while Chima Korieh argued the same for the Igbo.[34] Ewe elders nowadays claim that before the coming of imported liquor they used *liha*, local ale made with maize, to pray to gods and ancestors.[35] However, Marion Kilson's study of Ga libation indicated that libation is really about water, not alcohol, and that liquor, in the context of libation, is regarded as a powerful form of water.[36] This would fit with the Ewe elders' explanation that imported liquor had been introduced into ritual from the experience of the power of the drinks, caused by their alcoholic strength: they are the strongest, and therefore the most effective means of communication with the ancestors; they work fast. Also, the ancestors themselves had taken a liking to the drinks when they were first imported: 'our grandparents tasted it to realise that it was pure and special, and they resorted to using it altogether.'[37] Other available evidence also suggests that imported liquor did not replace local alcoholic drinks. While early European travellers documented the consumption of palm wine, they did not mention its ritual use. Furthermore, the ritual use of imported liquor spread along the coast among a large number of different African communities, with otherwise differing rituals and worldviews.[38] This suggests that the introduction and utilisation of rum and brandy in the ritual sphere may have represented an innovation related to the context in which this occurred: the trade in liquor commenced as part of the transatlantic slave trade.

Akyeampong has noted that the well known economic connection between the liquor trade and the slave trade also acquired important socio-political and spiritual dimensions that resulted in the inclusion of imported drinks in African traditions.[39] The initial connection is remem-

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[34] Raymond E. Dumett, 'The social impact of the European liquor trade on the Akan of Ghana (Gold Coast and Asante), 1875–1910,' *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 5 (1974), 69–101, there 81; Chima J. Korieh, 'Alcohol and empire: "illicit" gin prohibition and control in colonial Eastern Nigeria', *African Economic History* 31 (2003), 111–34, there 111.

[35] Interview with Hunua Yao Gakpo Dziekpor, Victor Gasu, Jimmy Dziekpor and Agumenu Dziekpor, held at Atiavi, 4 August 2000.

[36] Marion Kilson, 'Libation in Ga ritual', *Journal of Religion in Africa* 2.2 (1969), 161–78, there 176.

[37] Interview with David Kofi Togobo and Mr Yeke, held at Anloga, 28 July 2000; interview with Hunua Yao Gakpo Dziekpor, Victor Gasu, Jimmy Dziekpor and Agumenu Dziekpor, held at Atiavi, 4 August 2000 (quotation).

[38] Joseph Miller describes this for Western Central Africa (Miller, *Way of Death*, 84).

[39] Akyeampong, *Drink, Power, and Cultural Change*, 42.

bered in a familiar narrative known as the 'Krobo myth'.[40] According to this tale, the Ghanaian Krobo and their neighbours had long been enemies. At some stage during the conflict, the Krobo had withdrawn onto Mount Krobo, which could be easily defended. They successfully resisted all enemy attacks on the mountain until their enemies made a deal with Dutch slave traders. The slave traders provided the enemies of the Krobo with bottles containing a mysterious and powerful drink, which was offered to the Krobo fighters as a gesture of reconciliation. Upon finishing the bottles, the Krobo warriors fell in a drunken stupor. They woke up the next day on board of a slaving vessel sailing to the Americas. Later, when the remaining Krobo—the elderly, the women and the children—visited the site of the disaster, they found the bottles with a little liquor remaining in them. In recognition of the power of these bottles, and in order to avoid further disasters, they built a bottle shrine on Mount Krobo that still exists.[41] The details of this story do not allow a literal interpretation. The bottles in the shrine and other bottles found on the mountain are Dutch (and probably also German) gin bottles that have been dated to the 1850s and later.[42] During this period illegal slave trafficking was indeed ongoing in the area, but by then the Krobo were certainly no longer strangers to imported liquor. It is therefore likely that this story refers to an older, remembered connection between the slave trade and the spread of imported liquors. A similar event, dated 1856, is widely remembered among the Anlo Ewe of eastern Ghana.[43] The details of the incident vary in different versions of the story, but the basic narrative is the same: a group of famous drummers were playing on the beach of Atorkor when a slave ship arrived. The slave traders offered the drummers barrels of liquor

[40] I do not present this narrative as a Krobo oral tradition, and I have my reservations as to its authenticity. The only references to it that I have managed to find are in secondary literature.

[41] Wim Verstraaten, *Het Groot Jeneverboek* (Baarn: In den Toren 1984), 92; Peter Vermeulen, "Heilige flessen" uit Ghana (n.p., n.d.).

[42] Vermeulen, "Heilige flessen". We can date gin bottles reasonably precisely by taking into account a number of features, such as whether they were free blown or blown into a mould, the type of mould that was used, whether the bottled was pontilled, had embossings or seals, whether it was hand blown or mechanically produced, and so on. There is much expertise on this among the members of *De Oude Flesch*, an association for collectors of old glass bottles. See: www.Deoudeflesch.nl. See also: Johan Soetens, *In Glas Verpakt. Packaged in Glass. European Bottles, Their History and Production* (Amsterdam: De Bataafsche Leeuw 2001), 93–7.

[43] Anne C. Bailey, *African Voices of the Atlantic Slave Trade. Beyond the Silence and the Shame* (Boston: Beacon Press 2005), 33–56.

and invited them on board to play. The drummers got drunk, were taken away when the ship sailed, and eventually sold as slaves. This story again allocates a role to imported liquor, although the mention of barrels, and the identification of the ship as American,[44] points towards rum, rather than gin. As in the Krobo story, although intoxication is thought to have allowed for capture, the situation is thought to be the result of local African rivalries; some versions of the story mention a dispute over a woman, while another version has it that the town of Atorkor was in debt to white traders and arranged to pay this debt by organising the kidnapping of the drummers. Unlike the Krobo, who live in the interior, the Anlo live on the coast and their leaders had long been involved in the transatlantic slave trade when the incident occurred. Even though the remembered incident can be precisely dated, the significance of the story appears to be about a more fundamental transition in Anlo society from a middlemen role in trading people from the interior, towards the enslaving of people from their own community. Anne Bailey notes in her analysis of the story that one effect of the slave trade was to corrupt indigenous legal institutions, and that 'the story thus appears to be the community's way of grappling with their involvement in the trade.'[45]

Partly as a consequence of the slave trade, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries witnessed the reorganisation of West African economies and societies.[46] Many historians have focused on the slave trading and slave raiding states that emerged in this period, assuming that these states emerged on the basis of older, existing kinship structures.[47] However, Peter Ekeh has shown that these slaving states grew along with kinship systems, and that on the periphery of such states, unilineal kinship emerged as a social formation of the slave trade. Understanding kinship systems as a creation of the slave trade period makes sense, as both inside and outside the slave trading states, kinship could offer the individual protection against the dangers of the violence created by the slave trade, or, as Jean-Pierre Warnier has illustrated, could provide a

[44] *Ibidem*, 39.
[45] *Ibidem*, 55.
[46] John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1680* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998).
[47] Martin A. Klein, 'The slave trade and decentralized societies', *Journal of African History* 42.1 (2001), 49–65.

means to regulate and disguise the sale into slavery of younger males.[48] This same transatlantic slave trade introduced distilled liquor, which was then used ritually to strengthen the new institutions of kinship. Thus within the kinship systems that had emerged to mediate the effects of the commoditisation of human beings, the ritual consumption of one particular commodity became crucial for defining belonging and power: imported liquor. This sounds paradoxical, yet follows the logic of Daniel Miller's observation that kinship and consumption are each other's context, as both operate as domains through which diverse projects of value are objectified.[49] Thus, following the logic of the system, the African traders who sold slaves on the coast for European liquor distributed these same drinks to those within their own social groups to secure clients.[50] Akyeampong observed that in this way, the recipients were bound socially and spiritually to those who distributed the liquor, and that this constituted 'a complex manipulation of the concept of wealth in people.'[51] Imported liquor became the central commodity in this, embodying at the same time the link between the living and the ancestors, and, among the living, either the belonging or not-belonging to the community, as well as wealth and power relations.

These observations cannot be generalised for the whole of West Africa, as at the beginning of the nineteenth century, three zones of alcohol use can be discerned in the region: a coastal strip where imported rum and brandy had become an essential element of many rituals and transactions; a zone beyond that, about which we do not have much information apart from oral traditions, where palm wine—and to an extent *pito*—were drunk; and the area further inland where *pito* was used, and where the prevalence of Islam restrained the spread of strong liquor. The alcohol imported at this time was predominantly brandy and rum, with much smaller quantities of liqueurs, wines, and gin. The rum was imported in casks, and used mainly for public festivals, where a

[48] Peter Ekeh, 'Social anthropology and two contrasting uses of tribalism in Africa', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32.4 (1990), 660–700, there 678–82; Jean-Pierre Warnier, 'Traite sans raids au Cameroun', *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 29.113 (1989), 5–32; see also Rosalind Shaw, 'The production of witchcraft / witchcraft as production: memory, modernity, and the slave trade in Sierra Leone', *American Ethnologist* 24.4 (1997), 856–76.

[49] Daniel Miller, 'Consumption and commodities', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995), 141–61, there 155–6.

[50] Miller, *Way of Death*, 105–26.

[51] Akyeampong, *Drink, Power, and Cultural Change*, 43.

larger number of people would partake in the drink. Brandy was often mentioned as imported in bottles, and we find many examples of brandy being used for more personal rituals and transactions. Of course, one or two bottles of brandy were more easily affordable than a cask or a demijohn of rum, and it is quite possible that the different uses of rum and brandy stem from such pragmatic financial considerations. It was within this context that gin from Germany and the Netherlands gained in popularity so rapidly from the mid-nineteenth century.

The emergence of Hollands gin

Dutch sailors and merchants have been actively participating in the trade with West Africa since the sixteenth century, and Dutch *jenever* (gin) already existed at that time.[52] Why, then, did it take so long for Dutch gin to acquire a share of the West African liquor trade? The short answer to this question is that, at first, Dutch gin was amateurishly produced liquor for local consumption. Later, when the distillation of gin had been professionalized and export became important, Hollands gin had already become too expensive compared to other distilled liquors for consumers in West Africa. Only when the price of gin fell, from the middle of the nineteenth century, could gin exports to West Africa become significant.

The history of Dutch gin has been tied up with developments in international trade from the very beginning. Dutch distillers copied the technology from brandy producers in France, where distillation had been invented. The original French liquors were made by distilling wine and were often flavoured with herbs and spices. Medicinal qualities were ascribed to these drinks, and it has been suggested that the explanation for the wide spread of distilled liquors across Europe from the fourteenth century can be found in their perceived health benefits.[53]

By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Netherlands developed into a centre for international trade and this had an impact on the local liquor production. Not only was French brandy imported and for the most part exported again to other counties, the ingredients for local

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[52] J. A. van Houtte, *Economische Geschiedenis van de Lage Landen 800–1800* (Haarlem: Fibula-Van Dishoeck 1979), 146.

[53] Hans van der Sloot, *Het Echte Schiedamse Jeneverboek* (Ter Aar: Uitgeverij Van Lindonk 1987), 31–7, 47–9.

distillation were also widely available. Dutch merchants' warehouses contained large supplies of imported grain and wines, to be blended and stored until they could be sold at the right price, either in the Dutch market or re-exported. A large part of the French wine production was sold in this fashion through Dutch ports,[54] while the trade in the spices used to flavour the distillates, was conducted through these same ports. By the sixteenth century, the distillation of liquor from beer, grain and wine had spread through the Netherlands and surrounding areas.[55] At this time, Dutch liquor came in many different flavours, all much stronger than the gins of today and sold under many different names. Most of the distillers were small-scale producers, who sold to local markets and for whom distillation was often a sideline to their main business. They distilled their drinks from many different foodstuffs, including beer, wine, various grains as well as other crops. When the wine in merchants' warehouses proved of poor quality, deteriorated due to poor packaging or storage conditions, or simply could not be sold quickly enough against a decent price, this, too, was distilled into brandy. In the seventeenth century, the combination of high grain prices and the increasing popularity of alcoholic drinks led to failed attempts by the Dutch authorities to keep the price of bread down by prohibiting the use of grain for liquor production.[56] In spite of the rise of local production, the importation of brandy from France continued to be important, especially for the export trade. Dutch merchants bought cheap French wine, which they had distilled into brandy in France, before exporting it to the Baltic and other overseas markets via the ports of Rotterdam and Amsterdam. It made sense to have the wine distilled in France rather than in Holland because distillation reduced the volume to about one fifth, which resulted in a corresponding reduction in transportation costs.[57] It is therefore not surprising that in this period Dutch gin was not mentioned amongst the cheap liquors exported to West Africa.

The development of Dutch gin into a widely exported drink that was typically distilled from grain alcohol can be linked to seventeenth-

[54] Jan Willem Veluwenkamp, 'Lading voor de Oostzee' in: Remmelt Daalder *et al.*, eds., *Goud uit Graan. Nederland en het Oostzeegebied 1600–1850* (Zwolle: Waanders 1998), 42–55, there 49.

[55] Pieter Jan Dobbelaar, *De Branderijen in Holland tot het Begin der Negentiende Eeuw* (Rotterdam: Nijgh & Van Ditmar 1930) 13–48.

[56] Van Houtte, *Economische Geschiedenis*, 127.

[57] Veluwenkamp, 'Lading voor de Oostzee', 49.

century French mercantilism. The Dutch authorities prohibited the importation of French brandy in 1671 in response to French trade policies.[58] As a result, the use of grain alcohol increased in Holland, but also in areas of what are nowadays Belgium and Germany where the price of grain was lower than in Holland. This established the characteristic production process of Hollands gin. Generally, two sets of producers were involved in the manufacture of gin. First, *branders* (roasters) produced *moutwijn* (malt wine) by making a malted grain mash, usually based on barley and rye, and then distilling the mash three times in a pot still. This process also produced yeast, which the malt wine distillers sold separately. They also sold the dregs of the grain mash to farmers who used it to fatten pigs.[59] Then the second group of producers, the *distillateurs* (distillers), bought the malt wine, blended it, and distilled it a fourth time with a mixture of juniper berries, herbs, and spices imported from as far away as Asia. The flavour of the gin produced in this way depended on the taste and the blend of the malt wine, and on the mixture of herbs and spices used. Each distiller had his own gin recipes, which he carefully guarded. Hollands gin produced in this way was a true product of international trade: grain, which often had been imported, was combined with juniper berries and with spices that had been brought into Dutch ports from all over the world, and the resulting *jenever* itself was to an increasing extent exported to consumers outside Holland. Thus the seventeenth century saw the beginning of the rise of Dutch gin distillation as one of the *trafiek* industries, a business sector that was characteristic of early industrialisation in the Netherlands during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. *Trafiek* industry emerged in the vicinity of seaports and specialised in the processing of imported raw materials into consumer goods such as sugar, mustard, or salt. The finished product was then either exported or consumed locally.[60] This type of industry could generate considerable wealth, but was also very vulnerable to fluctuations of the price of imported ingredients and international competition. During the eighteenth century, small-scale local distilleries

[58] Van Houtte, *Economische Geschiedenis*, 215; Dobbelaar, *De Branderijen in Holland*, 59–70.

[59] Dobbelaar, *De Branderijen in Holland*, 191.

[60] A. J. W. Camijn, *Een Eeuw vol Bedrijvigheid. De Industrialisatie van Nederland, 1814–1914* (Utrecht and Antwerpen: Veen 1987), 14; Richard Griffiths, 'Ambacht en nijverheid in de Noordelijke Nederlanden 1770–1844', *Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 10 (Haarlem: Fibula-Van Dishoeck 1981), 219–52, there 222.

remained throughout the Netherlands and in nearby countries such as Denmark, Germany, Belgium, and even Northern France. However, distillation for export concentrated in the town of Schiedam, close to the seaport of Rotterdam. The gin industry in Schiedam grew rapidly, from 34 malt wine distilleries in 1700, via 122 in 1771, to 188 distilleries in 1795. In the period 1770 to 1795 the gin distillers in Holland exported 85 per cent of their total production.[61] While Dutch gin was now becoming an important export commodity, it failed to capture a big share of the market for imported liquors in West Africa. This was because it was too expensive due to its relatively costly ingredients and expensive production methods.

The years during which the Netherlands was part of revolutionary France (1795–1813) were difficult for Dutch distillers, as their exports were hit by wars and trade restrictions. The price of ingredients soared, and the domestic market offered only limited compensation for the loss of export markets. By 1813 distillers were operating at only one sixth of their capacity. Gin exports remained at low levels after 1814, as traditional export markets such as Britain had developed their own products to substitute Hollands gin. Dutch distillers felt nevertheless compelled to direct their efforts at export markets because of the raising of the duty on domestic gin from 15.5 per cent to 75.5 per cent.[62] Some producers developed into specialised export distilleries that were unknown in the domestic market and that can be characterised by large-scale production and vertical integration (see Figure 2.2). At one stage Henkes distillers even owned their own shipping line.[63] Much of the export went through trading companies based in France, Britain and Germany (Hamburg), and gin was often sold under the names of the trading corporations, rather than those of the Dutch distillers.[64]

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[61] Van Houtte, *Economische Geschiedenis*, 215; Griffiths, 'Ambacht en nijverheid', 225.

[62] Griffiths, 'Ambacht en nijverheid', 232–4; Keetie Sluyterman and Huib Vleesenbeek, *Drie Eeuwen De Kuyper. Een Geschiedenis van Jenever en Likeuren, 1695–1995* (Schiedam 1995), 19, 22.

[63] C. M. Stöver, Schiedam onder invloed. De invloed van de branderijen op de economische ontwikkeling van de stad Schiedam in de periode 1850–1914 (Doctoraalscriptie Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam 1991), 67; [Hans van der Sloot], *150 Jaar Henkes. Enkele Aspecten van Anderhalve Eeuw Gedistilleerd-Industrie in Delfshaven en Omgeving* (n.p. n.d. [1975]), 34–7.

[64] Nathalie Lans, *Wereldwijd Verbreid. De Jeneverindustrie in Schiedam 1860–1993* (Schiedam: Stedelijk Museum Schiedam 1993), 20.

The orientation towards export led to an important innovation in the packaging of gin: the introduction of the characteristic gin bottle around 1800.[65] Before this time, gin was exported in casks, other relatively large containers, or earthenware jugs, as glass was still too expensive to be considered for single-use packaging.[66] By the late-eighteenth century glass bottles had become cheap enough for distillers to use them for the export markets, even though they were still free blown and not yet industrially produced. The bottles used had a square shape (hence the name 'square face bottles'), tapered towards the bottom, which made it possible to pack them securely for transportation, crammed tightly using straw in wooden cases of twelve or fifteen bottles (see Figure 2.3). While until 1830 the bottles did not carry labels, and were closed with a simple cork without a seal, the cases had the name of the manufacturer displayed prominently on the outside.[67] The advantages of these square bottles for the sale in export markets became apparent in the course of the nineteenth century. Not only did the gin arrive safely, the cases and the square face bottles where instantly recognisable as containing gin, thereby advertising the product. The relatively small sizes of the bottles (the largest size used was two litres; the smallest about a quart litre) made it possible to sell a bottle to less wealthy consumers without the need to pour the drink over into other containers, as happened with rum, which limited the potential for tampering and the introduction of impurities into the drink. Finally, the use of bottles facilitated the marketing of specific brands of gin, as glass seals with trademarks could be added, and text or illustrations could be pressed into the glass during the blowing of the bottle. Producers could also make their bottles more distinctive with labels and special closures (see Figure 2.4). Therefore, the use of the glass bottle for export allowed the distillers to engage in far more modern marketing practices in the Americas, Australia and West Africa, than in their domestic market. In the Netherlands, gin continued to be sold per measure until the mid-twentieth century. In liquor stores the customers received the gin straight from the cask

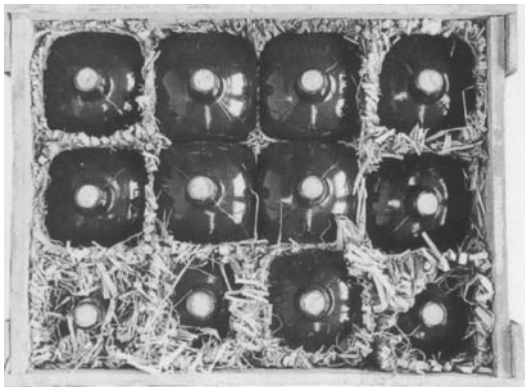
[65] Verstraaten, *Het Groot Jeneverboek*, 76; Sluyterman and Vleesenbeek, *Drie Eeuwen De Kuyper*, 29.

[66] Soetens, *In Glas Verpakt*, 14, 26. The first wine bottles, for example, were extremely expensive, often stamped with the seal of the owner, and filled and re-filled many times.

[67] Peter Vermeulen, 'Nigeriaanse jeneverflessen', *Klubblad van de Verzamelaarsklub "De Oude Flesch"* 18.2 (1996), 2–3.

2.1 Akan gold weight in the shape of a gin bottle (Ghana)

2.2 'De Kuyper' Distillery, Rotterdam, around 1900



2.3 Case of gin bottles for export

2.4 Henkes gin bottle for export with label and glass seal, mid-nineteenth century

into containers such as earthenware jugs they had brought along to the shop themselves.[68]

On the whole, gin exports were strong in this period.[69] Initially, the United States became an important market for Dutch gin, but export to this country suffered from the raising of the import duties on gin from the middle of the nineteenth century, and from the introduction of protectionist legislation towards the end of the century.[70] Such experiences convinced Dutch distillers of the need to spread their risk, and develop as many markets as possible. They continued to export to Australia, Canada and Latin America, and also targeted Africa. However, in spite of the successful introduction of the square face bottle, exports to West Africa showed only a limited increase. In the 1840s, Nigeria imported around one million gallons of spirits, but this was mainly rum.[71] The situation was the same in the Gold Coast. In 1847 Governor Winniett estimated that the annual gin consumption of the Gold Coast was three thousand cases, an almost negligible amount compared to an estimated annual consumption of two million gallons of rum.[72]

Dutch distillers' attempts to build up new export markets suffered from the relatively high price of gin, which made the product unaffordable for consumers in many parts of the world, which included most West Africans. During the 1870s, for instance, Dutch gin imported into West Africa was almost twice as expensive as rum.[73] This was about to change, as innovations in the technique of alcohol production had made available cheap alcohol prepared from sugar beet molasses or potato. This development was made possible by the invention of the patent still at the beginning of the nineteenth century. A patent still could produce strong (up to 96 per cent), neutral alcohol in one single step out of any of a number of cheap ingredients. As the price of alcohol produced this way was half of that of the malt wine traditionally used

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[68] Verstraaten, *Het Groot Jeneverboek*, 72; Soetens, *In Glas Verpakt*, 86.

[69] J. A. de Jonge, 'Nijverheid en conjunctuurbeweging' in: *Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 12 (Haarlem: Fibula—Van Dishoeck 1977), 62–76, there 64.

[70] Coen Kramers, *De Moutwijnindustrie te Schiedam* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Lieverlee, *c*. 1946), 173.

[71] Martin Lynn, *Commerce and Economic Change in West Africa: the Palm Oil Trade in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge and New York, NY: Cambridge University Press 1997), 69.

[72] Brooks, *Yankee Traders*, 263.

[73] PRAAD/A ADM 7/1 Blue Books of Statistics.

as basis for the distillation of gin, gin distillers could produce gin more cheaply.[74] Dutch distillers long ignored this innovation, even though Belgian distillers produced alcohol according to this method as early as 1832.[75] German firms, particularly the export distillers in Hamburg, also started to use this type of alcohol relatively early, which gave them a price advantage over Hollands gin and other imported liquors in West Africa around 1880. Not only did this allow German export distillers to rapidly increase their exports, produce traders in West Africa who traded with the cheaper German gin could make bigger profits. In the early 1880s, a number of merchants complained that German firms were underselling the market in Porto Novo by selling a case of gin for two and half or three puncheons of palm oil, where other traders charged four puncheons of palm oil for a case of gin, and that there was no longer any money to be made in trading rum and gin. Clearly, the German firms had access to cheap supplies of liquor.[76] In addition to gin, German distillers also exported rum, made on the basis of the same cheap alcohol. In 1891, the Gold Coast imported 576,891 gallons of rum from the United States, a traditional rum-exporting county, and 222,375 gallons of rum from Germany, while importing only 71,371 gallons of German gin.[77]

The distilleries in Hamburg, who made their drinks mainly out of alcohol produced in patent stills, exported their gin in the same square bottles as those used by Dutch gin producers. Dutch distillers suffered from the cheap competition from Hamburg, and argued that the German gin was of inferior quality. They also claimed that the Hamburg gin producers were imitating their product, and protested against the use of the terms 'Schiedam', 'Holland' and '*jenever*' by the Hamburg gin producers.[78] These accusations were impossible to prove, however, as a large amount of genuine Hollands gin was also exported through companies operating from Hamburg. Therefore, if the gin distillers in Schiedam wanted to regain their competitiveness in the international

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[74] Kramers, *De Moutwijnindustrie*, 178.

[75] Wim Snikkers, 'Schiedam, spiritus en schnapps (1). Enige invloeden op de ontwikkeling van de moutwijnindustrie', *Scyedam* 22.5 (1996), 149–55, there 148.

[76] *Lagos Observer*, Thursday 12 April 1883.

[77] PRAAD/A ADM 7/1/25 *Gold Coast Blue Book of Statistics* for 1891; also: 'Liquor trade in West Africa. Prohibition and the Native. Questions of Policy', *The Times* 8 April 1919.

[78] Wim Snikkers, 'Schiedam, spiritus en schnapps (3). Enige invloeden op de ontwikkeling van de moutwijnindustrie', *Scyedam* 23.2 (1997), 59–68, there 61–2.

market, they would have to produce their gins more cheaply. Their production methods had become relatively expensive. Although many sectors of the Dutch economy had mechanised during the nineteenth century, the gin producers resisted mechanisation and continued to distil their gin out of malt wine according to the traditional methods they had developed in the seventeenth century.[79] Meanwhile, the first factory in the Netherlands that used a patent still to produce alcohol and yeast out of sugar beet molasses had opened in 1860, an initiative soon followed by others. These factories supplied the Hamburg gin producers and also, from 1877, Dutch distillers who hesitantly began to replace part of the malt wine with the cheaper alcohol. During the 1870s the share of Hollands gin in West African gin imports declined drastically, while the total volume of imported gin remained stable. West African gin imports soared in the early 1880s, but as this increase was made up entirely of gin imported from Germany, the Dutch distillers did not benefit.[80] From 1885 many of the export distilleries in Schiedam finally responded by developing gins that had the cheaper alcohol from patent stills as main ingredient. While this move resulted in the decline of Schiedam's local roasting (malt wine distilling) industry, it ensured the survival of the gin distillers, as the new type of gin could be exported at a much lower price.[81] Exports rapidly increased and by 1891 Dutch gin had overtaken German gin in the West African market.[82] This market became so important that in the period 1900–1910, half of the export of Dutch distilleries went to West Africa.[83]

That the distillers in Schiedam had qualms about switching away from malt wine is understandable, because the use of alcohol made in patent stills raised concerns about quality and taste. Compared to the traditional distillates made from malted grain, the new type of alcohol

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[79] De Jonge, 'Nijverheid en conjunctuurbeweging', 64; J. A. de Jonge, 'Het economisch leven in Nederland 1873–1895' in: *Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 13 (Haarlem: Fibula—Van Dishoeck 1978), 35–56.

[80] PRAAD/A ADM 7/1 Blue Books of Statistics; Leonard Harding, 'Die Berliner Westafrikakonferenz von 1884/85 und der Hamburger Schnapshandel mit Westafrika' in: Renate Nestvogel and Rainer Tetzlaff, eds., *Afrika und der deutsche Kolonialismus: Zwilisierung zwischen Schnapshandel und Bibelstunde* (Berlin and Hamburg: Dietrich Reimer 1987), 19–40, there 29.

[81] Stöver, Schiedam onder invloed, 61–2, 66; Kramers, *De Moutwijnindustrie*, 178.

[82] PRAAD/A ADM 7/1 Blue Books of Statistics; *Papers relative to the Liquor Trade in West Africa. Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty. May, 1897* (London: HMSO 1897), 26–38.

[83] Sluyterman and Vleesenbeek, *Drie Eeuwen De Kuyper*, 29.

had much less flavour. This was not necessarily a bad thing, as it made it easier for drinks producers to blend palatable and consistent liquors. Furthermore, the lighter, more neutral flavour of gins produced with the new alcohol proved popular with consumers and this, combined with the lower price, resulted in an increase in domestic consumption.[84] However, some of those familiar with the taste of old-style gins lamented the new gins' lack of flavour and loss of traditional character. Combined with the much reduced retail price, this led to accusations that the new gins were of inferior quality. At the time, it seemed common sense that drinks produced this cheaply simply had to be of poor quality or even harmful. The anti-liquor trade movement, observing the increase in West African gin imports in combination with the much lower price of the drink, concluded that the gins exported were 'trade spirits': poor quality liquors not normally consumed by Europeans and produced specifically for sale to 'vulnerable' African consumers, who were not used to distilled liquor and could therefore easily be corrupted.[85] Employing a popular, yet incorrect, etymology of the term 'geneva', the *Gold Coast Leader* in an editorial claimed:

> Trade gin is made in Geneva, but the people there do not drink it. It is undoubtedly intended for the consumption of the benighted African whose fate does not concern the makers of this deleterious drink, and therefore it is desired to stop this traffic.[86]

According to the movement, the 'trade spirits' exported to West Africa were 'poisonous' and 'raw alcohol' and very harmful to the health of Africans.[87] Anti-liquor trade campaigners therefore argued that if the total prohibition they desired was not feasible, then it should at least be possible to ban the cheap gins in favour of the more expensive pot still gins. This argument was flawed, as in chemical terms the cheap alcohol produced in a patent still is purer and contains fewer harmful particles than the more costly pot still distillates.[88] Indeed, officials often pointed out that the main criterion for the definition of 'trade spirits' was their cheapness, and that they were not unwholesome or

[84] Stöver, Schiedam onder invloed, 47–8; Snikkers, 'Schiedam, spiritus en schnapps (1)', 149; Van der Sloot, *Het Echte Schiedamse Jeneverboek*, 19.
[85] PRO CO554/45 Minute J. I. Lauder (Acting Comptoller of Customs) 5 May 1920.
[86] 'Editorial notes', *The Gold Coast Leader*, 9 January 1929.
[87] *The Times*, 7 May 1889.
[88] Snikkers, 'Schiedam, spiritus en schnapps (1)', 149.

especially obnoxious.[89] The campaigners' claim that the 'trade gins' were not sold to European consumers was equally problematic. Even though the type of gin exported by Dutch and German distillers was not popular in Britain, it was very popular among consumers in the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium and Austria. Furthermore, the quality of cheap gin exported to West Africa was not different from cheap gin sold in Europe.[90]

Economic transition and changing consumer demand in West Africa

The developments outlined above in the supply of gin coincided with changes in the structure of the demand for imported liquor in West Africa. These were the consequence of the restructuring of the West African export economy that occurred following the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade. The extent and impact of this restructuring has been the subject of debate since Anthony Hopkins suggested that the abolition of the slave trade resulted in a 'crisis of adaptation' in West Africa.[91] According to this perspective, the abolition of the slave trade resulted in a shock to African economies that had become dependent on the slave trade. The military and political leaders who had dominated the slave trade were less able to control the new trade in agricultural produce, because the new trade was readily open to participation by small-scale traders and farmers. However, as the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 did not result in an immediate ending of the trade, and the growth of legitimate trade was haphazard, the restructuring of West Africa's political and economic order must have occurred more gradually than is implied by a 'crisis of adaptation'.[92] Other nineteenth-century developments were also important. For instance, Ralph Austen and Jonathan Derrick argue that African economic and political structures were not destroyed by the ending of

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[89] PRO CO96/685/2 Minute J. A. Calder, 18 February 1929.

[90] *The Times*, 7 May 1889; Mary Kingsley, 'Trade and labour in West Africa' in: Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa. Congo Français, Corisco and Cameroons* (London: MacMillan 1897), 631–80, there 664–5; Simon Heap, 'The quality of liquor in Nigeria during the colonial era', *Itinerario* 23.2 (1999), 29–47.

[91] Anthony G. Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa* (London: Longmans 1973); Martin A. Klein, 'Social and economic factors in the Muslim revolution in Senegambia', *Journal of African History* 13.3 (1972), 419–41.

[92] Patrick Manning, *Slavery and African Life. Occidental, Oriental, and African Slave Trades* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1990).

the slave trade, but by the coming of colonial rule at the end of the nineteenth century,[93] while Martin Lynn points towards technological improvement through the introduction of the steamer around 1850 as the most important factor restructuring trade and society in West Africa.[94] Historians have thus come to emphasise continuity between the eras of slave trade and produce trade. However, this is not to say that no fundamental changes took place in West Africa following the abolition of the slave trade.[95]

Patterns of consumption changed drastically due to the shift from the slave trade to the trade in agricultural products. Of these products, palm oil was by far the most important. The cultivation of palm oil for export resulted in a shift towards individual units of production in parts of West Africa, as there were few economies of scale to be found in the production of palm oil. Many small farmers shifted at least part of their attention to palm oil, as with palm trees growing wild, there were few barriers of entry into the manufacture of palm oil for the export market. With the rapid growth of the palm oil trade after 1830, West African land and labour became increasingly commercialised.[96] Compared to the eighteenth century, the economy became more individualised and wealth became more dispersed, as the benefits of the palm oil trade were distributed in a more egalitarian way than those of the slave trade.[97] As a result, cheap mass-produced imports could spread widely through West Africa. These included cotton cloth, singlets, knives, earthenware mugs, enamel pans, beads, tobacco, rum and gin. Lynn suggests that in many parts of West Africa, palm oil production was an incidental activity, carried out only to gain access to imported luxury goods.[98] However, the processing of palm oil for export was very labour intensive. There were various techniques in use. The most labour-intensive method, which produced the best quality palm oil, involved boiling the fruit, pounding it, and then squeezing the resulting

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[93] Ralph Austen and Jonathan Derrick, *Middlemen of the Cameroons Rivers: the Duala and their hinterland, c. 1600–c. 1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999).

[94] Lynn, *Commerce and Economic Change*, 128.

[95] Robin Law, 'Introduction' in: Robin Law, ed., *From Slave Trade to 'Legitimate' Commerce. The Commercial Transition in Nineteenth-Century West Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1995).

[96] Lynn, *Commerce and Economic Change*, 56–7; Reynolds, *Trade and Economic Change*, 107.

[97] David Northrup, *Trade Without Rulers. Pre-Colonial Economic Development in Southeastern Nigeria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1978), 188.

[98] Lynn, *Commerce and Economic Change*, 58.

mass of pounded fibres by hand. Susan Martin estimates that it took a group of women and at least one man two days' labour to produce one four-gallon tin of palm oil by this method.[99] The palm oil would then have to be transported to the coast, which would be more or less expensive, depending on whether the oil could be transported over water, or whether it had to be carried over land. At the coast in the 1880s, four gallons of palm oil would not be enough to buy a single bottle of gin.[100] The other method of palm oil processing involved the fermentation of palm fruits in large vats or basins, treading it, and then washing out the oil. This procedure was less labour intensive, but produced a worse quality of palm oil, which fetched a lower price.[101] Therefore, even though the price and quantity of palm oil traded soared around the middle of the nineteenth century, the purchasing power of individuals should not be over-estimated, and imported goods needed to be cheap enough, or packaged in sufficiently small units to be affordable.[102]

The combination of the distribution of the wealth generated by the palm oil trade through society, and the need for imports to be affordable, helps to explain the success of gin in comparison to other imported liquors: most Africans could not afford to buy gin by the case, but thanks to the palm oil trade many could afford to buy at least one single bottle, especially so when the price of gin fell in the late 1870s. It thus appears to be the combination of packaging and pricing, rather than the drink's flavour, strength, or colour, that explains the rise of gin in West Africa after centuries in which rum had dominated the market in imported liquors. The vast majority of the palm oil was produced in the coastal regions east of the river Volta, including the important palm oil producing areas of the Niger Delta and the Lagos hinterland.[103] These were also the areas where gin importation increased most markedly during the nineteenth century. While the volume of imported gin soon dwarfed that of rum in these areas, the actual volume of rum

[99] Martin, 'Gender and innovation', 419–25.

[100] *Lagos Observer*, 12 April 1883 (in Porto Novo one case of gin cost about 300 gallons of palm oil).

[101] Lynn, *Commerce and Economic Change*, 110.

[102] Christopher B. Steiner, 'Another image of Africa: toward an ethnohistory of European cloth marketed in West Africa, 1873–1960', *Ethnohistory* 32.2 (1985), 91–110; there 95–6.

[103] Lynn, *Commerce and Economic Change*, 35–45.

imports tended to remain stable, or even show a moderate increase. The decline of rum was thus relative, not absolute. The stability of the volume of rum imports indicates that, rather than that existing African consumers were moving away from rum to gin, the rising gin imports were reaching new markets. These new markets for gin did not extend to the entire West African coast. The increase in gin importation was less extreme in areas such as Sierra Leone, the Gambia and the Gold Coast west of the river Volta, regions that were also less prominent palm oil producers. There, rum remained the main imported liquor, often until well into the twentieth century.[104]

Anti-liquor trade campaigners feared that the rise in importation of cheap liquor would result in widespread drunkenness and degradation, in dishonesty, and in 'acts of immorality', especially by women.[105] The *Temperance Chronicle* wrote that the inhabitants of the Gold Coast had become 'truculent, gin-soaked, spoilt natives,' and even suggested that the gin trade had led to cannibalism in Nigeria.[106] Most traders and colonial officials disagreed with this perspective, and rather emphasised that West Africans were moderate drinkers. While the campaigners feared that the cheap gin would corrupt poorer natives in particular, colonial officials found that 'it was the comparatively small class of more or less educated Africans who consumed not "Trade" but high class spirits who, with the exception of a few Chiefs, represented the only habitual drunkards to be met with in Nigeria.'[107] Although the gin exported to West Africa was cheap in comparison to other distilled liquors, its consumption was still expensive in terms of the local African economy. The Senior Assistant Treasurer of the Gold Coast observed that, therefore, '[t]o get really drunk would cost a native more than he could often

[104] PRAAD/A ADM 7/1 Blue Books of Statistics; *Papers relative to the Liquor Trade in West Africa. Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty. May, 1897* (London: HMSO 1897), 16–8; 'Liquor trade in West Africa. Prohibition and the Native. Questions of Policy', *The Times* 8 April 1919; Akyeampong, *Drink, Power, and Cultural Change*, 85.

[105] Herbert Tugwell, Letter to the Editor of the "Times", *The Times*, 27 March 1899; TC DA 44/1/11 Evidence for the Liquor Traffic Commission: Interview with the Alafin of Oyo, 11 February 1909.

[106] TC DA44/1/11 'Drink on the Gold Coast', *The Temperance Chronicle* (cutting, n.d. [*c.* 1910]).

[107] PRO CO583/108 Clifford to Churchill, 11 February 1922; for a similar observation for the Gold Coast, see: PRO CO554/41Governor, Gold Coast, to Milner, 6 March 1919.

afford.'[108] Furthermore, the system practiced in Southern Africa of paying labourers partly in liquor (the 'tot system'), was extremely rare in West Africa.[109] In 1909, a Committee of Inquiry into the liquor trade in Southern Nigeria concluded that '[i]t goes without saying that the standard of sobriety in Southern Nigeria is very much higher than that of the United Kingdom' and that there was 'absolutely no evidence of race deterioration due to drink.'[110]

The strong growth in absolute terms of liquor imports was part of the general increase of imports during the nineteenth century, made possible by the increase in agricultural exports from West Africa. Even though the liquor imports increased, they normally remained well behind textiles as a percentage of the total trade, while tobacco and hardware also continued to be important. For example, in 1893, at the height of the gin trade, the value of general imports into Lagos was £749,027, of which £271,220 was for cotton goods, while the combined value of the gin and rum imported was £93,508.[111] Furthermore, as wealth—and thus the ability to acquire foreign imports—had become more dispersed among the population in comparison to the days of the slave trade, gin, too, could spread much more widely over West Africa. Not all the imported gin was actually drunk, however, and towards the end of the nineteenth century, imported gin had four main uses. A first use of gin was consumption through social or individual drinking, which seems to have occurred mainly in the coastal areas, where gin was more affordable than in the hinterland, where gin could cost up to three or four times what it cost at the coast.[112] In the hinterland, it appears that gin was only consumed in considerable quantities during weddings, funerals, and festivals. The ritual use was the second main function of gin, continuing the already existing ritual roles of

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[108] 'Extract from address by Mr. Hesketh J. Bell, Senior Assistant Treasurer, Gold Coast Colony, to the African Trade Section of the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce, 1st May, 1893' in: *Papers relative to the Liquor Trade in West Africa*, 14.

[109] Pamela Scully, 'Liquor and labor in the Western Cape, 1870–1900' in: Jonathan Crush and Charles Ambler, eds., *Liquor and Labor in Southern Africa* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press 1992), 56–77; *Papers relative to the Liquor Trade in West Africa*, 45.

[110] *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Liquor Trade in Southern Nigeria* (1909) [Command Paper 4906].

[111] PRAAD/A ADM 7/1 Blue Books of Statistics; Lynn, *Commerce and Economic Change*, 69; Raymond E. Dumett, 'John Sarbah, the Elder, and African mercantile entrepreneurship in the Gold Coast in the late nineteenth century', *Journal of African History* 14.4 (1973), 653–79, there 671.

[112] *Papers relative to the Liquor Trade in West Africa*, 14.

rum and brandy. Contemporary observers mentioned that quite a large portion of total gin imports was thus employed. Mary Kingsley, for example, estimated that one-eight of the total of imported spirits in the Niger Delta was used for 'fetish-worship'.[113] Very widespread, especially through the hinterland of the Niger Delta, was the third use of gin, whereby the bottles and cases were kept intact and utilised as currency, and equally widespread was the fourth main use of gin for conspicuous display.

While the trade in palm oil and other agricultural products allowed small producers access to the marketplace, thereby dramatically expanding the potential market for affordable imported goods, it did not result in revolutionary changes in other respects.[114] In many areas, those who were already in a position of relative power were able to mobilise and exploit labour to take maximum advantage of the new opportunities and further strengthen their position. Others built up capital and power by operating successfully in the collecting, bulking and transporting of palm oil.[115] Thus while the trade opened up opportunities for small producers, it also strengthened existing social differentiation, which was expressed through the consumption of imported goods. The appeal of imported goods lay in the gains they gave their owners in converting material goods into the fundamental values of the African political economy: dependents and dependency.[116] Among the Igbo, the growing export market led to the emerging of 'big men' (*Ogaranyan*). These wealthy palm oil producers and traders quickly established themselves in the political economy, which was aided by their display of commercialized social markers of male status and prestige. Their consumptive habits conspicuously included imported goods such as cases of gin and guns, but also traditional markers of wealth such as slaves and yams. These forms of conspicuous consumption influenced most other men in the local communities.[117] When slavery declined, imported goods became even more important as markers of social status,[118] reflecting Joseph Miller's observation that, '[b]eyond the obvious coercive potential of

[113] Kingsley, 'Trade and labour in West Africa', 666.
[114] Lynn, *Commerce and Economic Change*, 58–9.
[115] Oriji, 'A re-assessment', 523–48.
[116] Miller, *Way of Death*, 94.
[117] Carolyn A. Brown, *'We Were All Slaves' African Miners, Culture and Resistance at the Enugu Government Colliery* (London: James Currey 2003), 35, 44.
[118] Don Ohadike, '"When slaves left, owners wept": Entrepreneurs and emancipation among the Igbo people', *Slavery and Abolition* 19.2 (1998), 196–201; Jeremy

muskets and the political prestige of strong drinks, the sheer circulation of imports of any sort nurtured social and political stratification in Africa.'[119] Bottled gin was thus one item amongst an array of imported commodities, some of which, such as the top hat and the pipe, were depicted in the Fon altar discussed at the very beginning of this chapter. Other goods included building materials and musical instruments.[120] In Ikwerre in Southeast Nigeria, wealthy men cemented imported decorated dinner plates into the outside walls of their houses (see Figure 2.5).[121] Perhaps the most important category of such commodities was that of imported textiles, used to indicate differences in social status throughout coastal West Africa.[122] Late nineteenth-century photographs of members of the Western-educated coastal elite often show them wearing formal European clothing. When Anglican missionaries first visited the interior town of Awka, in 1899, they were surprised to find that most of the men wore some European articles of clothing, such as a sailor-hat, a pair of trousers, or a waistcoat, while many carried whips, apparently as a fashion accessory.[123] Most of the textiles imported into West Africa were pieces of cloth, and these were used either as such (worn wrapped around the body), or tailored into Western-style shirts or indigenous African garments. As an indication of social status of the wearer, the quality of the cloth mattered, of course, as well as its pattern and colour. When turned into a garment, the style of the cut mattered, and in all cases it mattered how the clothing was worn, how items of clothing were combined, and what accessories were carried. All of this was often connected to local political power. Among the Kalabari in the Niger Delta, for example, different ranks of chiefs, gentlemen, and 'youth that matter' would wear different clothes. The chiefs would wear gowns of an indigenous design, made from thick, multi-coloured imported fabrics, worn with a formal hat such as the

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Rich, 'Civilized attire: refashioning tastes and social status in the Gabon Estuary, c. 1870–1914', *Cultural and Social History* 2 (2005), 200.

[119] Miller, *Way of Death*, 94.

[120] Michel Doortmont, ed., *The Pen-Pictures of Modern Africans and African Celebrities by Charles Francis Hutchison. A Collective Biography of Elite Society in the Gold Coast Colony* (Leiden and Boston: Brill 2005), 26 and *passim*; PRAAD/A ADM 41/4/11 Civil Record Book Keta District, 15 April 1921—Bruce Brothers vs Hon. Fia Sri II of Awunaga.

[121] http://www.siu.edu/~anthro/mccall/jones/misc.html.

[122] Miller, *Way of Death*, 82; Steiner, 'Another image of Africa'; Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World*, 230–3; Rich, 'Civilized attire', 190.

[123] Mrs T. J. Dennis, 'A week's itineration in the Ibo country', *Church Missionary Intelligencer* (September 1899), 780.

English top hat, and they would always carry a cane, umbrella, or walking stick. By contrast, the young men of influence would wear a plain, light-coloured shirt made of lightweight cotton, and they were allowed, but not required, to carry an umbrella or walking stick.[124]

Imported goods indicated social status through the display of wealth, style, and access. All imported commodities, no matter how cheap from a European perspective, were expensive goods in West Africa.[125] Therefore, owning such items—and even more so consuming them, or giving them away—indicated wealth. It was therefore better to serve imported drinks than palm wine to your guests. Around 1900, the *Alafin* of Oyo complained, or perhaps bragged, that during the most recent festival he had used eighty cases of gin to entertain his guests, as a cost of £30.[126] But a simple display of wealth was not enough to indicate social status. One also had to do it properly, and show the appropriate style. Here, style works as an indication of knowledge. By buying or making commodities in the correct, fashionable style, the owner displays his or her sophistication, knowledge, and access to the wider world. This is why some West Africans had local craftsmen produce tables and chairs for them, as a means of importing the style of European furniture. Commoners from Asante in the hinterland of the Gold Coast, who had moved to the coast and lived there for some time while they engaged in trading, claimed status through the display of wealth and European style upon their return to Asante.[127] In the Asante capital Kumasi, they built up a reputation as connoisseurs of drink who wore beautiful cloths.[128] On the coast, many Western-educated West Africans avoided gin in favour of 'high class' spirits such as whisky. Not only was gin relatively cheap on the coast, it was also the drink

[124] Joanne B. Eicher and Tonye V. Erekosima, 'Why do they call it Kalabari? Cultural authentification and the demarcation of ethnic identity' in: Joanne B. Eicher, ed., *Dress and Ethnicity. Change across Space and Time* (Oxford and Washington, DC: Berg 1995), 139–64; there 147–9.

[125] This is not to say that imported goods were always more expensive than locally produced commodities. The cheaper qualities of imported cotton cloth were significantly cheaper than locally made cloth, which accounted for their popularity in West Africa. Nevertheless, even such cheap imported textiles were expensive for most West African consumers, while the local cloth was often entirely unaffordable.

[126] TC DA 44/1/11 Evidence for the Liquor Traffic Commission: Interview with the *Alafin* of Oyo, 11 February 1909.

[127] Kwame Arhin, 'Rank and class among the Asante and Fante in the nineteenth century', *Africa* 53.1 (1983), 2–22; Kwame Arhin, 'A note on the Asante Akonkofo: a non-literate sub-elite, 1900–1930', *Africa* 56.1 (1986), 25–31.

[128] Akyeampong, *Drink, Power, and Cultural Change*, 56–7.

that was bought by illiterates.[129] However, even to those with wealth and style, some commodities could still be out of bounds if their use was restricted to only certain groups in society, such as ritual specialists, chiefs, or male elders. In the example of Kalabari clothing, only the chiefs were allowed the special gown with hat and stick. Similarly, Akyeampong has argued that in the Gold Coast, access to imported gin and indeed any alcohol used to be controlled by chiefs and male elders.[130] The elders of today confirm this view, and emphasise that in the past, gin could only be drunk by chiefs and elders, and not by women and young men, unless the chiefs offered it to them at special occasions. Even young men who had managed to acquire wealth were not allowed to buy the drink, and according to some of the elders I interviewed, they would be heavily penalised or even killed if they tried.[131] However, I suspect that the relationship between wealth, gin, and male power must have been slightly more complex than the elders nowadays suggest, with the acquisition and consumption of gin by successful younger males as one step towards achieving status as elders or chief. In this sense, the changes in the West African export economy that resulted in gin becoming more affordable and more widespread, also allowed the wealthy younger men to claim positions among the local elites. Their conspicuous consumption of imported liquor in towns and their membership of drinking clubs thus constituted a challenge to the power of members of the then-existing elites.[132] However, the eventual gaining of status and power by these young men, and their cooptation in the group of chiefs and elders, does not appear to constitute a radical departure from the way in which previous generations had achieved such positions.

While gin could thus be used to purchase status and power, it also literally functioned as currency, especially in Southern Nigeria. The use of gin as currency was not unique to West Africa, as it was also used as such in seventeenth-century Canada by European colonists as well as by the Native American population.[133] Also, gin was not the only imported good that functioned as West African currency. During

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[129] PRO CO554/41 Governor, Gold Coast, to Milner, 6 March 1919.
[130] Akyeampong, *Drink, Power, and Cultural Change*, 15–6.
[131] Interview with Midawo Shitor Dzigbah and Henry Aflakpui, held in Anyako, 3 August 2000.
[132] Akyeampong, *Drink, Power, and Cultural Change*, 47, 53.
[133] Van der Sloot, *Het Echte Schiedamse Jeneverboek*, 44.

2.5 House with inset plates in the wall. Ikwerri, Southeastern Nigeria, 1930s

2.6 General store selling a diverse selection of imported wares

the nineteenth century, a wide variety of items were used as money, including gold dust, cowrie shells, iron and brass rods, manillas of different sizes, foreign silver coins such as US dollars and Maria Theresa dollars, cloth, salt, and gin. The popularity of these different currencies varied with geographical area and type of trade, and changed over time. The foreign coins were especially popular in the illegal slave trade, while cowries, manillas, and brass rods were widespread in the palm oil trade. Of these, cowries were especially popular in the Gold Coast, and also in Dahomey, the Yoruba area, and on the Benin River. Manillas and brass rods were predominantly used in the Niger Delta and on the Cross River. In Nigeria, local currencies and cowries were often used for relatively small purchases, while other imported currencies were used for larger payments. Of the different sizes of manillas, the largest size was mainly used for the payment of bride-wealth or for initiation into title societies.[134]

Imported currencies devalued considerably during the second half of the nineteenth century. This was one of the consequences of the introduction of the steamship services between Europe and West Africa, which enabled European merchants to cheaply supply large amounts of currency. In Dahomey the devaluation of the cowrie hurt those who held large stocks of them and caused problems for state finances, which resulted in a reluctance to accept cowries. The devaluation destabilized the existing multiple-currency system and, as Lynn has noted, led to the steady growth of cash payments and the use of paper receipts, especially on the coast.[135] In the hinterland, however, regardless of the devaluation, existing currencies continued to be used. Although a specially designed British West African coinage was introduced as official currency in 1913, brass rods, copper wires, tobacco, and gin, continued

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[134] Lynn, *Commerce and Economic Change*, 69–70; Reynolds, *Trade and Economic Change*, 90; Miller, *Way of Death*, 81; Felicia Ekejiuba, 'Currency instability and social payments among the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria, 1890–1990' in: Jane Guyer, ed., *Money Matters. Instability, Values and Social Payments in the Modern History of West African Communities* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann 1995), 133–61, there 136–8; G. H. Neville, 'West African currency', *Journal of the Royal African Society* 17.67 (1918), 223–6.

[135] Robin Law, 'Cowries, gold, and Dollars: exchange rate instability and domestic price inflation in Dahomey in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries' in: Jane Guyer, ed., *Money Matters. Instability, Values and Social Payments in the Modern History of West African Communities* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann 1995), 53–73, there 67–8; Francis Agbodeka, *An Economic History of Ghana from the Earliest Times* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press 1992), 47; Lynn, *Commerce and Economic Change*, 136–7; *Lagos Observer*, 12 October 1882.

to be used as money in Eastern Nigeria until about 1952.[136] In contrast to what happened to imported currencies more generally, it appears that the importance of gin as currency increased after 1860.[137] Cases of gin, or individual bottles of gin, were regarded as a stable currency that kept its value. Colonial officials suspected that gin's popularity as a widely accepted and convenient form of currency resulted in part from the steady increase of import duties, which meant that this for once was a currency that tended to appreciate, rather than devaluate.[138] Also, as gin was imported in fixed quantities, and as cases of gin were easily divided (each case containing, depending on its size, either 12 or 15 bottles of equal contents), it was relatively easy to calculate the value of other commodities in terms of gin. In Southern Nigeria, large quantities of gin were stored as accumulated wealth, and often kept for decades. Colonial documentation even contains suggestions that there have been instances where gin had been kept so long that the corks had rotted away and the liquor had been lost.[139] In 1922 Governor Clifford wrote that,

> …gin is still being put to these uses in Nigeria, and when I was at Brass in August, 1920, a local Chief was pointed out to me who was reputed to have 20,000 unbroached cases of pre-war gin in his house, worth it was at that time it was computed some £50,000, which represented, not only his enormously valuable trading-capital, but the accumulated wealth of a long lifetime. He was personally, I was informed, a very moderate consumer of liquor.[140]

[136] Neville, 'West African currency', 223; Ekejiuba, 'Currency instability and social payments', 138.

[137] H. Paffenholz, 'Schnaps—Zahlungsmittel in Nigeria (Schnapsflaschenfund am Ogun-River)', *Der Primitivgeldsammler* 9.2 (1988), 52–6.

[138] PRO CO 583/108 Clifford to Churchill, 11 February 1922.

[139] *Ibidem*.

[140] PRO CO 583/108 Clifford to Churchill, 11 February 1922; however, missionary G. T. Basden strongly disagreed with such claims: 'In evidence given before the Liquor Traffic Commission mention was made of the practice of purchasing gin to hold as a treasure. This may be the case in some parts, but it most certainly is not so in the district with which I am acquainted. There are huge stacks of gin bottles—sometimes hundreds together—but they do not contain liquor; they are merely records of what once existed' G. T. Basden, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria* (London: Seeley, Service & Co. 1921; reprinted London: Frank Cass 1966), 200.

The marketing of gin

Having outlined the introduction of imported liquors in West Africa during the slave trade, the changes in the production and packaging of gin that placed Dutch and German gins within the reach of African consumers, and the changes in West African consumer demand during the nineteenth century, one more question remains to be answered in this chapter: How did gin from Holland and Germany reach their consumers in the African interior? During the nineteenth century, the liquor trade was part of the general trade in cloth, tobacco, utensils, and so on (see Figure 2.6).[141] This trade was largely in the hands of trading houses that operated from Britain, France, or Germany. Also active were a number of African merchants, who ordered their wares through commission houses in Europe. In this set-up, European gin producers had very little influence on how their gin was marketed in West Africa.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, most of the trading houses owned or chartered their own ships for the journey between Europe and West Africa. From 1850 onwards, they increasingly made use of the regular steamship services from Liverpool and Hamburg that often called at Rotterdam to load cases of gin.[142] The trading houses would order their goods straight from the producers, usually with instructions to ship the goods directly to the West African port for which the order was intended. These orders often gave very exact specifications, reflecting the trading companies' understanding of what was popular in a specific area of West Africa at that exact moment. The amounts of goods ordered fluctuated greatly. On the one hand these fluctuations reflected the changes in demand and price for palm oil and other produce. On the other hand they reflected attempts by traders to respond to the West African market. If at one stage in one area a high demand existed for gin, while that for cotton goods was low, then all trading houses would stock up on gin. This then resulted in a situation where there was a local oversupply of gin, and attention would now be given to other imports for a while.

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[141] PRO CO 96/138 Trade Crossing the Prah River, 20 March 1882.
[142] Lynn, *Commerce and Economic Change*, 95–105.

By the late 1880s, West African traders experienced that certain brands sold better than others.[143] While distillers had registered their own brands, much of the gin was exported under the private labels of the trading houses, such as F. & A. Swanzy's 'Double Crown Geneva'. It was also common to export the gin under a combination of a distiller's trademark and the name of the trading company, such as the 'Prize Medal Geneva selected for A Miller, Bro & Co'. The trading houses often gave detailed instructions for the packaging. An order by Swanzy's for Henkes 'Stork Gin' specified that 'the cases to be white instead of red and the words Extra Strength to be branded on each case, and a label to be put on each flask bearing the same words . . . make the cases look as nice as possible.'[144] The trading houses would do business with several distillers, and shopped around to get the cheapest supplies. If the gin of one distillery proved very popular in the market, but another producer could supply more cheaply, then the latter producer was asked to supply their gin using labels and bottles that very closely resembled those of the first distiller.[145] It appears that some orders were intended to deceive West African buyers. Why else would a trading house place an order for gin with labels very closely resembling those of one of the main competitors, while specifying that there should be no mention of a company name on case, bottle or label?[146] Of course, the distillers were quite willing to adopt each others' trademarks, labels, and glass seals, even when not encouraged to do so by the trading houses. Gin producers in Hamburg often produced under labels that claimed the drink was made in Schiedam in Holland.[147] At the same time, Dutch distillers invented imaginary companies that they located in Hamburg. The Dutch firm of Herman Jansen, for example, shipped gin that was allegedly produced by the African T. Co. in Hamburg. The labels on the bottles showed a depiction of 'the Steam Distillery of the African T. Co.', which was simply a drawing of Jansen's own company

[143] Henkes Archive Box 21/3–21/8 Alex Bruce to J. H. Henkes, Accra, 13 October 1887.

[144] Henkes Archive Box 39/66, File 'Oude Jeneverorders'; Blankenheym & Nolet Archive 216/68 Exportorderboek Afrikaanse Westkust 1908–1909.

[145] Henkes Archive Box [no number] Bescheiden m.b.t. merken; Imitatiezaken (I), Henkes to Directie van de Nederlandsche Gist en Spiritusfabriek, 18 November 1904.

[146] Blankenheym & Nolet Archive 216/68 Exportorderboek Afrikaanse Westkust 1908–1909.

[147] Snikkers, 'Schiedam, spiritus en schnapps (3)', 67.

in Schiedam.[148] Real existing Hamburg trading houses, meanwhile, shipped large quantities of genuine Dutch gin alongside gin produced in Hamburg. At times, the steamers outwards from Hamburg arrived in West African ports carrying nothing but cases of gin.[149] Thus as consequence of the interconnectedness of the trade, and the tendency to copy successful features, the gin that arrived in West Africa from different producers in different countries showed remarkably similar features, regardless of whether the gin had been shipped for a British, German, French or African trading house, or whether it had been shipped from Liverpool, Hamburg, Rotterdam, Bordeaux or Marseille. Gin was typically sold in cases containing 12 or 15 square bottles. The cases always had the name of the distillery, a brand name or a trademark burned or painted on the sides, while the bottles often had names or trademarks embossed or had glass seals. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, these bottles always carried labels. The names and trademarks tended to stick to a limited number of themes. There was the dog-like animal theme, such as used by 'sheep-dog' and 'jackal' gin, after the well-known *Schnapshund* ('schnapps dog') that the Hamburg firm of J. J. W. Peters showed on its bottles. Another popular theme was the bird theme, probably after Henkes' 'Stork Gin', which featured a picture of a stork on the label and on the glass seal. Also popular were trademarks involving a star (such as 'Star Brand Aromatic Schnapps' and '*Genièvre Etoile*'), and gins featuring coins or medals on the label.

The steamships made their way down the West African coast according to a fixed schedule, calling at a number of bigger and smaller trading ports depending on the type of service. At each of the ports of call, the cargo for that destination was offloaded and brought ashore in surfboats. The gin, cloth, salt and other trade goods were then deposited in the stores of the trading house whose goods they were.[150] Shop and storage space were often rented from local chiefs or elders, or purpose-built on land that was leased.[151] Such leases could sometimes be acquired for a nominal amount if a local leader or trader wanted to attract

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[148] *Ibidem*, 60.

[149] *Lagos Observer*, 9 November 1882; 26 April 1883; 24 May 1883; 5 July 1883; 25 October 1883; 8 November 1883.

[150] PRAAD/A ADM 41/4/24 Criminal Record Book Keta District, 27 January 1892—Reg. vs. Anyiki M. Baba.

[151] PRAAD/A ADM 11/1/1187 Memorandum of agreement between H. Williams on behalf of J. & A. Swanzy, and Joachim Acolatse, 12 December 1882; Contract between Joachim Acolatse and F. Oloff, Agent of the Bremen Factory, 1 October

trade to the place or, when there was already a trading house active, to encourage competition which would result in better prices for the local produce traders. The stores on the coast, which could be owned by European trading houses or African merchants, had two main types of customers: the first was the small-scale trader, who could be male or female.[152] These small-scale traders received little credit or no credit at all, and would bring palm oil, rubber, or copra down in person, to receive an assortment of imported goods in return. Sometimes these small customers would trade for just one piece of cloth or a single bottle of gin at a time. They often had an account or 'book' with the trading house, which kept track of the value of goods taken away as against that of produce brought in. The second type of customer was that of the broker, who received what were often large amounts of trade goods on credit, which they then forwarded to markets in the interior, to purchase produce such as palm oil, kernels, and rubber. These brokers thus dealt with a number of small-scale traders in the interior, and they would extent credit to them.[153] The produce they had collected in this way was then forwarded to the trading houses on the coast for export. At the time it was argued that these middlemen preferred to use gin as a buying medium because it gave them the highest percentage of profit, and the lowest percentage of loss by damage when dealing with it.[154] Many of the final retailers in interior markets were female traders, who would purchase from a broker, often on credit, relatively small amounts of gin, alongside other trading goods.[155]

Towards the end of the century, a bottle bought on the coast for 9d or 1s., would cost 3s. or 4s. by the time it was sold a hundred miles inland.[156] This apparent disparity led to accusations that the middlemen traders were exploiting the producers in the hinterland, who were

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1884; ADM 41/4/4 Civil Record Book Keta District, 10 April 1894—Chief James Ocloo vs. Regis Aine.

[152] Felicia Ekejiuba, 'Omu Okwei: the merchant queen of Ossomari: a biographical sketch', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 3.4 (1967), 633–46.

[153] F. K. Ekechi, 'Gender and economic power: The case of Igbo market women of Eastern Nigeria' in: Bessie House-Midamba and Felix K. Ekechi, eds., *African Market Women and Economic Power. The Role of Women in African Economic Development* (Westport, CN and London 1995) 41–58.

[154] Kingsley, 'Trade and labour in West Africa', 666.

[155] TC DA44/1/11 Note Herbert Tugwell, 10 April 1909.

[156] *Papers relative to the Liquor Trade in West Africa*, 14.

unaware of the 'real price' of imported goods.[157] This is, however, unlikely. The West African produce trade took place in a very competitive trading environment, and not only was there intense competition among trading houses on the coast, there were also many brokers competing in the interior.[158] The high prices in the interior rather appear to have reflected the high cost of transporting imported goods inland, and produce towards the coast, as well as the risks involved with the extending of credit.

Traders in British West Africa that were operating near boundaries with French or German territories could increase their profit margins by smuggling. Substantial savings could thus be made on especially those goods that attracted high imports duties, such as rum, gin, and gunpowder. Dumett has suggested that it was mainly African firms who benefited from the inefficient British customs patrols, but American, British and German traders equally benefited from smuggling.[159] In the trading town of Keta, located on the Ghanaian coast close to the border with Togo, merchants who received palm oil and other produce for export, would give orders on their stores across the border for the equivalent in spirits and gunpowder. Thus while the trading firms left the actual smuggling—and the risk of getting caught by customs patrols—to their customers, they benefited from it, and smuggling was part of the business model.[160] With the expansion of the area under colonial domination during the period 1880–1914—increasing the area where import duties applied—the smuggling of spirits, cloth, gunpowder, and salt became widespread throughout West Africa. Smuggling was extremely profitable according to those involved in it.[161] The smuggling trade continued during the entire period of colonial rule, in spite of

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[157] Anthony I. Nwabughuogu, 'From wealthy entrepreneurs to petty traders: the decline of African middlemen in Eastern Nigeria, 1900–1950', *Journal of African History* 23.3 (1982), 365–79, there 368.

[158] David K. Fieldhouse, *Merchant Capital and Economic Decolonization. The United Africa Company 1929–1987* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1994), 100–2.

[159] Dumett, 'John Sarbah, the Elder, and African mercantile entrepreneurship', 672; Brooks, *Yankee Traders*, 277–81; PRAAD/A ADM 11/1/1113 Acting Colonial Secretary to C. Rothman & others, 17 April 1878; Acting Col. Secr. (A. Moloney) to Governor, 24 April 1878, SC 8/17 Ocansey papers, tration cashbook, Denu Factory; PRO CO 96/128 Despatch Governor Ussher, 23 November 1879; *Lagos Observer*, Thursday 1 June 1882.

[160] PRAAD/A ADM 11/1/1113 Memo Captain G. C. Childs, Inspector Constabulary, to Colonial Secretary, Keta, 22 April 1878; Interview with Torgbui Baku and twenty other chiefs, elders and queen mothers, held at Denu, 5 August 2000.

[161] Interview with Torgbui Kposegi III, held at Anyako, 3 August 2000.

colonial administrations' efforts to curb it through measures such as the negotiation and careful pitching of the height of import duties, checkpoints at trade routes, and armed customs patrols.[162] As a consequence, gin was sold in two different markets: there was the official trade through the trading houses, local market traders, and liquor stores, and there was the smuggling trade, with gin bottles being hidden in the roof of the gin seller's house, or buried in the compound. The news of the availability of smuggled gin was advertised by word of mouth, the product being described by terms such as *Kportomenu* ('something hidden under thatch') or *Togovi* ('child from Togo'). Thus, 'when someone told you that he or she had *Togovi* or *Kportomenu*, then the person was referring to gin or schnapps.'[163]

During the nineteenth century, apart from the text and illustrations on gin bottles and cases, the distillers or trading houses did not engage in the advertising of gin in West Africa. While local newspapers such as the *Lagos Observer* always carried a number of adverts for Liverpool Commission Agents and African Merchants, who announced that they were 'Established for the supply of every class of goods for the West Coast Trade,' spirits were not mentioned. It may be, however, that African traders used other means to advertise the product. Among a collection of African objects collected around 1900 by the Anglican Archdeacon Dandeson Crowther from the Bonny Pastorate in Nigeria is a carving of a man drinking gin. According to Crowther the object was a '*juju*' that had been placed in the house of a trader to increase gin sales:

> This is put in the corner of the house of the worshippers to invoke the buying of more of this drug for mercantile purposes and for consumption, hence it is made as a white man in a white man's dress.[164]

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[162] PRAAD/A ADM 41/4 Criminal and Civil record Books, Keta District (1890–1945); CSO 6/5 Preventive Service and Smuggling (1933–45); CSO 6/6 Smuggling from Ivory Coast to Ashanti (1930–38); PRAAD/H KE/C 27 Smuggling—general (1908–29); KE/C 146 Customs Preventive Service; PRO CO 583/181/14 Smuggling in Nigeria (1931–32); CO 852/217/11 West Africa: prevention of smuggling goods from adjoining French territory (1939). See also Paul Nugent, *Smugglers, Secessionists and Loyal Citizens on the Ghana-Togo Frontier: The Lie of the Borderlands Since 1914* (Athens: Ohio University Press 2002).

[163] Interview with Torgbui Kposegi III, held at Anyako, 3 August 2000; Interview with Sarah A. A. Afetsi and Yaovi Doe held at Tegbi, 2 August 2000.

[164] List of donations through Mayor Ridyard (National Museums Liverpool, internal document).

In this chapter I have described how, at the end of the nineteenth century, gin had become an important, and highly visible import into West Africa, having overtaken rum as the most popular imported liquor. I have argued that distilled liquors had first arrived in West Africa, and gained popularity as an important aspect of kinship rituals in the context of the transatlantic slave trade. During this period, however, gin was not significant among the liquors imported. I have shown that it was the restructuring of the economy as a consequence of the abolition of the slave trade that resulted in the changes in African consumer demand that led to the rapid rise of gin imports. As a result of this increased demand for gin, the West African market accounted for half of the total exports of Dutch distillers around 1900.[165] The importation of gin was also important to produce merchants, because the trade in gin allowed them to acquire palm oil and other produce for a good price; to colonial governments, because revenue from liquor could constitute up to 77 per cent of their total revenue;[166] and to anti-liquor trade campaigners, who were mainly concerned by the relative cheapness of gin. Gin clearly had become popular among African consumers, who used it for rituals, social drinking, conspicuous display, and as currency, but for whom gin had not yet become the 'King of Drinks'.

[165] Sluyterman and Vleesenbeek, *Drie Eeuwen De Kuyper*, 29.

[166] The figure quoted is for the British Niger Coast Protectorate in 1894–5. *Papers relative to the Liquor Trade in West Africa*, 44.

CHAPTER THREE

BECOMING THE KING OF DRINKS

Imports of gin into West Africa peaked between 1880 and 1914. They subsequently declined, from 84258 hectolitres in 1898 to 2610 hectolitres in 1939, with a brief revival during the 1920s. After World War II, gin imports stabilised at between 5000 and 7000 hectolitres, a mere fraction of the amount imported before World War I.[1] This coincided with a change in the position of imported gin. From being a popular drink which, depending on the context, could be used in a number of different ways, for example for social drinking or as currency, gin became a special drink with restricted circulation, significant as a necessary ingredient of West African traditional culture and as an emblem of traditional leadership. According to the elders, gin had become the only drink that could be used to pray to the gods: 'whiskey, brandy, etc., when used for the gods, it would mean that you had gone against their taboo.'[2] 'That would mean that you have spoilt them and it can cause harm to you by killing, going mad, etc.'[3]

When I asked Torgbui Baku and his elders in Denu what it was that made gin so special, they responded as follows:

> It was told and believed by our fore fathers time immemorial that the white Holland gin was a great Chief in Alcoholic world and had acted violently that at a time, it was decided to be discarded off the scene among the living. The great Chief 'GIN' accepted keeping itself away for peace to prevail. Life became meaningless, as the Gin was no longer participating in many events of the living beings. Everything remained motionless at the time. In countries where Gin was heartily accepted into the societies, activities were meaningfully and briskly performed in high spirit. Looking at the low spirit of the people who discarded the Great Chief Holland Gin, meetings of Elders were summoned to reconsider the banishment of the white Gin. Hence Holland Gin was adored to stay

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[1] Coen Kramers, *De Moutwijnindustrie te Schiedam* (Amsterdam:Uitgeverij Lieverlee, *c.* 1946); *Trouw*, 16 April 1999; interview with Wendy van Wijk of Bols Royal Distilleries, held at Zoetermeer, 6 May 1999.

[2] Interview with Hunua Yao Gakpo Dziekpor, Victor Gasu, Jimmy Dziekpor and Agumenu Dziekpor, held at Atiavi, 4 August 2000.

[3] Interview with Dakpo Akoto, held at Akatsi, 28 July 2000.

> among them for anything the people want to do be it living or spiritual. At one time, a decision was unanimously taken that since the Gin was considered high among them, a white or special Top Cover be used to seal its bottles to differentiate the beverage from other drinks, and also to be used for special purposes more specially for ritual ceremonies and to be the only drink before the Stools of Chiefs in addition to Liha.[4]

The crucial element in this narrative is the recognition of the importance of 'Chief Gin' through the experience of his absence. Therefore, my first interpretation of the story was that the period of absence referred to a specific, relatively recent, historical event: either to the prohibition by Britain of Dutch gin imports into West Africa between 1919 and 1923, or to the Gold Coast government's attempt to ban Dutch gin around 1930. However, when I put my interpretation of their story to Torgbui Baku and his elders, they denied any relation to recent historical events: 'Oh! No! We were referring to time immemorial from our great, great grandfathers. They told this story to other great grandfathers of ours before it got to us.'[5] The story nevertheless refers to a number of relevant aspects that may help to explain how gin became the King of Drinks. The narrative mentions the use of gin for ceremonies and stool rituals, which points towards a change in the uses to which gin was put, and to differences between the uses of gin compared to that of other alcohols. In this context the reference to gin as a 'white' drink may be relevant. Emmanuel Akyeampong discussed the importance of colour for explaining the different uses of rum and gin when he examined the use of alcoholic drinks among the Akan: rum and brandy, being red, are 'hot' drinks, connected to war gods and violence, while gin as a colourless drink shares in the ritual power of white objects.[6] Maybe we should understand the elders' reference to gin as 'white' and special in this context? The narrative also refers to explicit local debates about the status of gin, and an eventual decision by the elders to embrace gin for ritual ceremonies. Furthermore, the emphasis on the importance of a special white top cover, leads us to ask questions about product recognition, branding and brand consciousness. Finally, even though this narrative is said not to refer to any

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[4] Torgbui Baku and his Elders of Denu, personal communication, 4 August 2000; *Liha* refers to maize beer.

[5] Interview with Torgbui Baku and twenty other chiefs, elders and queen mothers, held at Denu, 5 August 2000.

[6] Emmanuel Akyeampong, *Drink, Power, and Cultural Change. A Social History of Alcohol in Ghana, c. 1800 to Recent Times* (Portsmouth, NH and London 1996), 28.

specific instances during the twentieth century, the experience during this century of times of limited availability will have had an impact on how highly gin was regarded.

I investigate all these aspects in this chapter. I first discuss the various and changing uses of gin against the backdrop of the establishment of colonial rule. Colonialism impacted on particular uses of gin without intending to do so, for example through the introduction of colonial currencies that challenged the particular use of gin bottles as unit of value. I then examine the changes in the liquor trade between 1900 and the 1930s, including the disruption of trade during World War I and the temporary ban of gin in its aftermath. The resulting combination of price, availability and status privileged Dutch gin among imported liquors. Finally, I explore how branding and product recognition helped to forge the ritual status of gin, as African consumers interpreted its colourlessness, bottle, label, and closure as indications that imported Dutch gin was particularly 'pure' and therefore appropriate for ritual use.

The changing uses of gin

During the nineteenth century, gin imported from Holland and Germany had spread mainly through areas where colonial rule had not yet been established. Even if towards the end of the century all the ports through which the gin was imported had been incorporated into European colonies and protectorates, effectively, these did not reach far inland beyond the immediate coastal areas. In terms of the trade and consumption of gin, colonial interference was limited to attempts to tax the gin trade that was conducted through their territories. Indeed, one of the factors that drove the gradual spread of colonies along the coastline was the desire to maximise revenue through import duties.[7] As was noted in the previous chapter, the steady increase of the duties on gin resulted on the one hand in a profitable smuggling trade, and on the other hand in the rising value of gin in the interior, which may have contributed to its popularity as a currency. Colonial administrations at this time did not consider the consumption by Africans of gin

[7] PRO CO 96/126–138 Despatches Governor Gold Coast January 1879–March 1882; PRAAD/A ADM11/1/1091 R. E. Firminger to Colonial Secretary, 26 March 1884.

or other imported liquors as problematic. They were more worried about the drunken behaviour of some of their own representatives, such as D. A. Lysagt, a colonial officer stationed in Lagos. It was said that he was often very drunk and 'incapable of taking care of himself,' and that he would beat Africans with a stick while walking in the street. He was ordered back to Accra.[8] *The Lagos Times* wondered: 'When will *real gentlemen* be sent to occupy posts which require their holders to comport themselves with dignity and exemplary self-respect?'[9]

A concern with 'real gentlemen' and Englishness, or more generally European-ness, was quite characteristic for West Africa's cosmopolitan coastal communities. Many of these towns had been sites of contact and exchange between African and European traders for centuries, and foreign goods and styles had been introduced there first. Goods that were costly in the interior, such as gin, were relatively inexpensive on the coast. This allowed commercially and politically successful inhabitants of coastal towns to engage in complex displays of consumption involving foreign imports. There were clear fashions, and especially in the popular cloth trade, European traders could only trade in a town if they stocked the exact style and colour that was popular in that place at that moment. The exchange of mainly slaves, and later agricultural produce, for imported goods, meant that these goods circulated widely through the interior, together with an understanding of their special status as sophisticated, luxury goods. People who came to the coast from the hinterland were impressed with the general availability of products that were scarce in the interior. Young men coming from societies where access to alcoholic liquor was controlled by chiefs and male elders, and where a bottle of gin signified considerable wealth, were particularly impressed with the relatively cheap and easy access to imported liquor at the coast. In the Gold Coast and in Nigeria, these young men organised in drinking clubs, where they expressed their autonomy through the drinking of imported liquors they could not access in their communities of origin.[10] These clubs were, however, not merely about drink, they were also about European style and fashion. As such, they were part of the broader popularity of clubs and Western-style social organisations that in the late nineteenth century spread along the coast. The membership of these Western-style associa-

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[8] PRO CO 96/134 Despatches Governor Gold Coast January–May 1881.

[9] *The Lagos Times*, 9 March 1881.

[10] Akyeampong, *Drink, Power, and Cultural Change*, 47, 53–5; George T. Basden, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria* (London: Frank Cass 1966 [first published 1921]), 84.

tions included many members of the West African coastal elite families. Many of these families had acquired their wealth through trading with European and American merchants, and a number of them had a claim to European identity through British or Dutch or Danish ancestry. Many had been able to send their children to Europe for education through their trading contacts or family relations.[11] Generally, they emphasised their position through a conspicuous display of their knowledge of the 'foreign': they cultivated Western manners, wore Western dress, consumed imported European tinned foods, and often spoke English.[12] The cultivation of European-ness on the coast is thus not a consequence of colonial occupation, but reflects a much older pattern connected to centuries of trading relations. This difference between the coast and the hinterland in terms of wealth, culture and politics, and often expressed through patterns of consumption, continued after European colonial administrations had incorporated coastal towns together with the hinterland in their various West African colonies.

The West African hinterland was brought under effective colonial control between 1880 and 1920, partly through conquest, and partly through diplomacy facilitated by European trading companies as well as by Christian missionaries and their followers.[13] Colonial expansion did not immediately alter existing patterns of gin consumption, but it did affect the trading networks through which gin reached African consumers. European trading companies found it easier to move into the interior to set up stores, which reduced their dependency on African brokers.[14] African small-scale traders, many of them women, nevertheless continued to be an essential element in the trading network, retailing

[11] Michel Doortmont, ed., *The Pen-Pictures of Modern Africans and African Celebrities by Charles Francis Hutchison. A Collective Biography of Elite Society in the Gold Coast Colony* (Leiden and Boston: Brill 2005).

[12] PRAAD/A ADM 5/2/3 *Census Report 1921 for The Gold Coast Colony, Ashanti, The Northern Territories and the Mandated Area of Togoland* (Accra: Government Press 1923), 65; Rosalind Tigwell, James Deemin and the organisation of West African trade—1880 to 1915 (M.Phil thesis, University of Liverpool 1978), 311.

[13] A. Adu Boahen, *African Perspectives on Colonialism* (Accra and London: Sankofa and James Currey 1987).

[14] Anthony I. Nwabughuogu, 'From wealthy entrepreneurs to petty traders: the decline of African middlemen in Eastern Nigeria, 1900–1950', *Journal of African History* 23.3 (1982), 365–79; Martin Lynn, *Commerce and Economic Change in West Africa: the Palm Oil Trade in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge and New York, NY: Cambridge University Press 1997), 157–8.

gin and other imported goods in markets throughout the interior.[15] These so-called 'petty traders' could become quite wealthy. Mrs Kporfa, who during the colonial period sold gin, cloth and bowls in Akatsi in southeast Ghana, could afford to build a house with five rooms and roof it with aluminium sheets.[16] While, initially, colonial governments did little to reduce the amount of gin imported, they did attempt to keep a close watch on a trade that contributed a significant proportion to the total revenue of nearly all West African colonies. During the first decade of the century, the income from the taxation of liquor imports constituted between 30 and 40 per cent of total government revenue in the Gold Coast, Togo, Lagos, and Southern Nigeria.[17] Not only did governments invest in the building up of various forms of customs police to catch smugglers, they also introduced liquor licenses that had to be taken out by anyone wanting to retail liquor. The new offence of selling spirits without a license resulted in many convictions,[18] which was probably helped by the practice of paying a percentage of the penalty to the person instrumental in obtaining the conviction.[19] It is likely that this added burden on the retailers undermined the

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[15] TC DA44 1/11 Memo Herbert Tugwell, 10 April 1909; Axel Harneit-Sievers, 'African business, "economic nationalism," and British colonial policy: Southern Nigeria, 1935–1954', *African Economic History* 24 (1996), 25–68; Tom Forrest, *The Advance of African Capital. The Growth of Nigerian Private Enterprise* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 1994), 16–7. There appear to have been attempts by European firms to avoid this overall pattern. For instance, in the 1930s, the chiefs and elders of Akwamu in Ghana complained about unfair competition from travelling sales lorries operated by some of the merchant firms: 'these Lorries go from place to place, village to village, and as from door to door selling below the usual prices in the Stores in general this has made some of the Stores in Districts to be closed on conditions that, the inhabitants can get more cheaper in prices by buying these travelling Lorries. The same thing has cut down the women traders and our women can do nothing because they cannot compete the prices.' (PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Questionnaire on Liquor Policy, Answers by Omanhene and State Council of Akwamu, 24 June 1933).

[16] Interview with Dakpo Akoto held at Akatsi, 28 July 2000.

[17] Leonard Harding, 'Die Berliner Westafrikakonferenz von 1884/85 und der Hamburger Schnapshandel mit Westafrika' in: Renate Nestvogel and Rainer Tetzlaff, eds., *Afrika und der deutsche Kolonialismus: Zivilisierung zwischen Schnapshandel und Bibelstunde* (Berlin and Hamburg: Dietrich Reimer 1987), 19–40, there 32; Akyeampong, *Drink, Power, and Cultural Change*, 82; Simon Heap, 'Before "Star": the import substitution of Western-style alcohol in Nigeria, 1870–1970', *African Economic History* 24 (1996), 69–89, there 70–1.

[18] PRAAD/A 41/4/22 Criminal Record Book Keta District 1888–1890, 41/4/33 Criminal Record Book Keta District 1907–1909, 41/4/44 Criminal Record Book Keta District 1926–1927.

[19] PRAAD/A 41/1/25 Minute on breach of spirit licence ordinance, 25 June 1891.

position of the small-scale African traders relative to the European trading companies, although it did not stop them selling gin—with or without a licence.

The establishment of colonial rule may have impacted on the use and status of gin in at least three indirect ways. The ending of domestic slavery destroyed one important way of storing wealth and showing status, thereby in principle raising the relative importance of imported goods for these purposes. Furthermore, the efforts to incorporate chiefs and elders into systems of colonial administration by locating them within hierarchical chains of command, made it possible for traditional rulers to insist on payment in gin for the swearing of oath, the performance of rituals, and other traditional duties. It also helped them to strengthen 'traditional' rules restricting the consumption of gin to male elders, excluding young men and women, even though, locally, gin was often sold by female traders. Finally, the gradual replacement of a broad variety of existing local currencies with coins introduced by the colonisers, over time reduced the importance of gin as a currency.

The decline of the local trade currencies had already begun in the run-up to colonial expansion, from the 1870s onwards. As discussed in chapter two, this was mainly the result of the quick depreciation of the majority of the existing currencies, with the notable exception of gin. By the end of the nineteenth century, German and British silver coins were gaining popularity, not always for their currency value, but also because they could be melted down and turned into jewellery. In the British territories a dedicated British West African currency was introduced in 1913, while the importation of cowry shells was prohibited.[20] A large proportion of the new silver coins were melted down quickly. This factor, combined with a shortage of silver, led to the introduction of a number of inadequate alternatives: banknotes that were converted into pulp by a shower of rain, and coins made from a metal alloy that turned black after two months of being in circulation.[21] It is thus not surprising that colonial subjects throughout the region treated the British West African currency with suspicion, that in parts of Nigeria they only accepted the British coins at a much depreciated rate (if at all), and that they continued to use gin and other

[20] G. W. Neville, 'West African currency', *Journal of the Royal African Society* 17.67 (1918), 223–6; P. Mullendorf, 'The development of German West Africa (Kamerun)', *Journal of the Royal African Society* 2.5 (1902), 70–92, there 74.

[21] PRO CO 583/108 Clifford to Churchill, 11 February 1922.

local forms of money as currency.[22] Over time, as European trading companies increasingly insisted on cash transactions, and school fees for mission schools as well as colonial taxes all had to be paid in the official currency, the coloniser's money gradually gained acceptance.[23] Nevertheless, the use of gin as currency continued for many decades, especially for those payments whereby its monetary value had become bound up with its ritual meaning, such as fines imposed by chiefs and marriage rituals.

In the case of marriage, at least part of the bride price, which the groom paid to his in-laws, had to be settled in imported gin or rum. Colonial court cases indicate that this custom was already well established by the late-nineteenth century. This can be seen, for instance, in a series of cases before the District Commissioner of Keta in the 1890s, in which wives accused their husbands of slave dealing. In each instance, the woman claimed that she had been purchased by her 'husband' and hence was not properly his wife but his slave. It is likely that in a number of these cases, a married woman attempted to use the legislation against slave dealing as a way of achieving a divorce without her family having to repay (part of) the bride price.[24] To establish whether the woman in question was properly married or not, the court asked whether drink had been given. If rum or gin had been given to the in-laws, then the claim failed, as the woman had clearly been properly married to the man.[25] This practice had not changed by the 1920s, when in an attempt at defining marriage for the Court of Appeal, Fia Adamahu and other chiefs included among the requirements for marriage '[t]hat rum was distributed to the parents.'[26] There were four aspects of the wedding process for which gin was considered essential, although not every West African traditional marriage necessarily contained all these

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[22] *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Liquor Trade in Southern Nigeria* (1909) Command Paper 4906.

[23] Akanmu G. Adebanjo, 'Money, credit, and banking in colonial and postcolonial West Africa' in: Alusine Jalloh and Toyin Falola, eds., *Black Business and Economic Power* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press 2002), 147–75; Lynn, *Commerce and Economic Change*, 137; PRO CO 583/108 Clifford to Churchill, 11 February 1922.

[24] For a similar case, see: Judith Byfield, 'Women, marriage, divorce and the emerging colonial state in Abeokuta (Nigeria) 1892–1904', *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 30.1 (1996), 32–51.

[25] PRAAD/A ADM 41/4/22–24 Criminal Record Books Keta District 1888–1892.

[26] PRAAD/A ADM 41/4/92 Appeal Record Book (cases from Native Courts) 17 May 1917–27 January 1932, 'Answers to questions put forth by D.C.', 14 May 1923.

four elements. First, the parents or representatives of the man had to bring gin along on their visit to the family of the prospective bride, to ask for permission for the marriage. Then, once permission had been granted, gin had to be part of the package of gifts that constituted the agreed bride price. During the actual wedding ceremony, gin was used to pour libation to ask for the blessings of the gods, so that love, respect, good health, and children would exist in the couple's marriage. Finally, after the wedding had taken place, gin had to be kept available for some time to come, to share with members of the family who had not been present at the wedding.[27] When I asked elders why gin, rather than any other good, had to be used for marriage, they usually answered that this was an indication of respect to the parents and the grandparents, and that it was used to tell the ancestors of the marriage. However, Sarah Afetsi, commenting perhaps as much on the nature of marriage as on the symbolic use of gin, observed: 'I would say we were fools in the sense that we use this same drink for war and also use it when marrying!'[28]

These comments relating to marriage highlight one of the main difficulties in charting the rise of the ritual importance of imported gin in relation to other drinks: the sources for the first half of the twentieth century are often very imprecise in their descriptions of liquor and its ritual uses. While nearly all the people I interviewed maintained that gin and rum have been put to distinctly different uses since time immemorial, they were at times quite unsure as to which drink was used when exactly. Many of the remaining archival records are equally unclear as to whether rum or gin is referred to in the description of a ritual. African and European authors writing from the perspective of the mission or the anti-liquor trade movement were often very specific in identifying liquor as 'trade gin'. However, those sources that were not primarily concerned with denouncing imported liquor, and rather described local African ritual or political practice, tended to be quite vague about the exact nature of the drink that was used. One example of this can be found in the court case against a man accused of selling

[27] Interview with Dakpo Akoto held at Akatsi, 28 July 2000; Interview with Torgbui Akpate and elders, held at Srogboe, 1 August 2000; Interview with Martin Dey, Wilfred Acolatse, and Lucian Fiadzo, held at Keta, 2 August 2000; Interview with Midawo Shitor Dzigbah and Henry Aflakpui, held at Anyako, 3 August 2000; PRAAD/A CSO 21/22/88 Proceedings of Anlo Tribunal: the Joachim Acolatse Succession case (1931–1932).

[28] Interview with Sarah A. A. Afetsi and Yaovi Doe, held at Tegbi, 2 August 2000.

schnapps gin without a licence. From the description of the product, there can be no doubt that the product sold was indeed a bottle of schnapps gin. Nevertheless, the witness repeatedly mentions the sale of 'a bottle of rum,' and on only one occasion specifies that 'it was Schnap'.[29] It appears that when clerks translated proceedings in local languages into English, they often used 'rum' as a generic term for imported liquor. Another example of the seemingly inconsistent use of the terms gin and rum can be found in the report of a tribunal held in Srogboe in 1928 to enquire into an accusation that Torgbui Sri II, the paramount chief of Anlo, had 'put Anlo nation into the Have fetish'. This tribunal was an indigenous activity, completely outside the colonial judiciary system, although clearly influenced by the latter's form and procedures. At a crucial stage of the proceedings to determine whether the paramount chief was guilty or not, the court needed to establish if Torgbui Sri II had in fact given a bottle of liquor to a traditional priest, and if so with what intention. Interestingly, the various witnesses talk about the same bottle as 'rum' and as 'gin', apparently using the two terms interchangeably, or perhaps—as in the previous example—in translation the term 'rum' was used as the generic term for imported liquor, and 'gin' as the specific variety. The tribunal eventually acquitted the paramount chief, and fined the accuser a rather large amount in compensation. The specifications of the fine included £50 and three cases of gin.[30]

The specific use of gin for the payment of fines in chiefs' courts has outlived to this day the earlier more general use of gin as currency. Gin also had to be presented to the chief's court by any complainant who wanted to initiate a case. In 1912, the use of 'rum' to initiate court cases was described as follows: 'First they killed one sheep or goat one case of gin is given.'[31] Gin was resorted to in these contexts, not only because it was relatively expensive and its use showed respect to the chief and elders, but also because of its ritual significance. Some of the gin thus collected by the elders was used to pour libation to invoke

[29] PRAAD/A ADM 41/4/44 Criminal Record Book Keta District 1926–1927. 26 December 1926 I.G.P. vs S. K. Sososi and Sososi.

[30] PRAAD/A ADM 11/1/1091 Proceedings Meeting of the Anlo (Dua) State Council held at Keta's Srogboe village, 6 February 1928.

[31] PRAAD/A ADM 11/1/1661 Notes of Evidence taken before a Commission of Inquiry held in the Quittah District by Francis Crowther Esquire, Secretary of Native Affairs & Commissioner appointed…to inquire into the constitutions of the Division or Divisions included in the District of Quittah (1912).

the stool and the ancestors, so that the details of the case, and the way in which the elders had decided the case, could be explained to them.[32] However, fines did not always involve gin. According to Henry Aflakpui, it depended upon the offence. Only if you had committed a great offence such as insulting an elderly person, you would be required to present gin to show that you could not repeat your attitude.[33]

In 1915, chief James Ocloo was fined £5.8.0 and 3 cases of gin by a public meeting of chiefs on the grounds that he heard cases from other chiefs' courts.[34] The reasons for a chief to judge cases from outside might have been political, as throughout colonial West Africa, traditional rulers were arguing over the boundaries of their jurisdiction, as well as over the hierarchy of traditional leaders. Some chiefs claimed that in their area the wrong person had been made paramount chief, while others protested against being ranked under a chief that they considered their equal.[35] While James Ocloo disagreed with—and repeatedly protested against—the limitation of his jurisdiction to the town of Keta,[36] his motivation for hearing cases from outside his jurisdiction might equally have been financial, as the hearing of cases was quite a lucrative business. James Ocloo had been a blacksmith, but when he was made a chief he stopped blacksmithing and established his own native tribunal instead.[37] How much exactly it would cost to settle a case on oath would depend on the importance of the chief. Around 1910, a divisional chief would charge one goat or ram, one case of gin and £1.1.6, a substantial fee at the time, while a more important chief would charge three times as much.[38] Around the same time, there were many complaints about 'nonsense palavers': court cases manufactured

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[32] Interview with Martin Dey, Wilfred Acolatse, and Lucian Fiadzo, held at Keta, 2 August 2000; Interview with Sarah A. A. Afetsi and Yaovi Doe, held at Tegbi, 2 August 2000; Interview with Torgbui Baku and twenty other chiefs, elders and queen mothers, held at Denu, 5 August 2000.

[33] Interview with Midawo Shitor Dzigbah and Henry Aflakpui, held at Anyako, 3 August 2000.

[34] PRAAD/A ADM 39/1/181 Report of a Public Meeting held this day the 14th June 1915 Monday 9.30 A.M. at the Parade-ground Quittah [Keta].

[35] Olufemi Vaughan, *Nigerian Chiefs. Traditional Power in Modern Politics, 1890–1990s* (Rochester, NY, 2000).

[36] PRAAD/A ADM 11/1/1113 D.C., Keta, to C.E.P., 23 May 1907; ADM 11/1/1113 Fia Sri II of Awuna to N. Curling, 8 September 1908; ADM 11/1/597 James Ocloo to District Commissioner, Quittah, Quittah, 10 May 1915; ADM 11/1/1726 Notes on Chiefs "Continued from Vol. I" 1906–1921.

[37] Interview with Martin Kwasi Dey, held at Keta, 10 August 2000.

[38] PRAAD/A ADM 11/1/1661 Notes of Evidence.

by the chiefs or their messengers, with the sole purpose of extracting money from wealthy individuals by forcing them to swear—and thus pay for—the chief's oath to prove their innocence.[39] The colonial administrators were aware that chiefs abused the oath for political reasons and monetary gain, but were unable to stop the practice. Dependent on the chiefs for the local implementation of colonial rule, they feared that to legislate against the oath would undermine the power of the chiefs and hence the stability of colonial rule.[40] This situation also allowed chiefs and elders to articulate a traditional custom that excluded young men and women from the consumption of gin.

It was not just the chiefs who insisted on being presented gin for their services. It was also necessary to give gin when visiting a shrine (see Figure 3.2). In 1912 the procedure to visit the Nyigbla shrine in Eastern Ghana was described as follows:

> First you take two bottles of gin to the Tronwa and he will take one from you then give you one man to direct you to the woman and give her the other bottle and she goes into her own house (not Nyigbla's) and prays and calls Nyigbla to come and listen: and there she gives you the reply.[41]

Another shrine in the same area was approached in a similar fashion:

> The fetish Anyi has no stool. No walking stick, no cap—He only has two pots. He has a Tronshi fetish priest. Ahia Gbedi. His father was Tronshi too. No woman is allowed to go there. If you want to see him you consult Ahia Gbedi. We give Ahia Gbedi two bottles of gin. Ahia Gbedi gets one bottle of gin: he drinks only one glass and gives the rest to those who attend him. He gives small small to the ground for Anyi and put water on the top: that means it is good.[42]

For some shrines, gin bottles were not only part of the ritual for visiting the shrine, but they even had gin bottles integrated in the structure of the shrine (see Figure 3.1). In Southeast Nigeria a number of shrines had largely been constructed out of hundreds of gin bottles, while in Ghana the existence of a bottle shrine on Mount Krobo has been mentioned.

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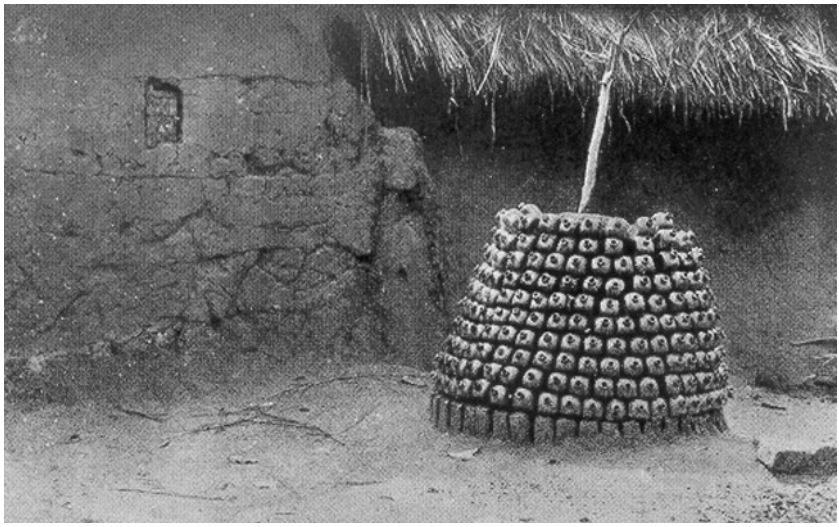
[39] PRAAD/A ADM 11/1/1388 Minute for the Governor [by Native Secretary?], 16 May 1908.

[40] PRAAD/A CSO 21/1/67[B] The abuse of the oath system by native rulers (1931–1935).

[41] PRAAD/A ADM 11/1/1661 Notes of Evidence.

[42] PRAAD/A ADM 11/1/1661 Notes of Evidence.



3.1 Anyanwu shrine in Awka, Southeast Nigeria, around 1910

3.2 Alusi shrine with gin bottle. Southeast Nigeria, 1930s

The term shrine covers quite a broad range of sacred places. Shrines could be for more or less powerful gods, and they could be tied to a specific stool or clan, or independent. Powerful shrines would have one or more priests and a number of shrine attendants, and would attract supplicants from quite far away. On the other end of the scale there were the shrines to family ancestors, looked after by the family elder and in many ways part of domestic routine. Libation had to be poured for the ancestors as well as for gods, but this did not always involve the use of gin.[43] According to Henry Aflakpui, the ancestors would sometimes ask for gin themselves. 'They did this by way of falling trade, or when people more often than not got annoyed with almost everything you said.' When this occurred, it was necessary to visit one of the shrines to find out the explanation for the negative things that were happening. 'Surprisingly, you may be told that your dead grandparents wanted you to pour libation for them. The moment you did this, then, everything would start going on well with you.'[44]

In Eastern Ghana, during the first decades of colonial rule, tensions were evident between the chiefs and the priests of powerful shrines. It appears that the shrine priests, like the chiefs, fabricated charges, and thus forced people to come to their shrine for consultation. There was of course a fee for the consultation, which involved gin. As a result of the consultation the shrine then insisted on additional payments,[45] which could involve the giving away of a female family member to the shrine.[46] The Gold Coast administration was aware of this practice, just as it was aware of the chiefs' manipulations of the oath. As the shrine priests were outside the structure of colonial rule, it was thought

[43] Marion Kilson, 'Libation in Ga ritual', *Journal of Religion in Africa* 2.2 (1969), 161–78.

[44] Interview with Midawo Shitor Dzigbah and Henry Aflakpui held at Anyako, 3 August 2000.

[45] PRAAD/H KE/C/21 A. H. L. Richter, D.C., Quittah, to Prov. Commissioner, 30 October 1909; PRAAD/A ADM 11/1/1679 Complaint from Alice Aku, Peki, 15 January 1932.

[46] PRAAD/A ADM 41/4/33 Criminal Record Book Keta District, October 1907—November 1909, 5 July 1909—Rex vs. Ahiakpor, Dotse, Ahosodey, Husunukpe, Tsegah and Doe; ADM 41/4/11 Civil Record Book Keta District, 1916–1924, 25 Aug 1916—Sampson Paul v. Sogli; CSO 21/22 Proceedings of Anlo Tribunal: the Joachim Acolatse Succession case (1931–1932); PRAAD/H KE/C/21 Abraham Bor Klo to Governor, 2 November 1915.

desirable and possible to close down the more powerful shrines.[47] At the local level, however, chiefs approached the shrine priests with caution and respect.[48] In Southeast Ghana, for example, it was not always clear who commanded most power in an area, a chief or a priest, and it was thought possible for a shrine priest to overturn the decision of otherwise quite powerful chiefs.[49] Both chiefs and priests functioned as gatekeepers between the people and their gods and ancestors, and both used rituals involving gin to mediate this relationship. While in the case of the chiefs, *de facto*, their gatekeeper-function shifted to being an intermediary to the colonial administration, they continued to present themselves as the keeper of the stool and the intermediary to the ancestors. Therefore, even if the chief were a Christian, he would continue to perform traditional rituals, such as those relating to the stool, involving the pouring of libation with gin. The tension is evident in the way Fia Sri II of Anloga was addressed as 'a Christian, and put on Fetish Stool,'[50] while he was also accused of owning 'powerful fetishes, formed from human bodies,' that could kill people.[51] In fact it can be argued that the ritual aspects of chieftaincy achieved more importance during the first half of the twentieth century as a necessary justification of the position of the chief vis-à-vis the people as well as vis-à-vis the colonial state.

Throughout Southern Nigeria and the Gold Coast, gin was linked to funerals. Gin was used to announce a death, it was used to pour libation to inform the ancestors, and it was also presented to the mourners. In the case of the funeral of an important person this could involve the consumption of relatively large amounts of liquor, which was a reflection of both the amount of liquor available at the funeral, and the importance of imported liquor for conspicuous consumption. For

[47] PRAAD/A ADM 39/1/181 Report of a Public Meeting held this day the 14th June 1915 Monday 9.30 A.M. at the Parade-ground Quittah [Keta]; ADM 41/4/44 Criminal Record Book Keta District 1926–1927, 28 March 1926—I.G.P. vs Dowi.

[48] PRAAD/A ADM 11/1/1091 Solemn Oath of Fia Adamah II of Some (Anlo Division) before the Anlo 3 Divisions (6 February 1928).

[49] PRAAD/H KE/C/21 Fia of Awuna-Ga [Anloga] to Secretary of Native Affairs 20 December 1912.

[50] PRAAD/A ADM 11/1/1091 Proceedings Meeting of the Anlo (Dua) State Council held at Keta's Srogboe village, 6 February 1928.

[51] PRAAD/A CSO 6/6/101 Anloa Keta to S.N.A., 8 January 1940.

the overwhelming majority of the population of the interior these were the only occasions where they drank imported liquor.[52]

The impact of World War I

The outbreak of World War I affected the availability in West Africa of many imported commodities, including gin. Gin produced in Germany, as a product of the enemy, was no longer welcome in British and French West African colonies. The Netherlands was neutral in this conflict, and importation of Dutch commodities into West Africa was thus not officially banned. However, it became increasingly difficult to transport goods by sea, a situation that affected West Africa's export-potential, as well as importation.[53] In the Netherlands, export distilleries soon found that while they continued to receive orders, they could no longer ship the gin to West Africa. By December 1916, the Henkes distillery had orders for 20,000 cases of gin, half of which had already been produced and were awaiting shipment.[54] This resulted in problems for the Dutch distillers, who did not have the space to stock such large quantities of gin, and who ran into financial difficulties due to the lack of remittances. In West Africa, the result was a drastically declining supply of gin. In 1917, due to restrictions and scarcity, gin in Nigeria was sold at four times the normal price.[55]

The colonial authorities noted that the shortage and high price of gin resulted in an increase in the production of indigenous alcoholic drinks. While this appeared to involve large quantities of palm wine, this palm wine was not distilled into liquor on a significant scale. Still, colonial administrations considered it prudent to introduce legislation

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[52] PRO CO 583/108 Clifford to Churchill, 11 February 1922, CO 554/41 Minute by Colonial Secretary, 3 March 1919; NAI CSO 20/4 NC 169/16 Findings of questionnaire to Residents, Southern Provinces, on sale of spirits (1917).

[53] Ayodeji Olukoju, 'Elder Dempster and the shipping trade of Nigeria during the First World War', *Journal of African History* 33.2 (1992), 255–71; J. J. Rankin, The History of the United Africa Company Limited to 1938 [1938], 89–90.

[54] Henkes Company Archive Box 39/51, Book 'Notulen Bestuursvergadering', 11 December 1916; TC DA44/1/12 Manchester Chamber of Commerce to Walter Long, 20 June 1917.

[55] Thomas Welsh, letter to the Editor, *West Africa*, 27 April 1929; NAI CSO20/5 NC38/17 Manchester Chamber of Commerce to W. H. Long, Manchester 20 June 1917; Olorunfemi, 'The liquor traffic dilemma', 241.

to restrict the local manufacture of liquor.[56] Some local distillation of spirits took place in the Central Province of the Gold Coast,[57] while elsewhere, apparently it was not carried on, or it was on such a limited scale that it did not attract the attention of colonial officers, missionaries or traders. This is to some extent surprising, as there had been earlier documented instances of local West African distillation. Around 1800, the Danish commandant of Fort Kongensten started distillation on a plantation in the Volta Region of Ghana. Initially, he used locally grown maize, but later switched to the use of palm wine, which proved to be more reliably available. According to Nørregård, the liquor made out of palm wine sold at higher prices than any other kind of spirit.[58] After 1803, however, nothing more was heard from this initiative. We do not know whether the technology of distilling was transferred to the local West African population, and whether it was subsequently practised in the area. At any rate, there was no mention of local distillation in the Volta Region in the period between the Danish initiative and the rise of illegally distilled *akpeteshie* around 1930.[59]

An early example from Nigeria was the small Wonsbrough Distillery in Apapa, Lagos, which was owned by the Jamaican entrepreneur Robert Campbell. Campbell advertised his 'African Canna' in the local press in the early 1880s with a testimonial of the Colonial Surgeon that it was 'a more wholesome stimulant than much of the imported liquors sold in Lagos.'[60] The editor of the *Lagos Observer*, in what must have been an early West African example of an 'advertorial', praised 'the good quality and purity of this native production,' and concluded that '[n]ow that the reduction of price has placed this canna within easy reach of all moderate drinkers, we have no doubt that it will be vastly preferred to the vile and obnoxious spirits so freely imported into the colony.'[61] In spite of such endorsements the distillery functioned only

[56] NAI CSO20/4 NC169/16 F. D. Lugard to H. C. Moorhouse, 28 October 1917, CSO20/4 NC169/16 Findings of questionnaire to Residents, Southern Provinces, on sale of spirits now that prices are high (1917), CSO 26/1/01532 Local Liquor (Manufacture) Ordinance 1918.

[57] PRO CO554/41Governor, Gold Coast, to Milner, 6 March 1919.

[58] Georg Nørregård, *Danish Settlements in West Africa 1658–1850* (translated by Sigurd Mammen) (Boston, MA: Boston University Press 1966 [original Danish edition 1954]), 181–2.

[59] See chapter five.

[60] *Lagos Times*, 9 November 1881.

[61] *Lagos Observer*, 26 October 1882.

briefly.[62] Otherwise, there is no indication in the sources of local distillation in West Africa during this period until the rise of illegally distilled *ogogoro* around 1930.[63] Instead, the first decade of the twentieth century saw a profitable business in the compounding of spirits in Nigeria on the basis of imported alcohol of high strength. The manufacturing process of the locally compounded drinks involved the mixing of the high-strength alcohol with flavouring essences, followed by the dilution with water. The drinks were then bottled in second-hand bottles that had been locally purchased and cleaned, and then packed in cases that had been similarly recycled and re-painted with new trademarks and brand names. These brands included gins with names such as 'Eleye,' 'Gelede,' 'Onigangan', 'Palm Tree,' and 'Quaranga,' as well as rums, anisettes, brandies, and whiskies. Colonial legislation put a stop to this business in 1909.[64] Some local distillation of spirits was reported in the Lagos area around the same time (and swiftly prohibited).[65]

Thus when World War I reduced the availability of imported distilled liquors there were few locally distilled alternatives. The restricted supply and inflated price of gin intensified the already existing pattern that in the interior it was mainly the Chiefs and wealthier individuals who could afford to buy gin. The use of palm wine increased, while the consumption of gin became more strictly confined to traditional ceremonies such as marriages, funerals, libations, and festivals. The importance that gin had acquired as an essential ingredient for such ceremonies is indicated by the fact that the demand of gin for these purposes was relatively price-inelastic. Indeed, in 1917 the colonial administration of Southern Nigeria found that 'some of the natives will pay practically any price for gin.'[66]

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[62] The owner was the Jamaican journalist, teacher, and entrepreneur Robert Campbell (1829–84), who had migrated to Lagos in 1862. In Lagos, unable to make use of the cotton gin he had brought with him, he established a number of short-lived businesses. He was the proprietor and editor of the *Anglo-African* newspaper, as well as the owner of a steam sawmill, a brick-making factory, a salt-making machine, and a sugarcane factory. Heap, 'Before "Star"', 72–3; R. J. M. Blackett, 'Return to the Motherland: Robert Campbell, a Jamaican in early colonial Lagos', *Phylon* 40.4 (1979), 375–86.

[63] Chima Korieh, 'Alcohol and empire: "illicit" gin prohibition and control in colonial Eastern Nigeria', *African Economic History* 31 (2003), 111–34, there 117.

[64] Heap, 'Before "Star"', 72–7; Simon Heap, 'The quality of liquor in Nigeria during the colonial era', *Itinerario* 23.2 (1999), 29–47, there 31–2.

[65] Olorunfemi, 'The liquor traffic dilemma', 241.

[66] NAI CSO20/4 NC169/16 Findings of questionnaire to Residents, Southern Provinces, on sale of spirits now that prices are high (1917).

At this moment in time, anti-liquor trade campaigners, governments of European powers, West African urban elites, and colonial administrations all realised that the momentary reduction of liquor imports during the war years had created a window of opportunity for those who advocated a radical change to liquor importation policies. Colonial governments found it more difficult to argue that the duty on the importation of gin was essential to government revenue, as even though revenue had declined during the war years, the decline in spirit import duties had been compensated to an extent by the increase of taxes paid on exports.[67] In the words of one missionary: 'Never in the history of West Africa has there been such a favourable opportunity for suppressing a form of trade which, though defended for purposes of revenue and commerce, cannot be morally justified.'[68] Furthermore, a new emphasis on the role of the international community, and the implication of the notion of trusteeship for the moral legitimacy of colonial rule, placed the issue of the ethics of the liquor trade firmly back onto the international agenda.

The anti-liquor trade campaigners considered the issue to be particularly urgent: it was thought that large stocks of gin had accumulated in the Netherlands during the war, and that these would flood the West African markets at the first opportunity, restoring the general availability of gin, and that most likely—due to the law of supply and demand—at a much reduced price.[69] They further pointed out that the overwhelming majority of liquor imports came from outside Britain. Most rum came from the United States and Cuba, and before the war from Germany, while nearly all gin came from the Netherlands. Thus, if Africans would spend their wealth on other imports such as textiles and bicycles from Britain, then not only would that be more healthy for the African population, it would also be more profitable to British industry. This line of reasoning likely prompted the Manchester Chamber of Commerce to view the importation of spirits into Africa with dismay, and to warn the British Colonial Office about the large stocks

[67] Ayodeji Olukoju, 'Rotgut and revenue: fiscal aspects of the liquor trade in Southern Nigeria, 1890–1919', *Itinerario* 21.2 (1997), 66–81.

[68] Basden, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*, 11.

[69] TC DA 44/1/12 Manchester Chamber of Commerce to Walter Long, 20 June 1917; 'A Degrading Traffic', *The Methodist Recorder*, 4 April 1918; 'West Africa and the Spirit Trade', *The Methodist Recorder*, 27 June 1918; *The United Committee for the Prevention of the Demoralisation of the Native Races by the Liquor Traffic Thirty-first Annual Report* (May 1918).

of Dutch gin that were available towards the end of the war.[70] In the foreign nature of the imported drinks lay at the same time a potential advantage for British industry and the political problem of prohibition. While Germany was the enemy, and to ban its rum and gin was only normal in a time of war, the United States and the Netherlands were not, and to prohibit the importation of Dutch gin and American rum was therefore likely to be perceived as unfair and discriminatory.[71]

Of course the eventual decision to ban or not to ban imported spirits could not be seen to be based merely on the interests of colonial revenue, British manufacturing, or Dutch and American distillers. It had to be the best outcome for the African population and indeed all those involved in the debates claimed to speak on behalf of Africans. Thus rather than to highlight their own commercial interests in the gin trade, the Niger Company Ltd. pointed out that '[t]he stoppage of trade spirits altogether would be very unfair to the Natives generally.'[72] Meanwhile, the anti-liquor trade campaigners proceeded to portray West Africans as vulnerable and easily corrupted by the evil gin. Where traders and colonial administrators would point towards the right of African consumers to make their own choices, anti-liquor trade campaigners argued that the vast majority of Africans were not yet capable of doing so, and had to be protected against the debasement and pervasive drunkenness that was said to be the result of the gin trade. They supported their claims with vivid descriptions of the drunken orgies that allegedly accompanied African funerals, and with alarming reports of gin being bought and consumed in the interior by women, schoolboys and children more generally. These claims were routinely disputed as highly exaggerated by merchants and colonial government, and even by high-ranking members of the Methodist mission, a mission that was otherwise deeply involved in the temperance movement.[73] However, to support its position, the anti-liquor trade movement could point towards the public demands for the ending of the gin trade that were being made by some of the chiefs, most notably the Gold Coast chiefs Nene Mate-Kole and Nana Ofori Atta. While presented by the anti-liquor trade movement as representative of the opinion of Gold

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[70] NAI CSO 20/5 NC38/17 F. D. Lugard to W. H. Long, Lagos 2 July 1918.
[71] PRO CO 554/41 Minute by Colonial Secretary, 3 March 1919.
[72] NAI CSO 20/5 NC38/17 Niger Company Ltd. to F. D. Lugard, Burutu 10 March 1917.
[73] PRAAD/A ADM 11/43 W. R. Griffin to Lamond, 6 October 1911.

Coast traditional leaders, Nana Ofori Atta can also be seen as an exponent of the mission-educated elite: he had been educated by the Basel Mission and even attended the Theological Seminary at Akropong. He also had a successful career as a colonial government official before he became the paramount chief of Akyem Abuakwa, and was a member of the colonial Legislative Council. Nene Mate-Kole was also educated by the Basel Mission, and worked as a schoolmaster before he became chief of Manya Krobo. He, too, was a member of the Legislative Council.[74] That these chiefs became prominent campaigners against the importation of gin is thus not surprising. Colonial governments noted the opinions of the African supporters of a ban on gin, but did not regard them as representative of the majority of the population.[75] They were, however, also aware of the opinion of Secretary of State for the Colonies Walter Long, that '[t]he bartering of spirits for Native produce is one of the most objectionable forms of that trade,'[76] and of his intention to stop the importation of liquor into West Africa.

Despite the sense of urgency that had pervaded the debates since 1917, no decision had been reached when the war ended and shipping services were about to resume a more normal pattern. This is the context in which Long informed the Governors of the British West African colonies on 7 January 1919, that 'in view of the present position of the liquor traffic in West Africa and the undesirability of allowing this German Dutch trade to revive I have decided that the time has come to stop it altogether as soon as practicable.'[77] This was to be achieved through an international agreement to extend the already existing prohibited zones from the mainly Muslim northern areas to cover all of West Africa. In September 1919 the international liquor convention of Saint Germain-en-Laye prohibited trade spirits throughout sub-Saharan Africa (excluding South Africa). It was also agreed that all imported spirits were to be banned in those areas not already accustomed to the consumption of imported liquor, and that the distillation of alcoholic beverages would be forbidden. Crucially, the convention left the definition of what constituted trade spirits to the individual colonies.

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[74] Doortmont, ed., *Pen-Pictures*.

[75] PRO CO 554/41Governor, Gold Coast, to Milner, 6 March 1919.

[76] NAI CSO 20/5 NC 38/17 W. H. Long to F. D. Lugard, London 10 October 1918.

[77] PRO CO 554/41 Long to West African Governors, 7 January 1919.

Concern quickly shifted from the issue of prohibition, to that of defining which liquors were 'trade spirits'. The term trade spirits had previously been loosely employed by anti-liquor trade campaigners and their adversaries as a term for Dutch and German spirits, as well as for cheap rum imported from the Americas. Now, an official definition had to be formulated that would be specific enough to function as a criterion for the exclusion of spirits, while worded carefully enough not to be seen as directed too blatantly against the spirits from one or more specific countries, and able to withstand the challenges to the definition that would inevitably come from producers and importers. It was immediately assumed by all parties involved that whatever the final definition, it would cover gin imported from Holland. Where the anti-liquor trade campaigners had placed much emphasis on the perceived poor quality and harmful qualities of the Dutch gin, colonial administrations were not convinced that this was in fact the case, and therefore feared that gin producers could easily attack such a criterion were it included in the definition. Instead, the official definitions of trade spirits tended to emphasise that trade spirits were specially imported for sale to Africans, and the hidden main criterion was cheapness. Both in Nigeria and the Gold Coast, 'trade spirits' were defined as 'spirits imported, or of a kind previously imported, for sale to natives, and not generally consumed by Europeans, and includes mixtures and compounds made with such spirits.'[78] The definition of trade spirit used in Sierra Leone merely asserted rather vaguely that it 'means and includes spirits commonly known as Trade or common rum, and trade or common gin.' For each colony, the final decision about which spirits were prohibited lay with the respective comptroller of customs. The instructions to the West African comptrollers of customs specified that

> in case of a dispute, the decision of the Comptroller of Customs shall be final and conclusive as to whether any particular article is or is not 'trade spirits' &c. You should have little difficulty in recognising the old familiar brands of Rum and Gin formerly imported for native consumption… You should, however, be constantly on the look out for cheap spirits imported under a new guise and apparently for native consumption. If the price or quality or another indication leads you to suspect that a consignment of spirits has not been imported for European consumption, you should take action.[79]

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[78] PRO CO 554/45 Minute by Comptroller of Customs, 5 May 1920.

[79] PRO CO 554/45 Comptroller's Circular instructions No. 12/1920 (24 March 1920).

The result of this policy was that each colony had a steadily growing list of liquor products and brands that were barred from entry. Dutch distillers, meanwhile, had started to write to the comptrollers of customs to argue that their products did not fit the definition of trade spirits—even before the colonial authorities had gazetted the definitions. Herman Jansen was one of the Dutch distillers who had written the Nigerian comptroller of customs in response to rumours that Dutch gin would be classified as trade spirits. Jansen pointed out that Dutch geneva was

> a superior quality article and is produced in potstills in a similar way as potstill Scotch Whisky and potstill brandy and is therefore vastly different from so called 'trade gin' since 'trade gin' is usually but a secondary quality of plain spirit which is flavoured…We might mention also that Hollands Geneva is consumed in Great Britain and also in nearly every part of the world for its beneficial medical properties.[80]

In his reply to Jansen, the comptroller of customs made it very clear that he did in fact regard Dutch gins as trade spirits, and that they would thus be prohibited from importation in Nigeria. In a minute on the file he, however, fails to identify what exactly disqualifies the Dutch gin. After stating that the quality of the gin is not in doubt, he merely concludes 'I submit that all Dutch & German spirits are debarred as trade spirits.'[81] Dutch gin, German spirits, and cheap rum were all banned from importation into British West Africa from 1919. However, there clearly were tensions in the definitions and implementation of the measure from the very beginning, which would eventually lead to an overhaul of the procedures three years later.

As the French West African colonies had equally defined Dutch gins as trade spirits, the ban of Dutch spirits from West Africa was quite effective and the exports of Dutch gin distillers suffered as a consequence.[82] Liquor imports into West Africa continued, mainly of whiskey and brandy, and of some of the more expensive brands of rum and dry gin. However, as part of the measures agreed at Saint Germain, the colonial governments had raised the import duties on permitted brands of liquor. Because of this, and because the total amount of liquor

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[80] NAI CSO 21/378 Messrs. H. C. Jansen to Comptroller of Customs, 25 March 1920.

[81] NAI CSO 21/378 T. F. Burrows to H. C. Jansen, 24 April 1920; Minute T. F. Burrows, 30 April 1920.

[82] Henkes Archive Box 39/53 Rapporten Accountants, Jaarrekeningen 1904–1984.

imported was much lower than before the war, imported liquor became significantly more expensive throughout West Africa. Coinciding with a period of economic depression, this meant that the affordability of imported liquors in the interior was much reduced. However, this did not present a clear break with the previous years, as the war years had already seen successive price rises and reduced availability of imported liquor. Meanwhile, Dutch distillers repeatedly approached the British government with requests to review the classification of Dutch gins as trade spirits.[83] At the same time colonial governments asked for the prohibition measure to be reconsidered because they found that the alternative forms of taxation they had introduced did not fully make up for the loss in revenue that would otherwise have been achieved from duties on imported liquor. In February 1922, Governor Clifford of Nigeria submitted a lengthy report in which he argued that the Nigerian taxpayers were shouldering an enormously increased burden, and that the economic development of the colony had suffered.[84] All the while, the comptrollers of customs kept on adding brands to their lists of banned spirits. Clearly, a combination of inbuilt tensions and practical problems necessitated a review of the policy.

Towards the middle of 1922 it became clear that Dutch gin would be readmitted to the British West African colonies.[85] However, this applied only to those Dutch gins that had been produced using pot still distillation. This is the production method that had been used before the shift in the 1880s (discussed in chapter two) towards the use of cheaper alcohol produced through patent still distillation. The decision to allow the importation of Dutch pot still gin was in line with the aim of prohibiting cheap spirits, as the process of pot-still distillation resulted in a more expensive product. This decision was part of a more general move from a list of banned spirits towards a list of approved spirits. This approved list was applicable in all British West African territories, and compiled, not by the individual West African comptrollers of customs, but by a specially convened 'African Liquor Traffic Control Committee'. Importation of all pot still gins was to be allowed, provided there was

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[83] Lynn Pan, *Alcohol in Colonial Africa* (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies 1975), 70; NAI CSO 26/1/09651 Vol. II Gin: importation of, 1924–1929. Contrary to the title, this file contains a number of requests dating to early 1922.

[84] PRO CO 583/108 Clifford to Churchill, 11 February 1922.

[85] Henkes Archive Box 39/53 Rapporten Accountants, Jaarrekeningen 1904–1984.

adequate documentation to prove that they were indeed produced following that method from the appropriate ingredients. Some patent still gins could be placed on the approved list, too, provided they were 'of distinctly higher quality and more expensive than the brands of patent still gin which were exported on a large scale to West Africa for sale to the native before the war.'[86] Many Dutch distillers submitted requests for their brands of patent still gin to be placed on the approved list, but nearly all these requests were refused, resulting in a list of approved patent still gins that nearly exclusively contained British brands of dry gins.[87] Most brands of rum remained excluded as trade spirits, although expensive rums, made in Cuba from sugar cane products and nothing else, could make it onto the approved list.[88]

The restrictions of the 1919–1922 period had not only reduced the amount of distilled liquor imported into the West African colonies, but also altered the relative market shares of the different types of liquor. During the pre-war period, gin had by far the largest market share in Nigeria, Cameroon, Togo, and Ghana east of Accra. In these territories, rum also had a large share, while brandy and whisky were imported in much smaller quantities. In Ghana from Accra westwards, rum held the largest share of the imports. Here, gin was a strong second, while again, brandy and whisky imports were much smaller. By 1920, with distilled liquor imports reduced to almost one tenth of the pre-war levels, whisky had the largest share of the market in Ghana, Nigeria and British Cameroons.[89] However, this pattern immediately changed the moment the importation of Dutch pot-still gin was again permitted. Spirit imports increased rapidly over successive years, and this increase was almost exclusively made up of gin. Total spirit imports into the Gold Coast rapidly increased from 181,319 gallons in 1920 to 680,503 gallons in 1924. The next year, importation had increased again to 943,487 gallons. Gin imports accounted for 88 per cent of total liquor imports in 1924, and 91 per cent in 1925.[90] In the case

[86] NAI CSO 26/1/09651 Vol. II R. L. Craigie to R. Ch. Roosmale-Nepveu, 11 November 1925.

[87] NAI CSO 26/1/09651 Vol. I Gin: importation of, 1920–1925.

[88] NAI CSO 26/1/09651 Vol. II Gin: importation of, 1924–1929.

[89] NAI CSO 26/1/01892 Vol. I Returns of Quantity & Strength of Spirit Imports 1920 (Nigeria & British Cameroons); PRAAD/A ADM 7/1/54 *Gold Coast Blue Book of Statistics* for 1920.

[90] PRAAD/A ADM 7/1/54, 58, 59 *Gold Coast Blue Book of Statistics* for 1920, 1924, 1925.

of Ghana west of the Volta, this increase in imports also meant that the area was no longer predominantly importing rum, but that it had become a gin-drinking area, just like Ghana east of the Volta, Togo, Nigeria, and the Cameroons had already become before World War I. This was the result of the greater availability of gin compared to rum, which still suffered from import restrictions, rather than a profound change in the perception of gin by African consumers.

The much larger territory of Nigeria started off from 268,401 gallons in 1920, which amount had increased to 358,032 in 1924, and further to 520,158 in 1925.[91] As in Ghana, in Nigeria the rise was almost entirely the result of the much-increased importation of gin. However, the growth of liquor imports was smaller than in Ghana. While anti-liquor trade campaigners argued that this reflected a different attitude towards gin in Ghana as compared to Nigeria, traders and colonial administrators suggested that this merely reflected the much greater purchasing power of consumers in the Gold Coast.[92] Since 1900, the rise of cocoa farming had resulted in a rural economic boom that spread to areas of Ghana that had not been suitable for growing palm products. Cocoa farming also proved to be more profitable than palm oil, and thus attracted more labour.[93] As a result, the mid-1920s were a prosperous period for large parts of rural Ghana, which resulted in a great increase in the importation of foreign goods, including gin. It appears that the increase in the amount of goods imported did not reflect a change in the uses to which these products were put, but simply the fact that they had now become affordable to a larger segment of the population. Increased prosperity also explains the growth of gin imports in Togo and the British Cameroons, even though the relative increase in the latter territory was still exceptional compared to neighbouring Nigeria.[94]

From the perspective of colonial revenue, the new regulations for the importation of liquor were successful: by 1927, importation had gone up markedly from the level of 1922, yet still remained well below

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[91] NAI CSO 26/1/01892 Vol. I Returns of Quantity & Strength of Spirit Imports 1920, 1924, 1925 (Nigeria & British Cameroons).

[92] Speech by Ransford Slater, Governor of the Gold Coast, *West Africa*, 3 November 1928.

[93] Francis Agbodeka, *An Economic History of Ghana* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press 1992), 58–61, 81–2.

[94] West Africa in Parliament: Cameroon and Togoland Spirits Import, *West Africa*, 25 April 1931; front page, *West African Times*, 22 April 1931.

the levels of before World War I, while annual revenue from duties on spirits was three to four times the amount collected during the years before the war.[95] At the same time, colonial governments could boast that they had put a stop to the importation of cheap 'trade spirits' and that expensive 'high class' spirits only were allowed into West Africa. Not surprisingly, the anti-liquor trade movement was not satisfied and pointed towards the increasing spirits imports as evidence of the need to prohibit entirely the importation of liquor into West Africa, or, if that was not feasible, a return to the prohibition of all Dutch gin. Anti-liquor trade campaigners were understandably disappointed that the potential for abolishing the gin trade altogether, that had been created by World War I, had not been realised. As was discussed in chapter two, already since the 1880s critics of the liquor trade had identified gin as the worst quality drink, the importation of which they were most desperate to ban. Yet in spite of the decline of gin imports during the war and the temporary ban that followed, by the mid-1920s the importation of gin was again rising steadily throughout West Africa. Not only that, gin had now become the most prominent of all distilled liquors, outstripping not only whisky and brandy, but also rum.

Gin and purity

By the late 1920s, Dutch gin had become the most important liquor in West Africa. Not only was Dutch gin imported in larger quantities than any other distilled liquor, its uses had become closely associated with traditional rituals relating to ancestors, chiefs and elders, libations, burials, weddings, and the settlement of cases. In West Africa today, older people refer to the special status of gin when relating experiences from their youth during the 1930s. They emphasise that when they were young, gin was reserved for the elders, and that young men and women were not allowed to purchase or to drink gin. Dakpo Akoto remembered how one day, after his father and other elders had settled a case, they drank the gin. After they had left the house, he was tempted to also taste a little of what was left in the bottle… 'Hmm! Surprisingly, my father held my ears and raised me from the ground!'[96] According to Torgbui

[95] Speech by Ransford Slater, Governor of the Gold Coast, *West Africa*, 3 November 1928.

[96] Interview with Dakpo Akoto, held at Akatsi, 28 July 2000.

Akpate, even if you had the money to buy 'you dare not drink it.' The only exception would be the case of the young man with his own job, who decided to marry while the father did not to have money at that particular moment: 'then he may take some of his money to buy gin or other things in addition to what they were going to present.'[97] Clearly, the use of Dutch gin is here exclusively related to rituals from which young men are excluded. Torgbui Avlavi explained:

> As a young person, when your fathers and grandfathers were performing those rituals, you were not allowed to go near to them. They had a special room for it. They drank gin in that room after the ritual and left the rest there (if any), before leaving for their various houses. No child was allowed to enter that room. Our fathers were not allowed to take it in outside, too. The gin was expected to remain in that room.[98]

It is possible to argue that Dutch gin acquired this special position by default. Distilled liquors had become associated with kinship rituals during the period of the transatlantic slave trade and when gin became relatively cheaply available during the latter part of the nineteenth century, it was put to that use, as well as to some other uses to which it could be put as a foreign commodity—for example, as a way of storing wealth. On the eve of World War I, it seems that the importance of gin lay in its categorisation as foreign drink, alongside rum, brandy, and whisky, but that it did not yet occupy a special position within that category. When World War I resulted in the diminishing supply and increasing price of imported distilled drinks, large stocks of bottles of gin were already present throughout West Africa east of the Volta River. In the absence of significant levels of local distillation, indigenous fermented drinks such as palm wine were consumed in larger quantities, while the use of gin became more narrowly restricted to the ritual sphere. This pattern continued in the years following the war, when the importation of gin and rum were prohibited.

After 1922, Dutch pot still gin became available in significant quantities, while the importation of most types of rum continued to be prohibited. German gin was not excluded, provided it was produced through pot still distillation. It was nevertheless imported in much smaller quantities than Dutch gin. This reflected the disappearance of a number of German trading companies after the war, the loss of

[97] Interview with Torgbui Akpate and elders, held at Srogboe, 1 August 2000.
[98] Interview with Torgbui Avlavi II, held at Dzita, 1 August 2000.

German colonies in Africa, and the extent to which patent still gins had been more dominant in German gin manufacturing than in the Netherlands, where traditionally-inclined distillers had campaigned for the protection of the traditional distillation methods. While Dutch traditional distillers had failed to stop the rise of patent still gins since the 1880s, they had continued to distil pot still gins on a smaller scale, and had conducted a successful lobby to convince Dutch officials that patent still gins were merely cheap copies of the original pot still gins. In 1902 the town of Schiedam, which had been the centre of Dutch gin distillation since the late eighteenth century, decided that only pot still gins could claim to be genuine Schiedam gins, and introduced a system of inspections and an official municipal seal to guarantee the quality of gins sold as genuine Schiedam geneva.[99] While the British and West African colonial authorities did not accept unquestioningly the Schiedam municipal seal as evidence of high quality,[100] it undoubtedly placed Schiedam gin distillers in an advantageous position when the West African market was opened up to pot still gins only. In addition to availability, even though the price of a bottle of Dutch gin had increased markedly, gin was still cheaper than most whiskies and brandies for sale in West Africa. In inland Ghana by the late-1920s, diverse brands of gin were sold for prices varying from 6/-to 7/6 a bottle, whereby the most expensive gin was sold as schnapps. Whisky was rather more expensive at 10/6 for a bottle of Black and White Whisky, while Exshaw's and Martell's brandy sold at 12/6 a bottle.[101] Nevertheless, the overall decline in amounts imported compared to pre-war years, had resulted in a rise of the status of Dutch gin, as the higher price meant that the consumption of gin was out of reach of the vast majority of the population.[102]

Meanwhile, African consumers explained the importance of gin out of a number of additional factors. I have already discussed the opinion of chiefs and elders that it was the ancestors themselves who decided that they preferred schnapps gin over rum, as well as the assertion that gin had to be used to show respect because, being a foreign drink, it was the most expensive drink you could offer (even though most whiskies and

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[99] Hans van der Sloot, *Het Echte Schiedamse Jeneverboek* (Ter Aar: Uitgeverij Van Lindonk 1987), 7–17.

[100] NAI CSO 21/378 T. F. Burrows to H. C. Jansen, 24 April 1920.

[101] PRO CO 96/685/2 Governor Slater to L. S. Amery, 23 January 1929.

[102] *West Africa*, 28 November 1931.

brandies were significantly more expensive than gin). Ewe elders also pointed out that Dutch gin was considered as being exceptionally pure.[103] According to them, not only was schnapps gin produced according to a very pure process, it also contained only very pure ingredients—unlike rum and whisky, which were said to contain pepper.[104] They explained that the pepper accounted for the 'red' colour and the stronger taste of rum, and that it was because of the pepper that rum could not be used to pray to the gods. Not only that, the person who went to pray should also have avoided eating pepper, in preparation for the prayer.[105] In his study of alcohol in Ghana, Akyeampong relates the use of gin to Akan colour ideology. He contrasts the 'red' colour of rum (and brandy, and blood) to the colourlessness of gin (and water and palm wine), and explains that the ascendancy of warfare and war-gods among the Akan from the seventeenth century onwards, resulted in the use of rum for many of the Akan gods. Meanwhile, the colourless gin was suitable for use for the ancestors and for gods that were seen as pure (not war-like).[106] Thus absence—of colour, or of pepper—signifies purity. Ewe elders also point towards the pureness of gin as the reason why gin had to be presented to the chief for oath swearing, and why gin was so often part of the fines imposed by the chiefs' courts:

> Somebody who was guilty was guilty to the land and at the same time offended the ancestors. Therefore, this pure drink was used for our ancestors and gods to ask for forgiveness.[107]

The perception of gin as a pure drink goes back to the beginning of the twentieth century at least. It is possible that this focus on the purity of gin was influenced in part by discussions—in local newspapers and other forums—of the alleged impurity of imported gin that had been initiated by the anti-liquor trade campaigners during the 1880s. The colonial authorities' insistence on the specific production process of pot still distillation may have been an additional influence.

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[103] Interview with David Kofi Togobo and Mr Yeke, held at Anloga, 28 July 2000.

[104] Interview with Hunua Yao Gakpo Dziekpor, Victor Gasu, Jimmy Dziekpor and Agumenu Dziekpor, held at Atiavi, 4 August 2000.

[105] Interview with Torgbui Baku and twenty other chiefs, elders and queen mothers, held at Denu, 5 August 2000. It is common in West Africa to describe the entire range of colours from yellow, via orange, to deep red, all as 'red'. David Dwyer, *An Introduction to West African Pidgin English* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University 1969).

[106] Akyeampong, *Drink, Power, and Cultural Change*, 28–30.

[107] Interview with Torgbui Baku and twenty other chiefs, elders and queen mothers.

A concern with purity is also understandable in view of the practice of watering down imported spirits, which was believed to be widespread throughout West Africa. Defenders of the liquor trade would point towards the dilution of spirits as a positive feature, evidence that imported spirits were not particularly harmful by the time they were consumed.[108] Nevertheless, African consumers preferred drinks that had not been tampered with. When the 1909 Liquor Trade Committee reported on the sale of spirits in Southern Nigeria, it observed that spirits were more often than not diluted, often through unhygienic methods.[109] In a recent study of the quality of liquor in colonial Nigeria, Heap concluded that, as a rule, gin remained undiluted from its import state, while rum was watered down.[110] This might reflect the fact that gin was predominantly imported in bottles, while rum often came in casks. Trader John Holt observed that any kind of tampering with bottles or demijohns led to selling difficulties.[111] Dutch distillers covered the corks of their gin bottles with coloured wax and paper seals that had the dual function of protecting the contents of the bottle from adulteration and of advertising the purity of the particular brand.[112] Although Heap's Nigerian examples, and the complaint of the chiefs and elders of Asogli in Ghana that 'it sometimes happens that bottles of liquors contain a larger quantity of water than spirit,' suggest that even the bottles so protected could be diluted, this packaging was generally regarded as the most reliable.[113] It is thus not surprising that the spirits that were compounded in Nigeria before World War I were bottled in a similar fashion (using second-hand bottles) and placed in wooden cases that had been freshly painted, while they had their own trademarks that resembled those of imported brands of gin.

The decades around World War I are the period during which African perceptions of Dutch gin changed from 'generic imported liquor' to it being the most widely recognised and broadly discussed alcoholic

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[108] *West Africa*, 20 July 1929.

[109] *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Liquor Trade in Southern Nigeria* (1909) Command Paper 4906.

[110] Heap, 'The quality of liquor in Nigeria', 34.

[111] *Ibidem*.

[112] Blankenheym & Nolet Archive 216/68 Exportorderboek Afrikaanse Westkust 1908–1909; Henkes Archive Box [no number] Bescheiden m.b.t. merken; Depôts van merken.

[113] Heap, 'The quality of liquor in Nigeria', 33; PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Answers by chiefs and elders of Asogli [1933].

3.3 Protective canoe charm. Ibibio, Southeast Nigeria, ca. 1905

3.4 Drawing showing key features of cases of Henkes 'schnapps' and 'geneva' brands exported to West Africa

drink in West Africa. This period also shows increasing brand awareness amongst West African consumers. As was described in chapter two, distillers had started to actively develop—and copy—trademarks and labels during the latter part of the nineteenth century. As early as 1887, Accra merchant Alexander Bruce wrote to the Henkes distillery that their 'Prize Medal Gin (Stork Brand)' was 'very marketable' and sold faster than the other brands he traded in, ending his order for 500 cases of their gin with the words 'I want Stork brand' (see Figure 3.4).[114] In 1896 another African trader, G. B. Williams who operated from Keta, specifically requested 'Henkes Gin Liquor as per sample, as this is the only thing in demand.'[115] Four years later, amidst flagging sales, Williams ordered the Peters brand of German gin, in the hope that that brand would sell better.[116] It thus appears that brand awareness did not necessarily go together with brand loyalty, an impression that is strengthened by the gin bottles of different brands found in the excavation of disposal heaps in Eastern Ghana.[117] In 1899, Mrs. Williams, who was also active in G. B. Williams' trading company, had tried to return a shipment of whisky to her supplier, as it was not the specific brand that she had ordered.[118] Further evidence for brand awareness can be found in a message from the chief of Krobo to the Wesleyan Synod of 1906. The message asked specifically for the suppression of the importation of the 'Elephant Gin' brand, a brand of the Melchers distillery in Schiedam that was very popular in West Africa at the beginning of the twentieth century.[119]

How was this level of brand awareness achieved, and how was it developed further during the interwar years? As the target consumers were living in the interior and were thought to be largely illiterate, the standard methods of early-twentieth century advertising were not considered all that useful. Not that this was not used at all: before the war, Blankenheym & Nolet distilleries included a case of coloured show

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[114] Henkes Archive Box 21/3–21/8 Alex Bruce to J. H. Henkes, Accra, 13 October 1887.

[115] PRAAD/A SC12/9 Williams to MacLaren Bradburg & Co., 16 January 1896.

[116] PRAAD/A SC12/12 Williams [to a son], Keta, 6 August 1900.

[117] Interview with Dr Yaw Bredwa-Mensah, Legon, 3 September 2004; I had the opportunity to examine a number of gin bottles found in two recent excavations by Dr Bredwa-Mensah's team.

[118] PRAAD/A SC12/9 Williams to MacLaren Bradburg & Co., 18 December 1899.

[119] Akyeampong, *Drink, Power, and Cultural Change*, 71.

cards with each consignment of their 'Key' gin to the trading stations of Millers Limited.[120] Although local West African newspapers existed and carried advertisements since the 1870s,[121] gin distillers did not advertise in them until the 1930s, recognising that their market was not found among the highly literate, Anglophile elite readership of the newspapers. In the next chapter I will explore the ways in which Dutch gin was marketed to West African consumers.

[120] Blankenheym & Nolet Archive 216/68 Exportorderboek Afrikaanse Westkust 1908–1909.

[121] Stephanie Newell, *Marita: Or the Folly of Love. A Novel by A. Native* (Leiden and Boston: Brill 2002), 21–2.

CHAPTER FOUR

'BIRD GIN' AND 'MONEY GIN': BRANDS AND MARKETING

In the previous chapter I described how during the decades around World War I, Dutch gin became the most well known, and most widely consumed distilled liquor in West Africa. I discussed the impact of the war, the ritual requirements of West African traditions, and the changing colonial legislation that specified which types of liquor and what brands could be imported into West African colonies. However, such processes do not explain how individual West African consumers selected their liquor purchases. Did they simply buy whatever was available? That would not correspond with the increase in brand awareness during this period. Also, liquor stores tended to stock various brands of gin, sold against slightly different prices, which would indicate that consumers perceived differences between various gins.[1] In 1933 one Nigerian trader declared that his customers sometimes brought the label along to be certain they got the exact brand they wanted.[2] The people I spoke with in Ghana and Nigeria told me that all imported gins were thought to have 'a good smiling scent',[3] but that some were considered more prestigious than others. When I asked Torgbui Baku and his elders how their parents decided which drink to buy, they explained:

> In those days, all gin came from Holland but the one which was mostly liked by our great grandfathers was the one which has got the bird at the shoulder level (the one you have brought)—the Royal Stork Gin. When you bring this before any elder, you are respected as a big man. It was the best of all in those days. Another brand was that, on the bottle, there were two stamps; one on the left side and one on the right side. In those days, our great grandfathers only established the difference through taste and the shoulder emblem. No matter where the bird turned to, or what and what not… Our grandfathers, even though they might have been

[1] PRO CO 96/685/2 Governor Slater to L. S. Amery, 23 January 1929.

[2] Henkes Archive Box 21/3–21/8 Supreme Court of Nigeria Judgment in the trademarks application of J. H. Henkes Distillery, opposed by Netherlands Distilleries, 3 November 1933, evidence by Karimu Kotun.

[3] Interview with Dakpo Akoto, held at Akatsi, 28 July 2000.

> illiterate, could identify the brands through the signature that was signed on the paper and stuck to the bottle.[4]

This answer from the Denu elders indicates that brand awareness was a key factor in selecting gin for purchase. It also illustrates some of the features African consumers examined to establish whether they had the correct type of gin. The glass seals, labels, and trademarks they scrutinised, had, of course, been introduced by the manufacturers with this specific purpose in mind. However, this does not necessarily mean that African consumers read these signs as intended by the manufacturers: the comment that the bird on the glass seal could face in different directions indicates that, perhaps, brand recognition was not as precise as the producers had hoped for. This leads to a final element in the answer of the Denu elders: the emphasis on having the knowledge on the basis of which to identify the appropriate, respected brand of gin.

Which, then, were the most respected brands? People I interviewed in Nigeria would name 'Elephant Gin', 'Money Gin' and 'Seaman's Schnapps' as the most prominent brands of earlier days. In Ghana chiefs and elders remember 'Bird Gin' (*abatitwa*), 'Stork Gin', 'Money Gin' and 'the one which has a crown on the shoulder of the bottle.' Some of these terms refer to actual brand names: 'Elephant' is a popular brand of the Melchers Distillery, while the Henkes distillery owned the 'Stork' brand. 'Seaman's Schnapps' is a brand nowadays distilled in Nigeria. The terms 'Money Gin' and 'Bird Gin' are much less precise. 'Bird Gin' could refer to Henkes' 'Stork' gin, but may also have included a whole range of other gins that were imported at the time and included depictions of birds on labels or on glass seals. Similarly, it seems that 'Money Gin' denoted an assortment of brands that showed either coins or prize medals on the label. According to Yaovi Doe, 'this one, the money was not drawn on the bottle itself, it was rather drawn onto paper and stuck onto it.'[5]

This apparent brand awareness among African consumers contrasts to the lack of formal advertising for Dutch gin brands in West African newspapers and magazines during the 1920s and 1930s. The absence of advertising for gin, compared to the prevalence of advertising for

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[4] Interview with Torgbui Baku and twenty other chiefs, elders and queen mothers, held at Denu, 5 August 2000.

[5] Interview with Sarah A. A. Afetsi and Yaovi Doe, held at Tegbi, 2 August 2000.

other imported consumer goods such as canned meats, butter, cosmetics, bottled beers, and even brandies and whiskies, might lead to the conclusion that the producers and importers of Dutch schnapps did not actively market their products in West Africa. However, in this chapter I show that rather than being evidence of a lack of interest in supporting Dutch gin brands, the absence of print advertising tells us something about who the drinks industry had identified as key consumers of Dutch schnapps in West Africa: illiterate Africans who did not read the local newspapers. While gin producers refrained from newspaper advertising, they supported their brands in other ways, most notably through advertising posters, packaging and trademarks. Distillers and trading companies corresponded extensively in defence of their respective brands, accusing each other of brand imitation and other forms of unfair competition. Such disputes at times resulted in litigation in the West African courts.

This chapter explores the complexities of the marketing of Dutch gins in West Africa during the first half of the twentieth century. First, I introduce the colonial ideology of consumption as an important factor in shaping traders' and marketers' understandings of what, and how, to sell to Africans. After this, I look at the various ways in which gins were marketed to African consumers. I do this in the context of the marketing of other products intended for mass consumption in this period. I consider marketing strategies, intended uses of the product, underlying assumptions about African consumers, and the responses of the intended consumers. Then, I examine the emergence of the various main types and brands of Dutch gin and their respective trademarks. Finally, I use a number of court cases on alleged trademark infringements to examine in more detail some of the shared meanings as well as misunderstandings between producers and African consumers. This chapter is limited to marketing before World War II, as this war constituted a watershed in the marketing of gin in West Africa. Not only did the official attitude towards the importation of spirits change around 1940, the ways in which gins were marketed also changed. These changes included the increasing use of print media to advertise gin, as well as attempts to sell gins to a different type of African consumer, belonging to the educated middle class. I will discuss these post-World War II developments in the marketing of gin in chapters six and seven.

The colonial ideology of consumption

The marketing of Dutch gin to Africans was complicated by the extent to which gin had become a disputed commodity in colonial West Africa. The debate about the undesirability of the African liquor trade, which had been limited to Europe and to the margins of West African societies during the nineteenth century, became a key concern of colonial policy in the 1920s. This reflected the extent to which the consumption of manufactured goods had become linked to colonial ideas of a 'civilising mission'.[6] Colonial governments pointed towards the notion that the desire for more and better goods was a central characteristic of a civilised society, to justify their promotion of monetisation and consumption by Africans of 'appropriate goods' such as clothing, soap, and bicycles (see Figure 4.1).[7] In this context, Timothy Burke noted that those who worked in marketing and advertising at the time regarded their work as part of a 'New Mission', defined as:

> bringing Africans in from the marketless cold into the salvation of commodity relations, creating needs and converting problem populations into functioning parts of the colonial economy—populations whose problems had allegedly been caused by being 'outside' the marketplace.[8]

As with other aspects of the colonial idea of a civilising mission, the spread of monetisation and consumption was subject to the colonial contradiction: the fundamental tension in colonial ideology between the need to view the colonial subject as at the same time fundamentally different and similar. The Otherness of the colonised—their perceived 'primitive', 'uncivilised' and 'lawless' state—served as justification for colonisation. However, if the civilising mission proved successful, this would undermine the rationale for continued colonial occupation.[9]

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[6] Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England. Advertising and Spectacle, 1851–1914* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press 1990), 123.

[7] Timothy Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption, and Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe* (London: Leicester University Press 1996), 2, 84–5.

[8] *Ibidem*, 128–9.

[9] V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa. Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 1988); Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge 1994); Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture. Anthropology, Travel and Government* (Cambridge: Polity Press 1994); Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge 1998). In using the term 'colonial contradiction' I follow Nugent's clear formulation of this phenomenon. See: Paul Nugent, *Africa Since Independence* (Basingstoke: Pallgrave Macmillan 2004).

4.1 Advert for Pears Soap from *The Graphic Stanley Number*, 1890

4.2 Poster for Blankenheym & Nolet gin

4.3 Liquor store, displaying a case of 'Elephant' brand gin

Therefore, whenever Africans accepted and exhibited the colonisers' patterns of consumption, they were in fact challenging colonialism. In response, as with education and employment, colonialism attempted to regulate and limit African consumptive ambitions. This was plainly visible in the area of clothing. Missionaries and colonisers had used 'nakedness' as an image representing the 'primitive' state of Africans before colonisation, and encouraged the covering of African bodies with imported clothes as evidence of civilisation.[10] Yet those Africans who showed too much knowledge and sophistication in their wearing of European-style clothing were criticised for being insufficiently 'native'.[11] As early as 1915 the missionary G. T. Basden wrote that Africans wearing a suit, tie, and hat paid no attention to the demands of the African climate and were merely being ignorant imitators of Europeans. The colonial contradiction is evident in his warning that with these well-dressed Africans, 'it is not always easy to remember that we are dealing with a child race, and that all the vagaries and waywardness of children must be expected.'[12]

In addition to a concern with encouraging Africans to make appropriate consumptive choices, colonial economies also steered African consumption through the marketing of cheap versions of commodities, 'for natives only'. The importation of relatively inexpensive commodities for sale to Africans dates back to the precolonial period, and initially reflected a demand for goods that were affordable to African agricultural producers with limited cash. During the colonial period, such cheap commodities acquired additional meanings, reflecting racial difference and domination. Throughout colonial Africa, the availability of specific commodities was one of the ways through which racial superiority was constructed. Burke has discussed the example of inexpensive 'red' soaps that were sold to African consumers throughout the continent. After explaining that this type of soap has a distinctive, unforgettable smell because of the added disinfectant carbolic, Burke observes:

> Given the established weight of the settler vision of 'dirty' Africans, it is unsurprising that soaps with extra disinfectant, soaps that give users a

[10] Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*.

[11] Jeremy Rich, 'Civilized attire: refashioning tastes and social status in the Gabon Estuary, c. 1870–1914', *Cultural and Social History* 2 (2005), 189–213, there 202.

[12] G. T. Basden, 'Denationalizing a primitive people', *Church Missionary Review*, October 1915, 726.

> distinctive odour connoting cleanliness, were thought by white manufacturers to be particularly appropriate for use by Africans.[13]

For African consumers, meanwhile, the circumstance of a commodity being foreign, or being used by white people, made that commodity more attractive. However, the colonial context required that, generally, Europeans expressed their superiority through the consumption of superior brands and types of goods, and therefore these superior commodities could not be marketed explicitly to African consumers. This was less critical in West Africa than in areas with European settlers, such as South and East Africa, where the racially labelled consumption of daily commodities helped to define a class of poor whites as being somehow superior to the African population. Nevertheless, West Africa imported only very small quantities of luxury toilet soaps and premium brand margarines, intended mainly for the very limited European market. These goods were sold through upmarket stores, such as the United Africa Company's 'Kingsway Stores' chain, that were patronised mainly by Europeans and wealthy Africans.[14] In 1923 Lever Brothers began production in Nigeria of cheap carbolic soaps of relatively inferior quality for the West African market. These soaps were marketed under local brand names such as the 'Key' brand, to avoid harming the reputation of Lever Brothers' international premium brands. These locally made soaps, as well as cheap imported soaps such as the popular carbolic soap from Bibbys in Liverpool, were sold through the network of trading companies, local African intermediaries and, eventually, small local stores and market women, through which cotton cloth, Dutch gins, and other products intended for African consumption, were marketed (see Figure 4.3).[15]

The colonial meanings and tensions of consumption added to, rather than replaced, existing African understandings of consumption. In this context, gin and other imported liquors were particularly problematic

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[13] Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women*, 151.

[14] The first Kingsway store opened in Accra in 1920, from 1930 the name was used for a chain of department stores aimed mainly at Europeans. David K. Fieldhouse, *Merchant Capital and Economic Decolonization. The United Africa Company 1929–1987* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1994), 412. See also pp. 106–8 and: David K. Fieldhouse, *Unilever Overseas: The Anatomy of a Multinational 1895–1975* (London and Stanford, CA: Croom Helm and The Hoover Institution Press 1978), 372.

[15] Fieldhouse, *Unilever Overseas*, 345–50.

goods.[16] Gin generally was a highly respected commodity in local West African communities, associated with traditional rituals and with the status of chiefs and male elders. However, many Europeans considered its consumption by Africans undesirable. Colonial thinking may have associated increased consumption with civilisation, but—as I have illustrated in earlier chapters—the consumption of gin was thought to result in degeneration, and restrictions applied to the importation of distilled liquors throughout colonial Africa. In their East and Central African colonies, British administrators went even further and prohibited the consumption by Africans of all European alcohols, including bottled beers and wines.[17] This fitted well with the colonial ideology of consumption for settler societies as it contributed to the maintenance of a racial hierarchy through consumption: liquor was available to Europeans who, it was thought, could hold their drink. Meanwhile, keeping imported liquor away from Africans, who allegedly were prone to binge drinking, aided their civilisation. The situation was more complex in West Africa. On one level, the pattern of consumption that had emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century neatly confirmed colonial hierarchies: Europeans and members of Westernised African elites drank high class liquors, and the bulk of the African population consumed cheaper imported gins and rums. This also fitted the general idea that the production and importation of cheaper, 'less sophisticated' commodities for use by Africans was the appropriate way for colonised peoples to achieve civilisation through consumption. Except of course that in the specific case of imported liquors, the existence of cheaper spirits specifically intended for African consumption was thought to corrupt rather than civilise Africans.[18] In chapter three I have already discussed how colonial officials responsible for regulating importation into West Africa defined as 'trade spirits' all spirits that they suspected to be made specifically for consumption by Africans, and that they

[16] Lynn Schler, 'Looking through a glass of beer: alcohol in the cultural spaces of colonial Douala, 1910–1945,' *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 35.2/3 (2002), 315–34.

[17] Charles Ambler, 'Alcohol, racial segregation and popular politics in Northern Rhodesia', *Journal of African History* 31.2 (1990), 295–313, there 295.

[18] The potential for temperance to be linked to anti-consumerism has been noted in other cases of temperance agitation, notably in the United States. See: Peter N. Stearns, *Consumerism in World History. The Global Transformation of Desire* (London and New York: Routledge 2001), 68; Daniel Miller, 'Consumption and commodities', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995), 141–161, there 145.

prohibited the importation of such drinks. For importers and producers of gin this meant, that while they tried to market their brands so as to be appealing to African consumers, they also had to avoid being accused of supplying 'trade gin'.

Marketing in West Africa

In Europe and North America, the growth of capitalist production in the nineteenth and twentieth century was defined not only by its characteristics of production, but equally by the mass marketing of commodities to consumers.[19] Marketing methods developed rapidly in the decades around 1900. Advertising posters and newspaper adverts increasingly used images and bold typography, while the language employed changed from utilitarian product descriptions to more emotional value-laden phrases. At the same time, product packaging became more attractive and the design of packaging became part of the development of new product lines and the improvement of existing ones. Companies erected booths at exhibitions and manifestations to meet groups of consumers directly. They set up competitions or saving schemes whereby consumers could receive—often specially produced—gifts. They also gave away free samples and organised demonstrations to explain the benefits of the commodities to consumers as well as to teach them the appropriate way of using new products.[20] Manufacturers, retailers, and the advertising businesses working for them, tried to create new wants and attempted to manipulate fashion—both often with success—to lure customers into consuming more than they needed for subsistence or traditional display. Later on in the century, the rise of cinema advertising, and subsequently radio and television commercials, added even more marketing opportunities. Marketing and market research departments became increasingly important and marketing innovation became as essential as technological development in ensuring the survival and growth of manufacturing businesses.[21]

In the period before World War II, the mass marketing of produced goods remained much less developed in West Africa than in America

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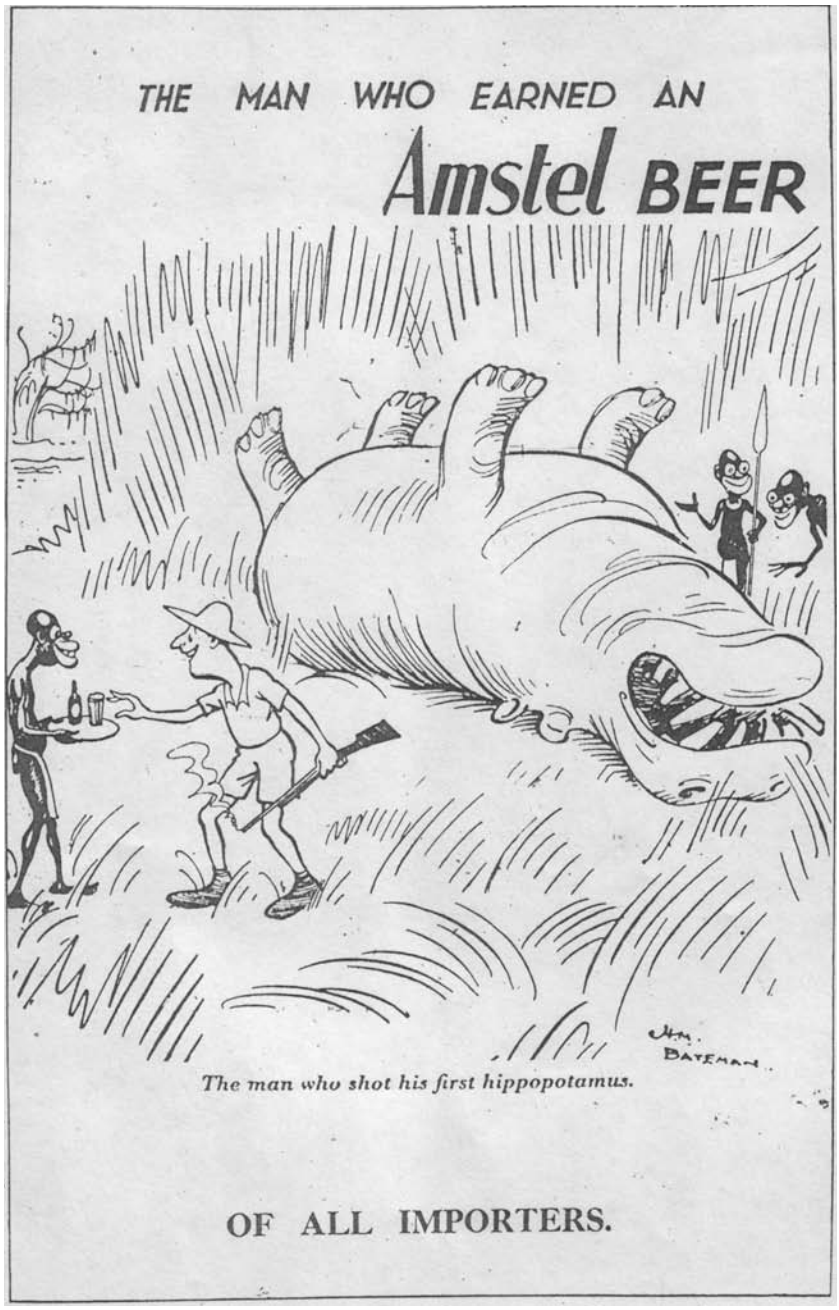
[19] Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England*, 12–3, 120.
[20] Stearns, *Consumerism in World History*, 45–7.
[21] Charles Wilson, *Unilever 1945–1965. Challenge and Response in the Post-War Industrial Revolution* (London: Cassell 1968), 91.

or Europe. The same companies that spearheaded the drive to consumerism in Europe appear to have been remarkably restrained in the marketing of their products to African consumers. This situation partly reflects the limitations of the West African market. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the average African consumer had only limited purchasing power. Even though many West Africans had access to some cash through their engagement with the farming, processing, and transport, of agricultural produce for export, their annual cash income was very low by European standards. After paying taxes, school fees, and obligations to the kin group, little money was left to spend on the purchase of imported goods. Importers thus mainly sold cheap 'staple' lines in small units.[22] Nevertheless, as I mentioned in chapter two, imported produced goods were in high demand by those who could afford them, and a very wide range of commodities was imported. Still, this constituted a limited market in per capita terms, and one that was geared towards the importation of what were locally perceived as luxury goods, rather than mass consumption.

Furthermore, the potential of newspaper adverts—one of the favourite tools of marketers in Europe and America—was restricted due to the limited readership of West African newspapers in the interwar period. These constraints are reflected in the advertisements for alcoholic drinks. With very few exceptions, these were limited to beverages that were intended for consumption by Europeans: bottled beers, champagnes, whiskies, brandies, and the more expensive brands of British gins. The adverts for Martell's cognac even claimed that the brand was 'The Coasters' Brandy'.[23] During the late 1920s and 1930s, the London-based weekly *West Africa* ran a series of adverts for Amstel Beer on the theme of 'the man who earned an Amstel Beer' (see Figure 4.4). Each ad featured a cartoon that illustrated an aspect of the imagined lifestyle of Europeans in colonial Africa. The man who earned a beer is invariably white, wears a recognisably tropical costume, and has just achieved a feat associated with colonial masculinity. Africans have no role in these adverts, except as servants or silent observers. In the episode illustrating 'the man who shot his first hippopotamus' are three smiling Africans, each drawn as being practically naked, with bulging

[22] Fieldhouse, *Merchant Capital and Economic Decolonization*, 100.

[23] *West Africa*, 21 July 1928. The term 'coaster' being commonly used to describe Europeans who worked in West Africa.



4.4 Advert for Amstel beer

eyes and thick lips. One of the Africans is evidently a servant, carrying a tray with a glass and a bottle of beer. The European reaches eagerly for the beer, with the still-smoking gun in his other hand. The other two Africans are armed with a single spear, and look at the slaughtered hippo with admiration. The drawing is undeniably funny, but it is clearly not African readers who are invited to laugh and buy Amstel beer. This approach reflects the readership of *West Africa* at the time, which mainly consisted of European merchants in Britain and West Africa, colonial officials, and others with a professional interest in West African affairs. It also included some African professionals, businessmen and clergy.[24] The adverts for Booth's dry gin in the same newspaper do not depict any Africans (see Figure 4.5). This type of gin was not popular among the mass of African consumers, and colonial authorities regarded it as one of the high-class drinks that were apparently preferred by Europeans and Western educated African elites. The Booth's gin adverts refer to leisure, class, and style. They show a group of white men who appear to have just finished a game of tennis, while a bottle of gin and four glasses are on a table in the foreground, ready to provide the sportsmen with refreshment. Other illustrated drinks adverts were not so conspicuously white, referring instead to the class and quality of the beverage. Such adverts appeared in *West Africa*, as well as in a range of local newspapers, such as the *West African Times* and the *Nigerian Pioneer*, and included recommendations for Duff's whisky ('the choice of the connoisseur'), for Grants' ('the finest whisky in the world'), and for Haig whisky ('don't be vague, ask for Haig—a sound policy'). Meanwhile, adverts for Anchor gin and Hoytema's Dutch geneva were the only adverts to regularly appear in West African newspapers during the 1920s and 1930s for the type of Dutch gin that was appreciated by the mass of African consumers. These announcements were very simple, had no illustration, and did not refer to class or lifestyle. The only claim that was made referred to the production method: these gins were produced through pot still distillation, and could therefore be legally imported into British West African colonies (see Figure 4.6). These adverts were

[24] In 1928, the United Missionary Conference passed a resolution, that: 'This conference, while expressing appreciation of the high tone of WEST AFRICA as shown in its impartial support of all sections of the community, regrets the inordinate number of liquor advertisements which appear in its pages, and would point out to the directors that these, especially some of the more blatent ones, are quite contrary to the general spirit of the paper.' F. W. Dodds, secretary, United Missionary Conference, to the Editor of *West Africa*, 18 August 1928.

4.5 Advert for Booth's dry gin

4.6 Advert for Hoytema Dutch pot-still geneva

4.7 Melchers' Distillery's Elephant label, as used in Nigeria around 1930

clearly not intended to reach consumers—African or otherwise—but traders. In that respect, they had more in common with the advertisements for general suppliers of trade goods, shipping lines, and cotton bailing presses, than with those for whisky, brandy, or beer.

Meanwhile, local clothing fashion constituted another area of African mass consumption that was largely neglected by West African newspapers and magazines of the time. There was no advertising for imported cloth, and the sparse editorial content on the subject tended to express misgivings about the 'inappropriate' copying of European dress styles by Africans. Clearly, the press was not the medium through which marketers reached the mass of African consumers. Of course, in addition to newspaper advertising, marketing specialists had many other tools at their disposal, which they could have employed to reach African consumers. Yet it appears that in most instances they considered this impractical because of a combination of limited purchasing power, the unique way in which trade was organised in West Africa, and the undeveloped state of the West African consumer apparatus more generally. In West Africa, the infrastructure of a commoditised and monetised economy, shops, consumer credit, means of mass communication, studies of consumer tastes, and other technologies that marketing specialists depended on, was still in the process of being forged by the forces of trade and colonialism in the pre-World War II period.[25]

The most important limiting factor, however, was the specific way the import and export trade was organised in West Africa. A large distance existed between producers and African consumers, because foreign producers of consumer goods did not have their own sales infrastructure in West Africa. The producers seem to have had few opportunities to influence consumer preferences directly, and depended largely on the efforts of the trading firms that dominated the market. These merchant firms, such as the United Africa Company (UAC) and John Holt & Co., benefited from efforts to encourage African consumption in general, because increased African consumption resulted in higher sales of imported goods, and also constituted an incentive for African farmers to bring agricultural produce to the market, which could then be exported by these same firms.[26] According to one British trader in

[25] Stearns, *Consumerism in World History*, ix, 58.

[26] Charles Wilson, *The History of Unilever. A Study in Economic Growth and Social Change*. 2 volumes (London: Cassell 1954), Volume II, 323; Rosalind Tigwell, James Deemin

the Gold Coast, who had a good understanding of the relationship between consumptive desires and agricultural cash crop production, though perhaps a less acute insight in African gender relations: 'Our business is built up on the extravagance of the women. They buy, and the menfolk work hard to produce the cocoa to pay their debts.'[27] In this context, there was no incentive for merchant firms to push products of one producer against those of another, and they therefore dealt in any product or brand that encouraged trade and promised profits. David Fieldhouse, commenting on the sale of soap, has noted that

> there was virtually no sales promotion by any merchant firm, and a product had to depend on its reputation among the African 'market women' who bought soap from a merchant firm's distributing point for resale in the market. Like other commodities soap sold on its appearance, smell, reputation and above all on its price.[28]

Most of the merchant firms believed that African consumers, in addition to price and appearance, paid great attention to trademarks. Trading companies had their own trademarks, which they placed on the merchandise they sold in West Africa, and which they attempted to protect against imitations. These trademarks included John Holt's 'Horse' brand, which was used on commodities as diverse as cutlery, cloth, and gin; Miller Bros' 'Turkey standing on a Basket'; and the United Africa Company's 'Y' trademark.[29] Furthermore, in spite of genuine limitations, some mass marketing of produced goods did occur, as the merchant firms distributed signs, hoardings, fliers, and posters to their dealers and distribution points in the interior. In 1928, the African and Eastern Trade Corporation founded West Africa Publicity Ltd.[30] This first advertising agency in West Africa was established to provide marketing support for the goods and services sold by its parent company (which became part of the United Africa Company in 1929). During the period up to World War II, its strategy for marketing to the mass of African consumers focused on the gluing of posters onto walls at strategic locations, and the nailing into trees of metal signs for brands

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and the organisation of West African trade—1880 to 1915 (M.Phil thesis, University of Liverpool 1978), 288; Fieldhouse, *Merchant Capital and Economic Decolonization*, 103.

[27] A. M. H., Letter to the Editor of *West Africa*, 29 June 1929.

[28] Fieldhouse, *Unilever Overseas*, 349–50.

[29] Tigwell, James Deemin and the organisation of West African trade, 298–9.

[30] 'The History of the United Africa Company Limited to 1938' (1938), 106.

such as Good Year Tyres and Ovaltine.[31] It also brought out a range of publications such as the magazine *Nigerian Teacher* and the popular *Nigerian Handbook*, which contained advertising aimed at Europeans working—or intending to work—in Nigeria.[32]

Manufacturing for West Africans

Meanwhile, manufacturers in Europe realised that they could support the 'reputation' of their goods among African consumers through the careful manipulation of product design, product naming, trademarks, and packaging. I have already discussed the importance that export gin distilleries attached to packaging as a means of communicating the identity and authenticity of their products to prospective buyers.[33] West Africa was one of their main export markets, but it was also a market where they competed fiercely.[34] From around 1900 Dutch distillers developed many of their brands and trademarks specifically for West Africa, and they also created African versions of their global brands with specially designed labels and packaging. The specific features of this packaging reflect Dutch distillers' understanding of what African buyers would find attractive. This understanding was based on direct feedback from the market, on the one hand, and on an imperialist discourse about African others, on the other. For their labels they chose bright colours that they thought would be attractive to Africans, and symbols that they assumed an illiterate African could easily identify.[35] While stars, crowns, coins, medals, and even a steam locomotive

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[31] http://www.oaan.org/history.htm (OAAN = Outdoor Advertising Association of Nigeria).

[32] Monsuru Olalekan Muritala, Development of the advertising industry in the post-independent Nigeria: 1960–1998 (long essay, Department of History, University of Ibadan, 2000). Muritala gives as sources: *TV Guide* 111 (April–June 1996), 10, and 'Advertising in Nigeria', *AAPN Journal*, 10.1 (1993), 10–2 (AAPN = Association of Advertising Practitioners of Nigeria). The *Nigeria Handbook* had started in 1917 as a private venture, the Nigerian government acquired the rights in 1922, but West Africa Publicity Ltd. published it in the 1930s. PRO CO 583/113 Clifford to Churchill, 11 October 1922; *Nigeria Handbook* (Lagos and London: West Africa Publicity Ltd., 1936).

[33] See pages 52–54.

[34] Keetie Sluyterman and Huib Vleesenbeek, *Drie Eeuwen De Kuyper. Een Geschiedenis van Jenever en Likeuren, 1695–1995* (Schiedam 1995), 29; Henkes Archive Box 39/53 Rapporten Accountants, Jaarrekeningen 1904–1984.

[35] PRAAD/A RG15/1/101 Affidavit C. J. Mensert (Rotterdam, 14 April 1932), in the trademarks case against W. Hasekamp & Co.; RG15/1/102 Affidavit C. Sheldon (Liverpool, 4 February 1932), in the trademarks case against J. H. Henkes Distillery;

were used as trademarks, pictures of animals were considered to be particularly suitable. As African males were thought to be obsessed with power and masculinity, distillers would emphasise that their gin was a powerful drink. They therefore designed many trademarks with animals that represented strength, such as the 'Bull', 'Buffalo', 'Tiger', and 'Elephant' brands (see Figures 4.7 and 4.8). Another series of labels features a picture of a pig riding on the back of a crocodile that is crossing a river. There are palm trees in the background. Some of the labels show the pig as smoking a pipe. In alternative versions it is holding a bottle of gin and a glass, apparently enjoying the refreshment. It seems that this illustration was conceived as a reference to a folktale that was completely unknown in the Netherlands, but which the distillers believed would be immediately recognisable to illiterate African consumers, who would read the picture of the crocodile-riding pig as indicating that the Dutch gin contained in the bottle was of superior quality.[36]

European and American manufacturers were well aware of the possibilities for misunderstandings when selling their products on the African market. For instance, African consumers could select their purchases on the basis of specific criteria that were not well understood by the foreign manufacturers, or they could put the foreign imports to uses that had not been intended by the producers. It was also possible that Africans misunderstood the visual language that was used on labels and packaging. An example of the latter problem was the troubled introduction of Stork margarine in Zimbabwe. It appears that, initially, producer Lever Brothers did not design specific packaging for the African market, and used the same wrapper as they used in Britain, which was illustrated with a picture of a happy baby. According to Burke, many Africans consequently assumed that the colourless substance was in fact rendered baby fat.[37] Luise White has shown that such rumours about Europeans, and the material culture associated with them, were quite common in colonial Africa.[38] The fact that margarine was part of a Western style of eating, and had therefore been used predominantly

RG15/1/102 Affidavit H. S. Rosenthal (London, 22 January 1932), in the trademarks case against J. H. Henkes Distillery.

[36] Hans van der Sloot, *Het Echte Schiedamse Jeneverboek* (Ter Aar: Uitgeverij Van Lindonk 1987), 85.

[37] Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women*, 162.

[38] Luise White, *Speaking with Vampires. Rumor and History in Colonial Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2000).

4.8 Dutch gin labels used in West Africa around 1930

4.9 Advertising plate for Henkes Paramount Chief Aromatic Schnapps (not dated)

by Europeans, may have added further credence to the suspicion. Lever Brothers responded by replacing the picture of a baby with that of a stork, which reduced the rumours somewhat. However, some of Burke's informants argued that it was the product itself that had been changed—to stork fat.[39]

It was not only because of such possible misunderstandings that producers kept in touch with traders in West Africa to obtain market information and to get feedback on the goods they shipped. European cloth manufacturers who hoped to export to Africa, for example, had known for centuries that their success in the textile trade depended not just on price and quality, but equally on the colours and design of the material being acceptable to the African fashion of the moment. As African fashions in textile varied from place to place and from time to time, European merchants and textile producers had to study the changing tastes of African consumers to avoid sending cargoes of unmarketable goods to West Africa.[40] *The Times* commented that:

> Many people believe that the African is a person of very simple tastes who is ready to accept all sorts of second quality goods and clearing lines, and crude designs and garish colours, which the more fashionable nations reject. This is far from the truth. It has been the life's work of many merchant converters in Manchester to produce specialty African prints for the people, men and women, 'on the Coast'.[41]

European textile producers examined the colours and patterns on indigenous African textiles, studied the reports of European traders and colonial administrators, and invited the direct feedback of African traders. Of the European trading companies, the United Africa Company took a very proactive approach. Its agents and customers were in direct contact with textile manufacturers and offered suggestions as to which colours and patterns would be popular in West Africa. The company also employed an African designer, Mr. Bentsi-Enchill, whose designs were produced by a number of British and Dutch manufacturers from the 1930s onwards.[42] The producers also sent their own fact-finding

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[39] Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women*, 162.

[40] John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1680* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998), 231; Christopher B. Steiner, 'Another image of Africa: toward an ethnohistory of European cloth marketed in West Africa, 1873–1960', *Ethnohistory* 32.2 (1985), 91–110; there 97–8.

[41] *The Times*, 13 August 1958, quoted in: Steiner, 'Another image of Africa', 92.

[42] Ietse Meij, 'Shimmering Fabrics for Ghana' in: Ietse Meij, ed., *Fashion and Ghana* (The Hague: Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, 2001), 8–27, there 21.

missions to West Africa. When the export manager of the Dutch firm Van Vlissingen made his first exploratory trip in 1934, he brought along a collection of samples, and showed them to agents and to a large number of market women in Ivory Coast, the Gold Coast, and Togo. He found many local differences in the demand for colours and designs. A design that was apparently thought of as 'no use' in Accra proved to be very popular in Kumasi, while a new colour red that Accra traders liked, was 'too bright' for the market women in Nsawam and Koforidua. Market research did not remain limited to a one-way traffic of managers and designers visiting West Africa. During the 1950s Van Vlissingen invited groups of African market women to its factory in the Netherlands to give their opinions on new designs.[43]

Dutch gin distillers likewise attempted to gain an understanding of the West African market. The directors of distilleries such as Bols, Henkes, and De Kuyper made tours to study market conditions.[44] They also employed their own agents based in West Africa, even though the vast majority of the exports continued to take place through merchant firms based in Britain or France. When Henkes appointed W. Clarke as their West African agent against a five per cent commission, they did so not primarily to boost sales through local entrepreneurs, but rather to increase their understanding of the West African market, and to keep a closer watch on the activities of their competitors.[45] The additional market intelligence gathered in this fashion did not result in a change in marketing practices. The main way through which Dutch gin was promoted was through the packaging, and as was the case with Dutch wax cloth, traders and companies based in West Africa worked together with the manufacturers on appropriate product design, especially in

[43] *Ibidem*, 22–3. Van Vlissingen was founded in 1846 and has been trading as Vlisco since 1965. Its 'Guaranteed Dutch Wax Vlisco' is still popular and highly respected throughout West Africa.

[44] Sluyterman and Vleesenbeek, *Drie Eeuwen De Kuyper*, 79; [Hans van der Sloot], *150 Jaar Henkes. Enkele Aspecten van Anderhalve Eeuw Gedistilleerd-Industrie in Delfshaven en Omgeving* (n.p. n.d. [1975]), 44–5; PRAAD/A RG15/1/101 In the Matter of Trade Marks Ordinance Cap 171 and in the Matter of Trade Mark No: 2559; Nationaal Archief ARA-II, BuZa, B-dossiers 1871–1940, Inv. Nr. 1468 Afd. Handel Dpt. Landbouw, Nijverheid en Handel aan Dir. Ec. Z., BuZa, 23 February 1922, nr. 2406 (The letter comments on observations made by a Bols director during a trip to West Africa. I am grateful to Michel Doortmont for drawing my attention to this item.)

[45] Henkes Archive Box 39/51, Book 'Notulen Bestuursvergadering', entry for 22 January 1923; PRAAD/A RG15/1/101 Affidavit Augustus Henkes, 5 November 1931 in the trademarks case against W. Hasekamp & Co.

the fields of labels, trademarks and bottles. Some distillers produced handbills and coloured show cards, which they distributed for display at retail premises. However, other ways of drawing attention to the brand, such as touring promotion vans, free samples, or the sponsoring of traditional festivals, were not attempted.

Of course, the local meanings of labels and trademarks were as much the result of local interpretations and preferences, as they were of the marketing attempts of the Dutch distillers. For example, the idea that Dutch gin was an exceptionally pure drink, the purity of which qualified it for use in specific ritual settings, was not one that had been intended by the distillers. Similarly, the decision to use white or silver closures, which was significant in local African terms, was almost certainly not taken with these local meanings in mind. In fact, during the interwar period, there were only very few attempts by distillers to exploit for marketing purposes the additional meanings and uses that their gins had already acquired in West Africa. One exception may have been the introduction of 'Paramount Chief Aromatic Schnapps' by the Henkes Distillery (see Figure 4.9).[46] Marketed at the same time as the '3 Matchetes' and the 'Red Bird' brands, which were versions of the familiar theme of easily identifiable symbols for illiterate Africans, the Paramount Chief brand attempted something new: to exploit the meanings and uses that schnapps gin had acquired for West Africans. The name paramount chief is an obvious reference to the association of gin with the status of traditional rulers, whereby the paramount chief has more power than the other chiefs. The circumstance that this categorisation—including the term 'paramount chief'—was a result of British colonial attempts to organise the local administration of their West African territories, did not undercut the effectiveness of the traditional connotations that Henkes attempted to achieve with this brand. The label shows an illustration of a chief, seated on a stool and wearing traditional dress, holding what looks like a glass of gin. Other aspects of the introduction of this brand are more difficult to interpret. Why, for instance, was the new Paramount Chief brand marketed as schnapps, and not as gin or geneva?

[46] I encountered materials relating to Paramount Chief Aromatic Schnapps in a box containing mainly correspondence on trademarks and labels from the 1920s and 1930s. The '3 Matchetes' brand, for instance, was introduced in 1927. However, the Paramount Chief Aromatic Schnapps material itself is not dated. Henkes Archive Box 21/3–21/8 Clichés, opposities, kvk, balansen.

According to Emmanuel Akyeampong, the marketing of Dutch gin under the name aromatic schnapps occurred relatively recently, after World War I. Schnapps became especially popular from the 1930s, after drinks sold under the names gin and geneva had been discredited.[47] So it is possible that the new brand was designed to hold onto—or even regain—a market that had suffered from negative publicity about Dutch gin and geneva. However, the term schnapps had already been in continuous use since the nineteenth century, and Henkes was exporting its 'Star Brand' schnapps gin to Accra as early as 1887, and probably earlier than that.[48] Dutch export distilleries used the term to indicate a type of gin, which they marketed as being of superior quality, and often sold in smaller bottles than other gin brands. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Blankenheym & Nolet distillery would produce their Telmans brand schnapps gin to a higher strength than their other gins, then wrap the bottles in blue paper, attach a 'medical certificate', and finally pack the schnapps in specially planed cases, the smoothness of which would indicate immediately that this was not ordinary gin.[49] Henkes would place their schnapps bottles in an additional carton before placing them in wooden crates, while they stacked their other gins in the crates without such extra packaging.[50] West African consumers have long respected the Dutch gin brands that were marketed as Aromatic Schiedam Schnapps, and were often prepared to pay a premium.[51] It nevertheless seems that during the first half of the twentieth century, Dutch distillers focused more on gins branded as gin or geneva, and that after World War II they stopped supporting these in favour of their 'schnapps'-branded gins. This possibly reflected a change in the relative appreciation of geneva and schnapps by African consumers. In order to understand such patterns in the naming of gins and their respective trademarks, we need to examine the history of such names

[47] Emmanuel Akyeampong, 'Ahenfo Nsa (the 'Drink of Kings'). Dutch schnapps and ritual in Ghanaian history', in: Ineke van Kessel, ed., *Merchants, Missionaries and Migrants: 300 Years of Dutch-Ghanaian Relations* (Amsterdam: KIT Publishers 2002), 50–9.

[48] Henkes Archive Box 39/66, File 'Oude Jeneverorders'; In 1905 Henkes registered a new label for its Star Brand schnapps in Nigeria (Henkes Archive Box [no number] Bescheiden m.b.t. merken).

[49] Blankenheym & Nolet Archive 216/68 Exportorderboek Afrikaanse Westkust 1908–1909.

[50] Henkes Archive Box 21/3–21/8.

[51] PRO CO 96/685/2 Governor Slater to L. S. Amery, 23 January 1929.

and trademarks in West Africa, their relationships between competing brands, and with African consumers.

'Spurious imitations' and brand policies

In chapter two I examined the extent to which nineteenth-century Dutch and German gin production and export were at the same time in a state of intense competition and close interconnection. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that the origins of Aromatic Schiedam Schnapps, so important in West Africa, go back to early-nineteenth century Hamburg. In 1810, Udolpho Wolfe, who worked for a distillery in Hamburg, developed a gin with a number of mainly herbal added ingredients that were supposed to give it medicinal qualities. Marketed as 'Wolfes Aromatic Schiedam Schnapps' it was an instant export success, and especially popular in the United States and Canada. Wolfe registered his company in Hamburg, opened offices in New York in 1828 and in Rotterdam in 1848, while he had the schnapps produced for him in Schiedam, by Blankenheym & Nolet Distillers.[52] Wolfe's business model was rather progressive for its time: the actual product was made by a third party according to Wolfe's specifications, while his company focused on sales and on the building up of 'Wolfes Aromatic Schiedam Schnapps' as a global brand. The commercial success of Wolfe's schnapps inspired others to develop their own versions. Soon, all Dutch export distilleries—including Blankenheym & Nolet, who supplied the genuine product to Wolfe—produced their own copy of Wolfe's schnapps. German distillers such as Nagel in Hamburg also made Aromatic Schiedam Schnapps. All of these were straightforward imitations of Wolfe's schnapps, bottled in the same square bottles made out of green glass, and with labels that had the same layout and contained the same claims as to the medical benefits of schnapps. Like Wolfe's schnapps, these labels contained a warning for consumers to: 'Please note label and brand and beware of spurious imitations'.[53] While Wolfe's original schnapps never became popular in West Africa, the

[52] Wim Snikkers, 'Schiedam, spiritus en schnapps (3). Enige invloeden op de ontwikkeling van de moutwijnindustrie', *Scyedam* 23.2 (1997), 59–68, there 64.

[53] Henkes Archive Box [no number] Bescheiden m.b.t. merken; Depôts van merken + inschrijvingsbewijzen (Holland), Depôts van merken (Buitenland).

imitations did become very widespread, and Schiedam schnapps from Holland is nowadays regarded as the original product.[54]

'Real Dutch Wax Print' cloth, the other Dutch import that West Africans have come to regard as part of their cultural heritage, similarly started out as an imitation. When Dutch textile manufacturers started to export their cloth to West Africa in the nineteenth century, what they sold were imitations of Indonesian batiks. These imitations had originally been designed for the Indonesian market, and were made to look and even smell like the original product.[55] In West Africa, the Dutch prints soon became known as the genuine article, and its producers—like the schnapps distillers—issued announcements warning about attempts to imitate their products.[56] The case of Dutch wax print cloth indicates that imitations were not limited to the gin trade or to the West African market. In fact, the production of imitations of popular products or styles was very widespread in Europe and North America during the nineteenth century, and not just for export to Africa and Asia. Products were readily imitated for local Western markets, and trademarks provided only limited protection. A well-known name or trademark could even be a liability in this respect, as it attracted imitators.

Legal protection of trademarks developed during the second half of the nineteenth century, with France introducing trademarks laws in 1857, the United Kingdom in 1862, and the United States in 1870. The timing of the legislation reflected not so much an increase of imitations, but rather the proliferation of industrialisation, commoditisation, and consumer culture. The increasing separation of consumption and production not only meant that for their daily needs, people had to rely to a larger extent on commodities produced by others, but also that in their consumptive choices they had to increasingly rely on impersonal references such as trademarks.[57] In this context, trademarks, and the legal protection of trademarks, became more and more important. However, even with the new national legislations it was quite difficult to act against trademark infringements and cases of obvious imitation. In international trade, it proved next to impossible. In its first issue, published in 1877, the journal *Trade Marks* claimed that 'inferior foreign goods, stamped with British Marks, have deprived us, before

[54] Snikkers, 'Schiedam, spiritus en schnapps (3)', 64–7.
[55] Meij, 'Shimmering Fabrics for Ghana', 14.
[56] *Ibidem*, 12. Also see: www.vlisco.com.
[57] Miller, 'Consumption and commodities', 141–61.

now, of the trade of a whole province,' while admitting that British producers were equally guilty of the practice.[58] In spite of campaigns for international registration, trademarks legislation remained national. During the interwar period, therefore, companies that wanted to register their trademarks for trade in West Africa had to do so in each territory separately. In a trading environment characterised by many look-alikes and outright imitations, this could result in one and the same trademark being registered successfully in the Gold Coast, but being refused entry into Nigeria.[59]

This happened when Henkes attempted to register a version of the well-known 'Prize Medal' brand in Ghana and Nigeria. There have been many different versions of this brand, produced by at least ten different distillers. It has been suggested that Henkes was the first gin producer to display medals on its labels.[60] However, it is impossible to determine with absolute certainty who first offered a 'Prize Medal' branded gin, or even which company first exported such a brand to West Africa. During the nineteenth century it was quite common to display exhibition medals on labels, and such medals could be found, not just on gin, but also on many other products including bottled beers, canned soup ('Campbell's Condensed'), mustard, apple cider, pocket watches, and magic lanterns.[61] These were usually medals awarded at international trade exhibitions, such as the 1851 'Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations' in London, the 1867 'Exposition Universelle' in Paris, or the 1876 'Centennial Exposition' in Philadelphia. These world fairs generated a lot of publicity and drew hundreds of thousands of visitors, including delegations from many countries, traders and manufacturers, church parties, and working class families enjoying a day out. In the spectacular surroundings of the world fairs, which included the Crystal Palace in London and the Eiffel Tower in Paris, feats of engineering progress were displayed alongside mass marketed consumer products such as margarines, soaps, beers, and

[58] 'Trade Marks', *Trade Marks* 1.1 (London, 2 July 1877).

[59] Henkes Archive Box 21/3–21/8 Oppositie Netherlands Distilleries tegen onze inschrijvingen Gold Band, Red Ribbon; Gold Coast Colony (beslissing te onzen gunste) en Nigeria (beslissing in ons nadeel) 1929–1936.

[60] Van der Sloot, *Het Echte Schiedamse Jeneverboek*, 103.

[61] Robert Opie, *The Art of the Label. Designs of the Times* (London: Simon and Schuster 1987); www.campbellsoupcompany.com/history_1900.asp; www.martinellis.com/martinellis_history.htm; www.luikerwaal.com/newframe_nl.htm?/etiket1_nl.htm.

liquors.[62] Manufacturers of consumer goods were keen to participate in such high-profile spectacles of modernity and consumption to increase recognition of their products among the buying public. They also attached great importance to winning one of the many gold or silver medals of excellence that were distributed among the participants, as they expected that the mentioning of an exhibition medal in their advertising would boost their sales.[63] Thus to consumers in Europe and America, the reproduction of prize medals on a label conveyed that the quality of the product had been independently established at a prestigious event. It is less clear what such labels were meant to communicate to illiterate African consumers.

When the Henkes distillery registered its 'Prize Medal' brand in 1869, the label displayed three medals, awarded at the 1862 exhibition in London, the 1866 Amsterdam show, and the 1867 exposition in Paris (see Figure 4.10).[64] At that time, there had not yet been any international exhibitions in West Africa, and only very few West Africans will have read about a European, American, or Australian world fair in a newspaper.[65] It is therefore highly unlikely that African consumers will have recognised the emblems on the label as being prize medals. It is possible that they regarded them as silver coins, which would explain the local name 'Money Gin'. Although coins were not very widespread in nineteenth and early-twentieth century West Africa, silver coins such as U.S. dollars and Maria Theresa dollars had become accepted as a currency in the—by then illegal—slave trade.[66] Perhaps the associations linking coins to the slave trade; slavery to kinship; and kinship to the

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[62] Jeffrey Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition of 1851: a Nation on Display* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 1999); Erik Mattie, *World's Fairs* (New York, NY: Princeton Architectural Press 1998); Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England*, 40–53.

[63] Allan Pred, 'Spectacular articulations of modernity: the Stockholm Exhibition of 1897', *Geografiska Annales. Series B, Human Geography* 73.1 (1991), 45–84, there 59–62.

[64] Henkes Archive Box [no number] Bescheiden m.b.t. merken. It appears that an earlier trademark showing only the medal awarded at the 1862 London exhibition has been used since 1863 or thereabouts. See: Trade Marks Journal, 24 January 1877, 214–5; *150 Jaar Henkes*, 29–31.

[65] When the recently established British colonial administration organised an Industrial Exhibition at Onitsha in 1905, the African population greeted this with great suspicion. A rumour circulated that six steamers filled with men who had gone to visit the exhibition had been sunk in the middle of the river. CMS G3 A 3/O 1906/11 Bishop Tugwell to Nott, Onitsha, 26 December 1905.

[66] Martin Lynn, *Commerce and Economic Change in West Africa: the Palm Oil Trade in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge and New York, NY: Cambridge University Press 1997), 69–70.

4.10 Henkes Prize Medal label, used for export to the Gold Coast in the 1930s

4.11 Labels from Blankenheym & Nolet distillery's West Africa Order Book

ritual use of alcohol, contributed to the significance and popularity of 'Money Gin'.[67] At any rate, the use of exhibition medals became very widespread. The labels that the firm Netherlands Distilleries used for the private label gins it produced for trading companies such as the African Association, F. & A. Swanzy, and Mante Frères et Borelli, showed prize medals arranged in a pattern identical to that on the Henkes label. The medals displayed dates from the 1870s, about ten years younger than those on the Henkes label, which appears to indicate this version was an imitation. The same goes for the exhibition medals on Blankenheym & Nolet's 'Prize Medal' geneva. The similarly laid-out label for Herman Jansen's gin includes a medal apparently awarded to the company in 1847, but it is unclear when this particular prize medal label was first registered or used. The prize medals on the label of E. Kiderlen's 'Celebrated Schiedam Geneva' are arranged in a different pattern, and date from the late 1860s and the 1870s. The German firms J. Ferd. Nagel and C. W. Herwig each had one prize medal embossed on the bottles of their gins. Meanwhile, the W. Hasekamp distillery used a 'Coin Medal' label, which showed a number of coins from different countries instead of exhibition medals.[68] As Hasekamp claimed that it first began to use this label in 1901, this must have been a straightforward attempt at imitating 'Prize Medal' gins by a young company that had not yet acquired any exhibition medals. However, it also showed an accurate understanding of the African interpretation of the Prize Medal label.

Henkes 'Star' brand aromatic Schiedam schnapps also displayed an exhibition medal on its label, but the key feature was a five-pointed star with an 'R' in the middle. The distillery based this brand on an eighteenth century slave tag that founder J. H. Henkes is believed to have acquired cheaply from a London merchant. Henkes first registered the 'Star-R' in 1863.[69] The star symbol, like the prize medal, was commonly used in trademarks during the nineteenth century. It could be found in such diverse places as on the labels of Heineken bottled beer (in combination with a mention of exhibition medals), on the vessels of the White Star Line, and on R. H. Macy & Co.'s store in New

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[67] See chapter two, pages 45–47, for an exploration of these linkages.

[68] PRAAD/A RG15/1/101 In the Matter of Trade Marks Ordinance Cap 171 and in the Matter of Trade Mark No: 2559.

[69] *150 Jaar Henkes*, 33; Henkes Archive Box [no number] Bescheiden m.b.t. merken.

York.[70] The star was also commonly used in Dutch gin brands. Vlek distillers exported a 'Star Brand' gin to the Gold Coast, while Blankenheym & Nolet exported their 'Genièvre Etoile' brand to Senegal and 'Stern Genever' to Cameroon.[71] Other well known symbols that were used by more than one distillery as trademark for gins exported to West Africa include various 'Phoenix', 'Bell'/'Glocke', 'Anchor', and 'Crown' brands.

Thus as symbols and names resembled each other closely and tended to be drawn from a limited number of categories, it was often difficult to determine who had used a trademark first, and whether a trademark that resembled an older existing one had indeed been designed in order to deceive buyers. It is nevertheless clear that distillers and trading companies at times attempted to mislead African consumers.[72] For example, the Blankenheym & Nolet distillery's export order books for West Africa evidence a number of instances whereby the label used for the order resembles that of a competitor rather closely. The resemblance was clearly intentional, as written descriptions of the labels and bottles referred to competitors' brands, and at times the label of a competitor was glued next to the look-alike label to be used for the specific order (see Figure 4.11). In some cases, the look-alikes were made specifically to the requirements of trading companies, but produced and shipped without brand name or the name of the producer.[73] Indeed, in 1924, the distillery decided to withdraw one of its brands from the West African market after a complaint from a competitor.[74] A similar case was the 'Three Medals' gin that Netherlands Distilleries supplied to West Africa for the Liverpool trading firm of H. B. W. Russell & Co. with a label resembling Henkes distillery's 'Prize Medals' brand, and a glass seal of a bird with an eel in its beak. After having been sent a bottle of this gin from a business partner in West Africa who claimed that the gin was marketed as 'Stork' gin, Henkes complained to

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[70] www.macys.com/store/about/history/index.jsp?bhcp=1. The star symbol remained popular. In the first decades of the twentieth century, Texaco, Mercedes Benz, and Marcus Garvey's Black Star Line all adopted star-based trademarks.

[71] Van der Sloot, *Het Echte Schiedamse Jeneverboek*, 103; Blankenheym & Nolet Archive 216/68 Exportorderboek Afrikaanse Westkust 1908–1909.

[72] Henkes Archive Box 21/3–21/8 Affidavit of William Joseph Hasekamp in answer to affidavit of Mr. Cornelis Johannes Mensert. Sworn the 5th day of July 1933, Rotterdam.

[73] Blankenheym & Nolet Archive 216/69 Exportorderboek Afrikaanse Westkust 1909–1910.

[74] Henkes Archive Box 39/51, Book 'Notulen Bestuursvergadering'.

Netherlands Distilleries. In a response, Netherlands Distilleries admitted that the labels were similar. However, they pointed out that the bird on their glass seal was an ibis rather than a stork, adding:

> We must strongly disagree with your opinion that the animal on the glass seal resembles a stork or YOUR stork. Neither the tail, nor the shape and thickness of the legs justify a comparison with a stork. Furthermore, according to the label in our possession, your bird, a stork, is standing on one leg and faces to the left, while our bird in comparison has an entirely different posture and shape, and is facing to the right.[75]

Netherlands Distilleries eventually accepted that Russell & Co. was probably passing their gin off as Henkes' 'Stork' gin, and agreed to use a different glass seal.[76] Other Dutch distilleries, in order to avoid detection, shipped their gins to West Africa without labels or trademarks. Their business partners then attached the imitation labels upon arrival.[77]

Specific brands promised a certain level of quality. This was not simply a matter of brand image: there were genuine differences in quality between distillers, and between the different brands exported by any one distillery. For example, when Henkes realised it was losing market share in West Africa compared to cheaper brands, it decided to develop brands of relatively inferior quality that could be sold more cheaply. Of course, these cheaper gins had to be carefully marketed as being different from the Henkes-branded gins so as not to undermine the reputation of the premium brand. They could for example be marketed as the private labels of trading companies.[78] This decision was part of Henkes' consistent brand policy: all of the company's quality gins, regardless of the type or label, were to be sold under the Henkes name. If a trading company wanted a private label quality gin, then Henkes insisted that the Henkes name also had to appear prominently on the product. If the same trading company wanted a cheap gin,

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[75] Henkes Archive Box [no number] Bescheiden m.b.t. merken, Nederlandse Gist- en Spiritusfabriek to J. H. Henkes' Distilleerderij, 21 March 1906.

[76] Henkes Archive Box [no number] Bescheiden m.b.t. merken, Nederlandse Gist- en Spiritusfabriek to J. H. Henkes' Distilleerderij, 10 April 1906; for a similar case, also involving instructions from H. B. W. Russell & Co., see: PRAAD/A RG15/1/101 Affidavit C. J. Mensert, 14 April 1932, in the trademarks case against W. Hasekamp & Co.

[77] Henkes Archive Box [no number] Bescheiden m.b.t. merken, Henkes to Directie van de Nederlandsche Gist- en Spiritusfabriek, 11 May 1905.

[78] Henkes Archive Box 39/51, Book 'Notulen Bestuursvergadering' (1904–1928).

then Henkes would supply, but not have its name on it.[79] This policy reflects the tension between, on the one hand, the West African trading environment wherein sales depended on low pricing, and on the other hand, the decision to position 'Henkes' globally as a quality brand. Henkes' main brands for West Africa were the 'Prize Medal Aromatic Schiedam Schnapps' and the 'Prize Medal Stork Gin'—the latter with a number of slightly different labels with different colours. While some of its other premium brands also had either a stork or a prize medal on the label, the only real consistency in the brand policy lay in the recurring use of the printed name J. H. Henkes combined with his signature on all quality brand labels.

Most of the other Dutch distillers exporting to West Africa appear not to have placed such a strong focus on brand development, with the exception of a company called Erven Lucas Bols. In contrast to export distilleries such as Henkes, De Kuyper, and Hasekamp, which were practically unknown to gin drinkers in the Netherlands, Erven Lucas Bols had a strong presence on the domestic market and invested much in the 'Bols' name. For its advertising campaigns, Bols employed well-known poets, designers, cartoonists, and painters. It also developed a series of collectables, and gave away fancy samples to first class passengers on steam ships. Its international expansion was not just based on export, but also on establishing a string of distilleries, including, in 1933, one in South Africa.[80] During the interwar years, the Bols that was sold in West Africa nevertheless continued to be exported from the Netherlands. Erven Lucas Bols, like Henkes, maintained a consistent brand policy in their exports to West Africa, even though they, too, eventually were compelled to export cheaper gins under different brand names. The ways in which Henkes and especially Erven Lucas Bols developed and supported their brands during the interwar years was up-to-date and can be compared to the ways in which companies such as Lever Brothers (later Unilever), Colmans, and Cadburys were marketing their products. The West African context, with its cultural, economic, and political constraints, limited what Henkes and Erven Lucas Bols could do at this time. Nevertheless, the principles and the thinking about the brands were decidedly modern. In contrast, the

[79] *150 Jaar Henkes*, 33; Henkes Archive, Box 39/51, Book 'Notulen Bestuursvergadering' (1904–1928).

[80] Peter Vermeulen, 'Erven Lucas Bols', www.deoudeflesch.nl/english.htm.

export brand policies of most of the other distilleries looked rather out-of-date.[81] Dutch export distilleries had been progressive during the nineteenth century in their use of bottles and labels to make their products special, recognisable, and desirable to African consumers, at a time when their gins were barely marketed as brands on the domestic market. However, by the 1930s their practice had become old-fashioned: dealing with the trading companies helped to sell relatively large quantities of their gins in West Africa, but this did not do much to build up brand loyalty. Trading companies dealt in the gins as a way of acquiring the agricultural produce they were trading in, as they expected to make their profits in the first place from the sale of agricultural produce from Africa, and to a lesser extent from selling imports to Africans.[82] Many export distillers were content to continue to produce brands showing generic trademarks and layouts associated with Dutch gin to specifications from the trading companies, including look-alikes and imitations of successful competitors' brands, rather than to develop their own strong brands.

The Henkes distillery's strategies for marketing and brand development in West Africa were based on a number of assumptions. The first was that African consumers could effectively distinguish between the different brands of gin, even when these had emblems and colours in common. While there was general agreement that African consumers attached great importance to trademarks, the many disputes over alleged imitations of trademarks and labels indicate that the industry was not convinced that Africans always could spot the differences. I will examine this question in more detail in the next section. Another assumption was that African consumers would define 'quality' in the same terms as the distillers did. In the late nineteenth century, Dutch consumers had preferred the cheaper gins that were made using patent still alcohol because of their more neutral flavour which made them easier to drink, even though distillers insisted that gin made purely out of grain alcohol distilled in pot stills, was better. Why would African consumers be any more inclined to accept the distillers' definition of quality? A case in point is the discrepancy between the colonial government's and the Gold Coast chiefs' assessment of the quality of imported gin

[81] Teresa Da Silva Lopes, 'Brands and the evolution of multinationals in alcoholic beverages', *Business History* 44.3 (2002), 1–30.

[82] Wilson, *The History of Unilever*, Volume II, 323.

in the 1930s. While the Gold Coast government prided itself in having introduced legislation that had led to the quality of imported gin being much improved compared to the years before World War I, most of the chiefs in the Greater Accra area claimed that the gin had become less pure, and asked for a return to the importation of gin 'of pre-war quality'.[83] While 'purity', as discussed in chapter three, was clearly an important aspect of quality, other criteria such as a 'smiling scent' are more difficult to reconstruct. What is clear, however, is the increased importance of the appearance of the bottle and the emblems, glass seals, and other aspects of the packaging of gin. Branding thus became more and more important. In this sense, it appears the distillers were correct in placing so much emphasis on the placing of popular emblems and look-alike trademarks on their labels. To West Africans meanwhile, to be able to distinguish between brands, and to see through attempts at imitation, showed consumer sophistication. How effective such expertise was, became a matter for debate in the context of alleged trademark infringements. That selecting the correct type of gin was not just a matter of personal choice and appreciation, but a public display of wealth and consumer knowledge, can be seen from the extent that gin consumption involved making sure that the gin bottle, complete with the relevant trademark, was clearly visible to others. The appearance of some of the gin bottles was so highly prized, that after the gin it originally contained had been drunk, people would use the bottles to re-fill and serve other brands of gin from.[84]

African consumers and disputed trademarks

In 1904, the Henkes distillery received a letter from one of their business partners in Hamburg, who reported that the agent of one of Henkes' German competitors had attempted to sell him gin. The competitor had explained: 'see, our label is almost the same as that of Henkes, even though it displays our company name. These Negroes do not look at the name, but at the trademark, prize medals and Stork, and in those respects the labels are practically identical.'[85] This German

[83] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Tabulation of answers.
[84] Interview with Dr Yaw Bredwa-Mensah, Legon, 3 September 2004.
[85] Henkes Archive Box [no number] Bescheiden m.b.t. merken: Imitatiezaken (I) Meyer & van den Bergh to Henkes Distilleerdery, Hamburg, 9 May 1904.

firm thus relied on assumptions about the specific features that African consumers looked for when they purchased gin not just to develop brands and labels that would be attractive to Africans, but to pitch them in such a way that they would not be considered infringements of competitors' trademarks under existing trademarks legislation, while Africans would still mistake them for the competitors' brands. This was a common practice during the period up to World War II. Gin traders and producers often expressed their understanding as to what features Africans paid attention to in racist terms. Their viewpoint was partly influenced by colonial thinking about African consumption. Yet it was also informed by feedback from European and African traders and consumers. Interviews with Ghanaian consumers I held for this book indicate that the imitators' strategies might have worked. Theodore Anthony remembered how, 'when our parents sent us to buy bottles, we were told to not buy just any gin, but only the one with the bird on the shoulder.'[86] The chiefs and elders of Denu observed:

> Sometimes the schnapps would have the same white cover on the bottle, and the same signature on the package, also "made in Holland". But the moment you have a taste of it, you would realise that it is a different brand altogether.[87]

The look-alike practices resulted in a number of trademark cases in British West African courts of law during the 1920s and 1930s. These tended to be difficult to solve, as so many of the allegedly distinctive features on gin labels were so commonly used in trademarks for gin—and had been for decades—that judges regarded them to be *publici juris*. Crucial in these cases was therefore the question of how likely it was that African consumers would mistake one brand of gin for another. A range of expert witnesses, including European traders, African shopkeepers, and consumers, discussed the buying patterns of Africans, and their recorded statements provide us with some insights into brand awareness and brand recognition among African consumers.

Trademarks Registers and trademarks laws were established in British West African colonies in the first years of the twentieth century. However, both the business community and the colonial judiciary were aware that trademarks had been used in the West African trade for

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[86] Interview with Theodore A. Komivi Anthony, held at Accra, 13 July 1999.

[87] Interview with Torgbui Baku and twenty other chiefs, elders and queen mothers, held at Denu, 5 August 2000.

decades, and also that the assumptions about how consumers understood trademarks that were underlying the formal legislation, did not necessarily match West African realities. During the 1920s and 1930s, therefore, when dealing with trademarks cases, judges in the Gold Coast and Nigeria followed the ground rules formulated by Judge C. J. Osborne in 1912:

> The Trade Marks Laws of this Colony have to be administered with due regard to local conditions, and with a view to protecting not only a vast illiterate population little acquainted with pictorial representations, but also the pioneers of trade who have earned a reputation among these illiterate folk by the quality of goods associated with some recognised mark, such as a particular bird, animal, tree or other object.[88]

Important here is the assumption that African colonial subjects lacked knowledge and skills that consumers in Europe and North America could be expected to possess.[89] Therefore the 'less civilised' African consumers were thought to be in greater need of protection as they were more likely to be confused, or even intentionally deceived, by superficial similarities between trademarks.[90] It was thought that this was not peculiar to African consumers, but a feature characteristic of recently colonised peoples more generally, and the proceedings of West African trademarks cases contain a number of references to cases in India, Yemen, and East Africa. African colonial subjects, and especially those who were likely to purchase Dutch gin, were considered to be as yet insufficiently developed as consumers to be aware of all the subtleties of branding, marketing, and consumption. When Netherlands Distilleries opposed J. J. Melchers' attempt to register their 'Bull' brand gin in the Gold Coast because it resembled their 'Buffalo' brand, Judge R. E. Hall pointed out a number of obvious differences between the two brands, concluding: 'I do not think it could seriously be contended

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[88] PRAAD/A RG15/1/22 Appeal Court Judgment In the matter of an Application for Registration of a Trade Mark by Distilleerderij van J. J. Melchers vs. Netherlands Distilleries, 19 September 1929.

[89] On the theme of consumption as knowledge, see: Mary Douglas and Baron C. Isherwood, *The World of Goods. Towards an Anthropology of Consumption* (Revised Edition) (London: Routledge 1996).

[90] PRAAD/A RG15/1/101 A. M. Akiwumi, Notice of opposition to application for trademark registration by Distilleerderij en Alcoholfabriek "De Papegaai", Accra, October 1926; RG15/1/102 Affidavit C. J. Mensert (Rotterdam, 14 April 1932), in the trademarks case against J. H. Henkes Distillery. The expression 'less civilised' is quoted from Mensert's affidavit.

that in a country of literates these two marks so nearly resembled each other as to be calculated to deceive.' However, he then turned to the question of how African buyers might look at the labels, observing that, 'we have to consider in these cases the conditions obtaining in this Colony where there are so many illiterate people.'[91] It seems that during the interwar years, judges in most trademarks cases in Nigeria and the Gold Coast took the view that a slight degree of resemblance between any two trademarks was sufficient to deceive the average illiterate African consumer.[92]

The potential for confusion was thought to be particularly great with a product such as Dutch gin, which was predominantly consumed in the more rural areas in the context of African traditional ritual and display. It was often illiterate customers who bought the bottles of gin for these purposes, and at times children were sent to buy a bottle urgently needed to pour libation or to announce a death. Similarly, the chiefs, elders, and traditional priests who used this gin for ritual purposes did not normally have a Western-style education. Judge Ross, in a Nigerian case observed:

> In this country the percentage of persons who can read and especially of those to whom the class of goods concerned are sold, is extremely small. Very few natives can, even after a minute explanation, understand a picture or pick out the details in one which would differ from the details in another picture.[93]

The claim that Africans could not 'understand a picture' appears to have been based as much on colonial assumptions about 'uncivilised' peoples, as on actual observations. At the very least, it was an overgeneralisation, as photography and especially family photographs had

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[91] PRAAD/A RG15/1/22 Appeal Court Judgment In the matter of an Application for Registration of a Trade Mark by Distilleerderij van J. J. Melchers vs. Netherlands Distilleries, 19 September 1929.

[92] This observation is based on a relatively small sample of trademarks cases. The sample consisted of all trademarks cases relating to gin that I managed to find in company archives and in official archives in Ghana. In the course of the proceedings of these cases, lawyers and judges mentioned and discussed many additional cases thought to be of relevance (which have been duly recorded in the transcripts). In fact in 1935, Judge J. Aitken, who must have seen many more of such cases than I have, made a similar observation (PRAAD/A RG15/1/102 J. Aitken, Appeal Court Judgement (23 March 1935) in the case of trademarks registered by J. H. Henkes' Distillery).

[93] PRAAD/A RG15/1/22 Appeal Court Judgment In the matter of an Application for Registration of a Trade Mark by Distilleerderij van J. J. Melchers vs. Netherlands Distilleries, 19 September 1929.

been popular throughout coastal West Africa since the late nineteenth century.[94] The assumption that Africans could not comprehend pictorial representations was nevertheless widely shared. Many of the gin producers argued that this was why competitors' trademarks which showed a superficial resemblance but had different names and different illustrations, were likely to confuse African consumers. Henkes, justifying why he regarded one of his competitors' brands as an imitation of his 'Stork' gin, suggested that, 'apparently, they do not carefully examine there whether or not the animal is standing on one leg, or if it is looking in another direction for a change.'[95]

Although the chiefs and elders of Denu's emphatic assertion that their parents could recognise Stork gin, 'No matter where the bird turned to, or what and what not,'[96] appears to confirm Henkes' claim, it is hard to understand why African consumers would place such great emphasis on trademarks if they ignored what in the eyes of Europeans were significant differences. Nevertheless, the various parties in the trademarks cases produced a number of African witnesses who testified to the importance African consumers attached to trademarks and to their ability to select the appropriate brand. According to a witness introduced as 'Mr. John, an educated native gentleman who has had very considerable experience in trading', African consumers paid great attention to trademarks: 'A native takes great note of marks and studies them very carefully and notes any variation.'[97] These witnesses challenged the idea that illiterate African consumers would not be able to distinguish between trademarks simply because they could not read. Karimu Kotun, a trader who dealt in gin, stated: 'I sell to illiterates . . . I think a bush native would know the difference although he cannot read the letters.'[98] However, the main issue during this period was not whether Africans had the skills to accurately distinguish between brands or not,

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[94] Tobias Wendl and Heike Behrend, eds., *Snap me One! Studiofotografen in Afrika* (München: Prestel 1998).

[95] Henkes Archive Box [no number] Bescheiden m.b.t. merken, J. H. Henkes' Distilleerderij to Directie van de Nederlandse Gist- en Spiritusfabriek, 11 May 1906.

[96] Interview with Torgbui Baku and twenty other chiefs, elders and queen mothers, held at Denu, 5 August 2000.

[97] Henkes Archive Box 21/3–21/8 Supreme Court of the Gold Coast Colony Judgment in the trademarks ordinance case Netherlands Distilleries (applicant) versus J. H. Henkes Distillery (respondent), 23 March 1935.

[98] Henkes Archive Box 21/3–21/8 Supreme Court of Nigeria Judgment in the trademarks application of J. H. Henkes Distillery, opposed by Netherlands Distilleries, 3 November 1933.

but that Africans tended to categorise their schnapps gins in a different way from that intended by the gin producers in Europe.

Not only did African consumers put gin to different uses than those originally intended by the distilleries, they also selected their gins on the basis of different features. Like other popular imported commodities such as cloth, the different categories of gin were given African market names by which they were recognised. In Nigeria, Melchers' 'Bull' brand gin, Netherlands Distilleries' 'Buffalo' gin, and Hasekamp's 'Nyala' brand, would all be known as *Oti Onimalu*—'cow gin'. Other market names for gins were *Onikokoro* ('key') and *Alade* ('crown'). According to witness Gilbert Idowu, who had been with John Holt for several years and traded in gin, all the prize medal gins were known as *Oti Olow*—'money gin'—and African consumers would not care to distinguish between any of the different labels with medals or coins on it. Any label with medals or coins in the appropriate colours would be regarded as *Olowo* in Nigeria, or as *Cavegevi* in Ghana.[99] These market names are still known today. As with cloth, market names were assigned to the goods by African traders and consumers, not by the European producers. Furthermore, it was only the popular gins and the popular cotton prints that acquired market names; having a market name was a sign that a commodity had been accepted.[100] Finally, just as cotton prints could be produced by different factories and still carry the same market name, it appears that African consumers during this period were not particularly bothered who made their 'Money' gin, as long as it was produced in Holland and showed the proper distinctive feature.

Thus it appears that during the interwar years, Henkes' consistent brand policy had not yet resulted in the development of specific brand loyalty among the majority of West African consumers. However, African consumers examined trademarks carefully and ensured that they acquired the type of gin they were after. Trademarks were thus very important, not to distinguish the goods of one producer or seller from that of others, but as indication of specific characteristics of the product itself and of the uses to which it could be put. Seen from this perspective, a producer who made a gin with a label that showed coins

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[99] Henkes Archive Box 21/3–21/8 Supreme Court of Nigeria Judgment in the trademarks application of J. H. Henkes Distillery, opposed by Netherlands Distilleries, 3 November 1933; Interview with Torgbui Baku and twenty other chiefs, elders and queen mothers, held at Denu, 5 August 2000.

[100] Meij, 'Shimmering Fabrics for Ghana', 16.

that were arranged in a way that resembled existing prize medal gins, was not infringing on someone else's trademark, but merely placing his good in the specific category of 'Money' gin. However, this was a perspective that was impossible to accommodate within formal trademarks legislation.[101]

The decision by African consumers not to differentiate between similar trademarks from competing producers was not a consequence of their being illiterate, or of their supposed inexperience in matters of consumption. The expectation held by colonial authorities and traders that African attitudes would change once they had acquired the skills and knowledge to engage in consumption in a 'proper', Western fashion, was thus based on flawed assumptions. However, African consumers' attitudes towards brands and trademarks did change over time, as they did become more concerned with specific gin brands and producers after World War II. This was perhaps not, as Judge Aitken had suggested, because more and more people had been exposed to Western education and European trade methods,[102] but rather because the gin producers changed the ways in which they marketed their gins in West Africa. However, while these post-World War II marketing efforts succeeded in achieving effective name recognition of Dutch brands and producers in West Africa, they did not succeed in raising gin sales, which by now were considerably lower than at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Marketing and appropriate consumption

Manufacturers of Dutch gin took a strong interest in developing labels and packaging that appealed to African consumers, and they used West African courts of law to protect their trademarks against infringements. However, compared to producers of other mass consumer goods, they appear to have been remarkably unconcerned about communicating

[101] PRAAD/A RG15/1/22 Appeal Court Judgment In the matter of an Application for Registration of a Trade Mark by Distilleerderij van J. J. Melchers vs. Netherlands Distilleries, 19 September 1929; Henkes Archive Box 21/3–21/8 Supreme Court of Nigeria Judgment in the trademarks application of J. H. Henkes Distillery, opposed by Netherlands Distilleries, 3 November 1933.

[102] Henkes Archive Box 21/3–21/8 Supreme Court of the Gold Coast Colony Judgment in the trademarks ordinance case Netherlands Distilleries (applicant) versus J. H. Henkes Distillery (respondent), 23 March 1935.

the proper intended use of their products to Africans. Burke has shown that in southern Africa, product marketers saw it as their task not only to generate brand recognition and a desire to purchase the goods thus advertised, but also to educate African consumers about the appropriate use of goods. In itself, this is not peculiar to African markets, and marketing strategies in Europe and North America have equally focused on explaining the function and proper use of new products to the intended consumers by means of live demonstrations and films.[103] Nevertheless, marketing executives in southern Africa regarded African consumers as fundamentally different from Europeans, and they identified cultural difference as a challenge to the development of African consumerism. They expressed concern over the producers' lack of awareness of the African market, and over African misunderstandings about the functions of imported commodities. Nevertheless, such African misconceptions could be good for sales. According to one South African advertising executive, laxatives were very popular among Africans who used them as 'blood purifiers'. Another executive commented on the enormous sales of 'Brylcreem' hair cream, which African consumers allegedly thought of as 'a great delicacy when eaten on bread.' Equally staggering were the sales of British carbolic tooth powder in Ghana, at a time when most African consumers cleaned their teeth by other means than using a toothbrush. Apparently, Ghanaians consumed this potent-tasting tooth powder internally, 'to drive out bad spirits'.[104] In Nigeria, the use of carbolic soap as fish bait along the Benue River boosted the catch of fish as well as the sales of soap.[105]

These stories have of course more than a whiff of advertising-lore to them, and I have not been able to find independent confirmation in other sources. Nevertheless, there is an underlying message here, that imported goods are likely to be incorporated into African consumptive patterns in ways that make sense in the context of existing yet continually changing African world views, rather than according to the intended uses of the foreign producers. Thus the ways in which Dutch gin and—allegedly—British toothpowder were incorporated in ritual, and the fashion of using imported dinner plates to decorate the outside

[103] Wilson, *Unilever 1945–1965*.
[104] Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women*, 144–5.
[105] Edward Marcus, 'Selling the tropical African market', *Journal of Marketing* 25.5 (1961), 25–31, there 27.

walls of dwellings,[106] cannot be understood as simply 'wrong'. Indeed, while marketers emphasised African 'misunderstandings' of consumption in order to illustrate cultural difference, they did not necessarily attempt to change African consumptive habits. One obvious incentive to advocate change would have been commercial: the assumption that Africans would consume more of a particular commodity, if only they knew the correct way of consuming the product. For instance, if Africans could be taught the 'correct' use of margarine, then, together with an increase in bread consumption, this would result in them acquiring 'the spreading habit' and, consequently, in the opening up of a potentially very large market. Similarly, teaching Africans the use of toilet soap, Maggi cubes, or imported spaghetti, would create large new markets. At other times, marketing managers' efforts to promote the correct ways of consuming imported commodities appear to have been informed by the—less obviously profitable—colonial concern with control: if Africans used Western commodities in all sorts of ways that had not been intended by the Western manufacturers, then they were, in effect, upsetting the colonial order. This of course reflects the influence of the colonial notion of the 'civilising mission' that I discussed earlier, which included the assumption that appropriate consumption was one route through which Africans could achieve 'civilisation'. However, there were enough instances when it seemed to make commercial sense not to intervene in African alternative ways of consuming imported commodities. 'Improper' African consumption patterns could result in higher sales than would have been the case if the consumption of the commodity had been restricted to its 'proper' use as intended by the manufacturer. In many such cases, European producers, traders, and marketing executives were quite happy to leave Africans to consume these particular commodities in whichever unintended way they wanted. Dutch gin appears to have been one such commodity.

African 'misuse' of Dutch gin, for traditional rituals and festivals or for use as currency, rather suited the gin traders and manufacturers. The benefits of such 'incorrect' use could not only be found in sales figures, or in the market share of Dutch gin compared to other distilled drinks, it also provided them with ammunition in the debates about the potentially harmful consequences of the consumption of gin by Africans. These debates focused on the amount of liquor consumed and on the

[106] http://www.siu.edu/~anthro/mccall/jones/misc.html.

perceived quality of the imported gins, and also on the specific contexts of consumption. Missionaries had a particular problem with the use of gin for funerals. They painted a lurid picture of gin consumption during funerals, claiming that these ceremonial functions 'generally end in disgusting orgies'.[107] Colonial administrators felt forced to look into accusations of liquor abuse during ceremonies, and considered ways of reducing gin consumption in this particular context. They were not merely worried about 'excessive consumption of alcohol,' but also about the large amounts of money spent on buying the drinks for the funeral. One colonial official described how his own cook had been obliged to withdraw all his savings of several years from the bank in order to pay his contribution towards the funeral of an aunt. It was thought that many families were pushed into debt by the funeral arrangements, as the costs involved started at £10 and could rise as high as £150 for the death of an important chief.[108] Even though the administration could not decide whether the amounts thus consumed were increasing or whether they were in fact stable, they nevertheless discussed the matter with the chiefs. The latter refused to consider the possibility of prohibiting the consumption of liquor at burials in favour of palm wine, or of limiting the amount of gin that could be used for a funeral.[109] Colonial administrations decided not to act against the custom. Instead, they came up with a positive interpretation, arguing that the majority of imported gin was used during funerals and that this proved that Africans in general were very sober people. The consumption of gin did not constitute a problem for colonial authorities as long as it was contained in the context of funerals and traditional rituals. It would only become a problem if its production and marketing were to get out of colonial control, as indeed happened in the 1930s when indigenous illicit distillation took off.[110] Taking the argument one step further than the authorities, gin traders and manufacturers pointed out that, due to its connection to traditional rituals, a significant share of the imported gin was never actually drunk. In an ironic reference to the widespread colonial idea of civilisation through consumption, one trader in Nigeria wrote that 'I hate handling the stuff, and I do it only

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[107] 'Liquor in West Africa', *West Africa*, 20 April 1929.

[108] PRAAD/A ADM 11/43 Funeral customs, 28 January 1909.

[109] PRAAD/A ADM 11/43 Furley to S.N.A., 5 June 1912, Griffin to S.N.A., 5 October 1911.

[110] See chapter five, pages 181–188.

because I would be frozen out in many other lines of general trade unless my shop carried the widely ranged variety that increased culture among Africans makes imperative.'[111]

These strategies in the debates about gin importation point towards some important differences between gin and other imported consumer goods. Although the connection between colonial ideology and appropriate consumption was as important for gin as for other commodities, there are some interesting inversions: where for other types of commodities, Africans were expected to consume inferior versions specifically produced or imported for African consumption; in the case of gin, authorities attempted to stop Africans from consuming inferior spirits, and gins specifically produced or imported for Africans were formally banned from West Africa. Furthermore, the improper uses of Dutch gin—that is, uses that had not been originally intended by the manufacturer—had become the only appropriate ones in the mindset of the colonial administration.

[111] J. M. Stuart-Young, Letter to the editor (dated Onitsha, 27 June), *West Africa*, 25 July 1931.

CHAPTER FIVE

POISON OR MEDICINE? CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF DUTCH GIN

The importation of Dutch gin into West Africa was the subject of intense debates throughout the colonial period. Most vocal were the anti-liquor trade campaigners, whose claims I have introduced in earlier chapters. Their campaign was linked to churches in Britain, and Christian missions in Africa, and received much information about the impact of Dutch gin from missionaries who sent alarming reports of alleged social degradation and health problems caused by the unlimited consumption of imported liquors. From the 1880s until the 1930s, the anti-liquor trade campaigners consistently claimed that the gins that were imported into West Africa were of poor quality: poisons that damaged the health of Africans. They also argued that African consumers were not yet civilised enough to consume spirits in moderation. Africans, being 'primitive people,'[1] were easily corruptible and lacked the basic skills of consumption, which would have helped them to realise that they should aim to acquire commodities that were healthier and more productive than liquor. To the anti-liquor trade campaigners, it was this combination of poisonous imports and the assumed primitiveness of African consumption, that justified their speaking and acting on behalf of Africans.

In this chapter I explore the differing and frequently changing opinions of West Africans concerning the importation and uses of Dutch gin. These developments have been discussed in some detail in the existing literature, and this chapter draws on the interpretations put forward by Emmanuel Akyeampong for Ghana, and Chima Korieh for Nigeria.[2] I include a detailed discussion of the contemporary West African debates here, because they had a great influence on the development of the marketing of imported gin which I discuss in chapters

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[1] Bishop Melville-Jones, letter to the Editor of *West Africa*, 3 November 1928.

[2] Emmanuel Akyeampong, *Drink, Power, and Cultural Change. A Social History of Alcohol in Ghana, c. 1800 to Recent Times* (Portsmouth, NH and London: Heinemann and James Currey 1996); Chima J. Korieh, 'Alcohol and empire: "illicit" gin prohibition and control in colonial Eastern Nigeria', *African Economic History* 31 (2003), 111–34.

six and seven. In my re-examination of newspaper discussions and of exchanges between African leaders and colonial administrations I attempt to read between the lines of what are often essentially political debates, to find clues about African consumer perspectives and uses of Dutch gin. The chapter starts with a brief examination of African temperance in the decades leading up to World War I. During this period, African advocates of temperance were mostly motivated by the desire to fashion modern, respectable identities, or by the opportunity to challenge local African leadership, and less by the allegedly pernicious nature of distilled liquor.

Following this, I discuss the debates surrounding the development of legislation to effectuate a ban on Dutch gin imports in Ghana during the late 1920s. After decades of unsuccessful attempts by anti-liquor campaigners to mobilise African leaders against gin imports, quite suddenly a consensus emerged among Gold Coast chiefs and the African Members of the Gold Coast Legislative Council in favour of the prohibition of Dutch gin. The rhetoric of the anti-liquor trade campaign is clearly present in the chiefs' claims that 'Geneva gin is deleterious to health' and 'full of turpentine'.[3] However, this new stance against gin imports also reflected concerns about economic exploitation, as can be seen in Paramount Chief Sir Nana Ofori Atta's rhetorical question whether the Gold Coast people were 'being robbed of the fruits of their labour by the sale to them of cheap liquor at exorbitant prices?'[4] Indeed, Akyeampong has interpreted this call for the prohibition of gin as part of the anti-colonial agenda of chiefs and educated elites, reflecting their anger over the exploitation of Africans by non-Africans.[5] By 1930 it had become a pattern for West Africans to adopt the discourse of temperance to achieve their own social or political goals, and in this respect the emergence of an anti-gin consensus in a very short time fits an existing pattern. I will contrast the developments in the Gold Coast with African opinion in Nigeria, where no such ban was proposed, and explore why the debates in these two territories took such different directions.

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[3] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Chiefs and Elders of Gbese, Comments on Liquor Policy of Government; CSO 21/18/18 Answers by the Chiefs and Elders of Akim Abuakwa, 12 October 1933.

[4] Ofori Atta, quoted in *West Africa*, 3 November 1928.

[5] Akyeampong, *Drink, Power, and Cultural Change*, 91.

After this, I will consider various contemporary claims about gin's purity and health benefits. These were powerful claims that were used by gin distillers to promote their products, but were contested by anti-liquor trade campaigners. Key to this discussion will be an examination of local African perceptions of the healthy nature, or otherwise, of imported Dutch gin in the context of the rise of local illicit distillation. This 'moonshine', made in homemade stills by numerous small producers, was technically illegal in all West African colonies as result of the 1919 international liquor convention of Saint Germain-en-Laye, which forbade the distillation of alcohol in Africa.[6] Illicit distillation quickly became a site of contest. Local debates emerged that aimed to assess the relative purity or impurity, as well as the poisonous nature or medicinal qualities, of the various legal and illegal liquors.

The final section deals with the 1930s and 1940s, and examines the renewed appreciation of imported gin, in both Ghana and Nigeria, as the 'lesser evil' compared to illicit gin. Colonial administrators, missionaries, European traders, and African chiefs now used against the local distillates the very language they had hitherto reserved to attack Dutch gin. All agreed that the local product was a 'liquor of inferior quality which is ruinous, morally, and physically.'[7]

Temperance and taxation

For most of the period covered in this book, the British anti-liquor trade movement and its European sisters did not have much support amongst West Africans. A large proportion of West Africans were of course Muslims, which allowed the anti-liquor trade movement to demand and achieve the prohibition of the trade in imported liquor in what were perceived as predominantly Muslim areas, such as the northern parts of Ghana, Togo, Benin, and Nigeria. Following the 1890–91 international conference in Brussels, at which colonial powers agreed to prohibit the sale of imported liquor in those areas where they were not already widespread, the various West African colonial administrations decided on liquor prohibition zones.[8] The anti-liquor

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[6] Korieh, 'Alcohol and empire', 111–34.

[7] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 C. E. Clerk, The Liquor Policy of Government [1933].

[8] NAI CSO 26/1 03556/S.1 Spirituous Liquor (Importation) Ordinance No. 6, 1901, CSO12/30 465/1911 Liquor Conference at Brussels, CSO 12/31 132/1912 Liquor

campaigners took for granted that African Muslims agreed with and welcomed prohibition. They did not enter into a dialogue with Muslim representatives, preferring to speak for them, rather than with them. Islam was an awkward ally to the anti-liquor campaigners, who were closely tied to Protestant Christianity, and who tended to regard Islam as the single largest obstacle to the spread of Christianity in Africa; an obstacle even bigger than the gin trade.[9] They preferred to associate with yet-to-be-converted non-Muslim traditional rulers, some of whom they persuaded to sign declarations denouncing the gin trade. They also encouraged local African Christians to become members of temperance societies such as the Good Templars, established in Cape Coast in 1877 by the Wesleyan Methodist mission.

For decades, membership of temperance societies was of interest only to a relatively small number of successful members of the anglicised elite in coastal towns, as well as those striving to become part of that elite.[10] It was thus not necessarily a concern with the social consequences of immoderate alcohol consumption that attracted the membership of the temperance societies (see Figure 5.1). In fact, the founder of the first temperance society in the Gold Coast in 1862, the later King Ghartey IV of Winneba, had owned several profitable rum shops before founding the society, and had even contemplated establishing a distillery to manufacture rum locally.[11] Members were attracted to the temperance movement because of its emphasis on individualism and self-improvement, the political influence that came with membership, and the 'Western-style' of the societies. Akyeampong has pointed out that 'the loyalty of these anglicised coastal Africans to temperance was divided, as some, in imitation of the traditional *abirempon* and the colonial administrators, also viewed drinking expensive imported liquor as evidence of superior social status.'[12] The imported liquor they drank consisted of 'high-class spirits' such as whiskey, and

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Prohibition Zone, 1912, CSO 20/6 NC3/18 H. S. Gadsmith to Governor-General, 28 October 1917. See also: Ayodeji Olukoju, 'Prohibition and paternalism: the State and the clandestine liquor traffic in Northern Nigeria, c. 1898–1918', *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 24.2 (1991), 349–68.

[9] CMS G3 A 3/O 1891/67 P. A. Bennett to HQ, Onitsha, 5 Februay 1890 (*sic*, was 1891).

[10] Michel Doortmont, ed., *The Pen-Pictures of Modern Africans and African Celebrities by Charles Francis Hutchison. A Collective Biography of Elite Society in the Gold Coast Colony* (Leiden and Boston: Brill 2005).

[11] Akyeampong, *Drink, Power, and Cultural Change*, 73.

[12] *Ibidem*, 75.

not the gin that was consumed in such large quantities by the people of the hinterland.[13]

During the first decade of the twentieth century the temperance movement spread into parts of the hinterland, especially to Akyem in the Gold Coast, where members of temperance lodges challenged the authority of the chiefs and elders. This challenging of traditional authority by African Christians was part of a common pattern of conversion in the context of colonialism. African traditional authority was often bound up with traditional religion, rejected by missionaries and African Christians as dark and pagan.[14] Thus African chiefs and elders did not necessarily have much legitimacy in the eyes of African Christians, who at times complained to the colonial administration that they should not be made to obey idolatrous heathen.[15] The temperance movement could become a vehicle for resisting the chiefs, as it did in Akyem in Ghana between 1906 and 1909, because rituals involving imported liquor had become so central to the authority of chiefs and elders. Members of temperance societies in the interior did not take part in the cleaning of roads. They also refused to attend their Chief's court, or to acknowledge the right of their Chief's oath, and they declined to pay the legal fees levied by the Chief, which usually included gin or rum.[16] One of the members of 'Star of Hope Lodge N° 8 Independent Order of Good Templars' wrote to Ohen Amoaku Attah on the subject of another member being imprisoned by the Chief. The letter writer threatened 'to report same to our District Chief Templar brother W. Z. Coker at Cape Coast who will deal harshly with this case according to the powers invested on him by the Grand Lodge of England.'[17] The colonial administration took seriously this threat to the authority

[13] PRO CO 554/41 Governor, Gold Coast, to Milner, 6 March 1919; this is also reflected in the type of liquor bottles found by archaeologist Yaw Bredwa-Mensa, who has been working on disposal heaps. The disposal heaps of wealthy families on the coast contain mainly wine and brandy bottles, and fewer gin bottles. Further inland gin bottles dominate, while the remnants of casks that were used for rum have also been found. Interview with Dr Yaw Bredwa-Mensah, Legon, 3 September 2004.

[14] V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa. Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 1988) 49.

[15] CMS G3 A 3/O 1914/56 *The Church and Native Customs. Conference, May 12th, 1914, CMS, Ozala, Onitsha, Nigeria.*

[16] PRAAD/A ADM 11/1/1388 E. C. Eliot to Secretary for Native Affairs, 21 February 1907.

[17] PRAAD/A ADM 11/1/1388 Daniel Acquah to Ohen Amoaku Attah, Winnebah, 7 June 1907.

of their chosen intermediaries. The temperance societies were swiftly told that 'no person, by becoming a member of any society whatever, is thereby freed from the necessity of obeying his lawful chiefs, and of observing the accepted native customs of the tribe to which he belongs,' and their members were fined where possible.[18] Upon investigation, the District Commissioner found that only very few of the membership of the Lodges were actually Christians, or showed concern about the level of alcohol consumption.

The situation that even religious temperance societies were more concerned about advertising status, or challenging the power of chiefs and the colonial state, than about the consumption of alcohol, illustrates that the anti-liquor trade movement could not count on much local African support. Instead, especially in the coastal towns, individuals adopted the discourse of temperance, and used it to achieve their own social and political ambitions. Many of those who did so were connected to the missions as catechists or otherwise active in Church.[19] When Bishop Tugwell of Lagos was under attack for claiming that thee-quarters of European deaths in Lagos were caused by their drinking habits, African support for his position came nearly exclusively from mission circles. Pastor J. J. Ransome Kuti observed that '80 per cent of those Europeans working on the railway line are hard drinkers,' adding that '[i]f any Negro were to drink as those on the railway line, he will cut short his life and that very quickly.'[20] Others may not have been so directly involved in the Churches, but were clearly responding to suggestions from missionaries. Recognising the power of chiefs both locally and in the eyes of the colonial administration, missionaries tried to convince the chiefs to speak out against the gin trade. As a result, the Wesleyan Synod meeting of 1906 could report the receipt of a message from the chief of Krobo, Ghana, soliciting their assistance in suppressing the importation of Elephant Gin.[21] In 1909, three CMS clergy members interviewed the Alafin of Oyo, Nigeria, and extracted from him the statement that he would be very glad to see the prohibition of the

[18] PRAAD/A ADM 11/1/1388 E. C. Eliot to Secretary for Native Affairs, 21 February 1907; J. J. K. Greenway to Secretary for Native Affairs, 3 February 1908.

[19] *Lagos Observer*, 14 February 1884, 28 February 1884, 13 March 1884.

[20] TC DA44/1/5 Correspondence relating to the libel case of Herbert Tugwell; quotation from J. J. Ransome Kuti, Native Pastor, to Bishop Tugwell, 24 May 1899.

[21] Akyeampong, *Drink, Power, and Cultural Change*, 71.

sale of gin.[22] Most of these chiefs, however, when questioned further by colonial officials, argued that the consumption of imported liquor should only be forbidden to the commoners, but not to the chiefs themselves who needed the drinks to conduct their traditional ritual duties.[23] In July 1918, the Omanhene of Esikuma in Ghana's Central Region issued an order forbidding the purchase of 'rum' by his subjects. According to the Omanhene, the inhabitants of Esikuma drank so much that the place had acquired the nickname 'Gin Town'. He claimed that 'strong drink' had pushed most families into debt because the men were spending the limited proceeds of their cocoa farms on drink, rather than on looking after their families.[24]

As we have seen, the anti-liquor campaigners considered gin to be the worst of all imported spirits, claiming it to be of a deleterious nature and of a quality that would not be admitted into England. Meanwhile, colonial governments repeatedly emphasised that all evidence, including chemical analysis, indicated that the imported gin was pure and similar to that drunk in Europe.[25] However, as the West African governments derived such a large proportion of their revenue from duties on the importation of liquor, they were seen to have a vested interest in the trade, which undermined the credibility of their assertions as to the quality of the imported gin. Around 1900, the anti-liquor campaigners succeeded in convincing their audiences in Britain as well as some of the Western-style educated West Africans living in the coastal towns, of the harmful nature of the gin. These coastal elites tended to regard gin as a low-class drink, and preferred whiskey and brandy. The anti-liquor trade movement's focus on gin, therefore, helped to gain their support. There was, however, a limit to the extent that even Africans in coastal towns were prepared to support the call for the abolition of the gin trade. This limit was called 'direct taxation'.[26] Colonial governments, mindful of the importance of the duties on gin imports for

[22] TC DA 44/1/11 Interview with the Alafin of Oyo, 11 February 1909. The interviewers were, Ven. Archdeacon Melville Jones, Rev. G. Burton, and Rev. J. S. Sowande.

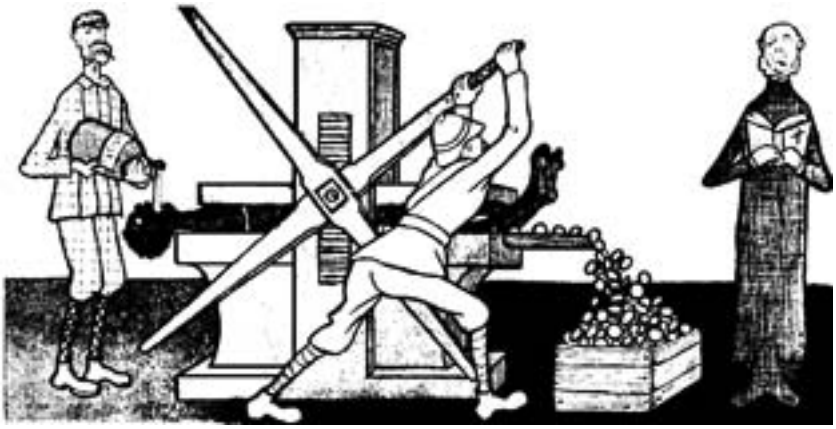
[23] PRO CO 554/41Gold Coast Governor to Milner, 6 March 1919.

[24] PRO CO 554/41 Minute by Colonial Secretary, 3 March 1919; see also: PRO CO 96/685/2 W. F. H. 'West African Echoes', *The African World*, 13 April 1929.

[25] TC DA 44/1/11 Sir Walter Egerton to Herbert Tugwell, 24 December 1909.

[26] A. Olorunfemi, 'The liquor traffic dilemma in British West Africa: the Southern Nigerian example, 1895–1918', *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 17.2 (1984), 229–41, there 239; E. A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842–1914* (London: Longmans 1966), 325–6.

5.1 Aburi Temperance Society



5.2 Cartoon 'British methods of colonialism in Africa'

their revenue, presented as condition for the prohibition of gin imports that Africans accept direct taxation to compensate for the inevitable loss of revenue.[27] While the anti-liquor trade movement considered this to be a sound policy, many African supporters of the prohibition of gin quickly changed their mind, observing that 'the evils of Direct Taxation will be greater and wider than the evils of Liquor have been or can ever be.'[28]

Towards prohibition in the Gold Coast

During the interwar years, Dutch gin producers and their trading partners in West Africa attempted to communicate directly with African consumers through product marketing and market research. In contrast to this, the opponents of the importation of gin continued to limit their efforts to reach Africans to the building up of alliances with mission-educated elites. They reasoned that attempts to reduce liquor consumption through the education of the African general public would yield results too slowly.[29] Not surprisingly, African consumers during the interwar period seemed barely affected by the anti-liquor campaigns and purchased Dutch gin whenever it was available and affordable. Therefore, rather than to try and change the consumptive habits of Africans, the anti-liquor trade campaigners aimed for the introduction of restrictive legislation, preferably the total prohibition of liquor imports. Their prime targets were thus the West African colonial governments, who achieved a significant proportion of their revenue from the taxation of liquor imports.

Over the years, colonial administrations responded to these pressures with three types of measures. They prohibited the importation and sale of liquor in those—largely Islamic—areas where imported liquor had not been on sale before the establishment of colonial rule; they banned the importation of liquors that they considered to be of poor quality and therefore classed as 'trade spirits'; and they discouraged African consumption through a steady increase of import duties

[27] NAI CSO 20/8 NC 141/20 Proposed Abolition of Liquor Traffic in Nigeria; PRO CO554/41Governor, Gold Coast, to Milner, 6 March 1919.
[28] TC DA 44/1/11 Obasa of Ikeja to Bishop Tugwell, Lagos 18 March 1909.
[29] 'West Africa's Liquor Problem,' *West Africa*, 13 July 1929.

on those liquors that continued to be imported.[30] By the mid-1920s, colonial governments routinely claimed that they had put a total stop to the importation of 'trade spirits' into West Africa, and that a much better quality of liquor was being imported overall, while consumption of liquor had been reduced dramatically compared to pre-World War I levels. They responded to anti-liquor trade campaigners' calls for further restrictions by additional increases in the level of import duties, but refused to consider a policy of prohibition on the grounds that alcohol consumption did not constitute a social problem in West Africa, and that there was no widespread demand for prohibition among the African population.[31]

The opponents of liquor imports considered this response insufficient. Although the higher duties might have resulted in lower alcohol consumption than would otherwise have been the case, between 1922 and 1927 spirits imports had nevertheless risen considerably in Nigeria, Cameroon, Togoland, and the Gold Coast.[32] They pointed out that the only definite effect of the raised duties had been an increase in revenue for colonial administrations: Africans were buying less liquor than before World War I, but paying a much higher price for it, most of it in duty, which ended up in the coffers of the colonial administrations. In 1927 liquor duties were almost five times higher than in 1912. Consequently, colonial government revenue from liquor was between three and four times higher, even though the quantity of liquor imported was about twenty per cent less than in 1912.[33] With the consumption of imported liquor increasing year on year, colonial governments proposed measures which included further rises of the liquor duty, increases in the retail license fee for spirits, and a ban on the sale of spirits on credit.[34] Judging by past experience, opponents to

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[30] A. Olorunfemi, 'The liquor traffic dilemma in British West Africa: the Southern Nigerian example, 1895–1918', *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 17.2 (1984), 229–41; Susan Diduk, 'European alcohol, history, and the state in Cameroon', *African Studies Review* 36.1 (1993), 1–42; R. O. Lasisi, 'Liquor traffic in Africa under the League of Nations 1919–1945: French Togo as an example', *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 5.1 (1996), 11–24; Ayodeji Olukoju, 'Rotgut and revenue: fiscal aspects of the liquor trade in Southern Nigeria, 1890–1919', *Itinerario* 21.2 (1997), 66–81.

[31] See for example the speech by A. Ransford Slater, Governor of the Gold Coast, which was printed in: *West Africa*, 3 November 1928.

[32] PRO CO 554/77/8 Importation of Gin into West Africa (1928).

[33] PRAAD/A ADM 7/1/46 *Gold Coast Colony Blue Book of Statistics, 1912*; ADM 7/1/61 *Gold Coast Colony Blue Book of Statistics, 1927–28*.

[34] 'Colonial Office vote in the House of Commons', *West Africa*, 4 May 1929.

the gin trade argued that these measures were unlikely to result in a significant reduction of alcohol consumption, but would result in more money being transferred in taxes from African consumers to colonial governments. Colonial administrators emphasised that the income from liquor duties was used to pay for public expenditure in the direction of progress and development, including education, hospitals, sanitary improvements and road building.[35] Of course, those who considered gin a 'deleterious liquor' and the trade in liquor an evil, argued that it was unethical to make colonial government spending dependent on the consumption by Africans of a product that was harmful to them (see Figure 5.2). The Irish Temperance Alliance wrote to the Colonial Office to 'emphatically protest against the action of the Colonial Office in forcing the sale of spirits on an unwilling and defenceless native population with such degrading effects.'[36]

To the existing evils of the liquor trade, high import duties added the further evil of impoverishing African consumers. Would the African consumer not be much better off, if he were to spend his money on cotton goods, tools, and bicycles, rather than on a little liquor and lots of taxes?[37] Would it, therefore, not be fairer to prohibit liquor importation altogether, so that Africans could put the money they thus saved to more productive uses? And if total prohibition were impracticable, would it be possible to institute a partial prohibition of Dutch gin?—the drink that accounted for ninety per cent of total liquor imports, tended to be slightly cheaper than other liquors, and had been denounced by anti-liquor trade campaigners as a particularly unhealthy spirit since the 1880s.[38]

The call for prohibition was not new. However, the claim that the high taxation of liquor imports—introduced at the instigation of the anti-liquor trade campaigners—impoverished African consumers, added a new dimension to arguments for prohibition in the late-1920s. In fact, it appears to have been one of the motivations for African members of the Gold Coast Legislative Council to request the prohibition of the importation of Dutch gin. In 1928 they demanded that the Gold

[35] Views of Sir Heskett Bell and Sir William Geary, *West Africa*, 20 April 1929; 'Colonial Office vote in the House of Commons', *West Africa*, 4 May 1929.

[36] PRO CO 96/685/2 Resolution of the Irish Temperance Alliance on Liquor in the Gold Coast, 10 April 1929.

[37] 'Colonial Office vote in the House of Commons', *West Africa*, 4 May 1929; A.M.H., Letter to the Editor, *West Africa*, 29 June 1929.

[38] Thomas Welsh, Letter to the Editor of *West Africa*, 29 June 1929.

Coast Government limited the importation of Dutch gin in 1929 to fifty per cent of the amount imported in 1928, that gin importation had to be further restricted by ten per cent per year, and that Dutch gin had to be prohibited altogether by 1935.[39] The unanimous appeal of the African Members for the prohibition of gin within five years was striking, as this was the first indication of the existence of a more widely shared support for prohibition among Africans. It is also interesting that African demand for prohibition did not emerge in any of the other West African colonies. That Dutch gin was singled out for prohibition was less surprising: by the late 1920s it had become the most popular imported liquor by far,[40] while among Western educated African elites it had retained its reputation for being a cheap and unfashionable drink, primarily drunk by illiterate people in rural areas. What is less clear, however, is to what extent African perception of Dutch gin had really changed. Legislative Council Members appear to have been motivated more by the desire to hit out at government exploitation, than by concern about the harmful consequences of the consumption of Dutch gin. It is also unclear to what extent other African chiefs' and opinion leaders' views on gin had changed, and how widespread support for prohibition was among the rest of the African population.

African demand for prohibition followed the rapid rise of Dutch gin imports in the second half of the 1920s. Already in 1927 Nana Anyirebi Acquah III voiced concern in the Legislative Council about the increased importation of gin.[41] Gin imports were increasing all over British West Africa. However, the rise in the Gold Coast appeared much larger than elsewhere. In 1928, with a population of about three million, the Gold Coast imported approximately twice the amount of spirits imported by Nigeria, which had a population of eighteen million.[42] Colonial officials and traders pointed out that, in spite of the rapid increase of the previous years, and even with the marked difference with Nigeria, consumers in the Gold Coast were still very moderate

[39] PRO CO 96/685/2 Governor Slater to Amery, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 23 January 1929.

[40] Gin accounted for ninety per cent of total liquor imports. PRAAD/A CSO 6/1/78 Potable Spirits imported into the Gold Coast, 1928–1930. See also chapter three for a discussion of changes in the relative popularity of the various types of imported spirits over time.

[41] Akyeampong, *Drink, Power, and Cultural Change*, 92 footnote 98.

[42] 'Colonial Office vote in the House of Commons', *West Africa*, 4 May 1929.

drinkers compared to drinking patterns in Europe.[43] African consumers purchased more imported liquor, not because they were addicted to drink, but because they were becoming more prosperous: in the years leading up to 1928 West African agricultural exports, especially cocoa, fetched good prices. As cocoa farming had spread more rapidly in the Gold Coast than in Nigeria, its farmers profited more from the high prices.[44] As a result, the Gold Coast could afford to purchase larger quantities of all imported commodities. By 1928, imports of such diverse goods as cotton cloths, tobacco, motor oil, biscuits, flour, meat, buckets, and musical instruments, were all much higher than at the beginning of the decade, and also much higher than in Nigeria. Governor Slater pointed out that in the Gold Coast there was one clock for every twenty inhabitants, against one in every 320 people in Nigeria.[45] If clock purchases per head of population in the Gold Coast were sixteen times higher than in Nigeria, then liquor imports being twelve times higher did not sound excessive. Indeed, the administration maintained that, considering the prosperity of the country, the increase in liquor consumption had been normal.[46] Spirits nevertheless contributed 54.9 per cent of total import revenue in 1927, a figure that was set to rise even further if liquor imports would continue to increase.

While touring Britain in July 1928, Sir Nana Ofori Atta, the Paramount Chief of Akyem Abuakwa and Member of the Gold Coast Legislative Council, gave a much-quoted speech to the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce demanding the prohibition of the trade in Dutch gin. In his speech, he described the effects of the exportation of 'such a terrible quantity of gin' to the Gold Coast as having become 'so alarming' that he was now pleading for the trade in gin to be stopped.[47] This demand could not have come as a surprise, coming from Ofori Atta, who was

[43] 'Nigerian trade in 1927' and 'Gold Coast trade report', both in: *West Africa*, 8 September 1928.

[44] Francis Agbodeka, *An Economic History of Ghana* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press 1992), 58–64. On the spread of cocoa cultivation see: Polly Hill, *Migrant Cocoa-Farmers of Southern Ghana* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1963); Gareth Austin, 'The emergence of capitalist relations in South Asante cocoa farming, c. 1916–33' *Journal of African History* 28.2 (1987), 259–79; and Gareth Austin, *Labour, Land, and Capital in Ghana: From Slavery to Free Labour in Asante, 1807–1956* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press 2005).

[45] Speech by Ransford Slater, Governor of the Gold Coast, *West Africa*, 3 November 1928.

[46] 'Gold Coast trade report', *West Africa*, 8 September 1928.

[47] Arnold Herschell, Letter to the Editor of *The Times*, 1 August 1928.

a long-term ally of the anti-liquor trade campaign. He had formally banished gin and liquor shops from his town as early as 1918.[48] Anti-liquor trade campaigners nevertheless hailed Ofori Atta's speech as a breakthrough, and as evidence that the African population shared their demand for prohibition, or at the very least temperance:

> It has sometimes been said or implied that the demand for the cessation of the traffic did not come from the Africans themselves, but is put forward by missionaries and missionary organisations who exaggerate the evil… but here we have, in addition, the opinion of a Chief, whom the Government has honoured with a knighthood and a seat in the Legislative Council of the Gold Coast, protesting against the import of what he feels to be injurious to the welfare of his people.[49]

Indeed, the Gold Coast Western-educated African leadership increasingly mobilised around the demand for the prohibition of gin imports. While some of them had expressed concern about the liquor trade in earlier years, it was only now that they placed the issue high on the political agenda.

In his social history of alcohol in Ghana, Akyeampong has analysed this stance as being a backlash against the policies of the new Governor Slater, who had succeeded Frederick Guggisberg in 1927. Guggisberg, Governor from 1919 to 1927, had followed a policy of economic development, Africanisation of the civil service, and the expansion of African representation on the Legislative Council. He had worked in partnership with educated elites and chiefs, which had resulted in employment opportunities in the administration and elected positions for the Western style educated elites, as well as a strengthening of the position of the chiefs through the Native Administration Ordinance of 1927. In return for this package, African leaders had accepted taxation, which was to an important extent realised through duties on imported liquor.[50] In fact, chiefs might have felt that the high duties that kept the imported gin expensive had the welcome side effect of keeping the drink an exclusive commodity, and its ritual consumption a display of power. Among the African leaders supporting Guggisberg's policies was Ofori Atta, who later praised the Guggisberg administration as one of 'cooperation'.

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[48] PRO CO 554/41 Minute by Colonial Secretary, 3 March 1919. See also chapter three.

[49] Letter to the Editor of *West Africa*, 18 August 1928.

[50] Akyeampong, *Drink, Power, and Cultural Change*, 89–90.

Governor Slater discontinued Guggisberg's development policy, reversed the policy of Africanisation of the senior civil service, and appeared to be prejudiced against Africans. Some of this might have been the consequence of changing economic circumstances rather than a reflection of Slater's personality. Still, the experience of Gold Coast chiefs and educated elites was that the hopes and promises from the Guggisberg years were not fulfilled, while taxes remained high. Akyeampong observed: 'If Slater did not want to respect the "conventions" attached to taxation, representation, and internal development, he could not expect liquor revenues to continue.'[51] African Members of the Legislative Council knew that a ban on the importation of gin would hurt colonial finances. Indeed, their attacks on the gin trade explicitly mentioned its link with colonial revenue. During the discussion of the Estimates in March 1928, Ofori Atta emphasised: 'The situation is dreadful because the increased duty though paid by the importer is eventually passed on to the consumer,' concluding: 'All the money we get in cocoa goes back to revenue and the gin trade account.'[52]

The colonial administration could not ignore the unanimous demand from the African members of the Legislative Council, and formed a commission to consider the Spirit Licence Ordinance. The recommendations of this commission, which included Ofori Atta as one of its African representatives, resulted in restricted access to liquor and a further increase in the retail price of alcohol. The African Members of the Legislative Council considered this to be entirely inadequate as these were the same strategies that had been used for years and which had merely resulted in increased Government revenue. Instead, they demanded the prohibition of Dutch gin.[53] The term they used to refer to Dutch gin was 'geneva'. Dutch distillers tended to brand the gins they exported to West Africa as either schnapps or geneva, and British West African colonial administrations used the term to denote Dutch (and German) gins produced through pot-still distillation. While Western-style educated African opinion leaders were quite comfortable using the term geneva, and appear to have had a clear sense of what drink they were referring to, it is less clear whether the average African consumer referred to geneva in the same way. African consumers had their own

[51] *Ibidem*, 90.
[52] 'Editorial notes', *The Gold Coast Leader*, 9 January 1929.
[53] PRO CO 96/685/2 Governor Slater to L. S. Amery, 23 January 1929.

categorisations of types of gins—including 'Bird' and 'Money' gins, or, more generally '*Blofodaa*' and '*Tordziha*' (foreign drink) in Ghana and '*Mmanyi oku*' (hot drink) in Nigeria—and it remains unclear to what extent they used the term 'geneva' at all.[54]

In response to the continuing demand in the Legislative Council for a ban on the importation of geneva, the Government formed a new commission to examine spirits consumption in the Gold Coast; a decision which caused immediate concern among importers and distillers of Dutch gin.[55] The new commission interviewed African chiefs, civil servants and traders, and European colonial officers, missionaries, traders and mine managers. It reached the conclusion that no liquor problem existed in the Gold Coast, but that there was a genuine demand among the African population for the prohibition of Dutch gin. It recommended the gradual prohibition of the importation of Dutch gin by a reduction of imports over a ten-year period of all 'geneva, which includes schnapps.' It also recommended the raising of the duties on all spirits, and the licensing of palm wine sales.

Colonial officials objected to these proposals because they would lead to a reduction of revenue, appeared to discriminate unfairly against Dutch spirits and were likely to lead to the smuggling of gin from neighbouring colonies. They furthermore considered it inconsistent to prohibit gin while allowing the importation of rum, especially since there was no evidence that gin was any more harmful than other liquors.[56] Such arguments were however insignificant in view of the commission's conclusion that the African population of the Gold Coast generally desired prohibition. Against this view, the Treasurer of the Gold Coast pointed out that the data in the report did not appear to justify the conclusions reached: of 26 Paramount Chiefs and Head Chiefs interviewed by the committee, only seven had asked for the prohibition of Dutch gin ('geneva and schnapps'), while twelve had opted for total prohibition, and the remaining seven chiefs had been against any form of prohibition.[57] Thus while it was true that a sub-

[54] See chapter four.

[55] PRO CO 96/685/2 Gordon Clark to A. J. Harding, CO, 12 March 1929.

[56] PRAAD/A CSO 6/3/520 Minute by W. D. Inness, Director of Medical and Sanitary Services, 12 March 1930, CSO 6/3/520 Minute by R. A. Kelly, Treasurer, 13 March 1930, CSO 6/3/520 Minute by A. Durham MacKenzie, Acting Comptroller or Customs, 17 March 1930, CSO 6/3/520 Memo by A. Durham MacKenzie, 25 February 1930, CSO 6/3/522 Slater to Lord Passfield, 12 April 1930.

[57] PRAAD/A CSO 6/3/520 Minute by R. A. Kelly, Treasurer, 13 March 1930.

stantial majority of the chiefs interviewed had been in favour of some form of prohibition, the conclusion that the overwhelming majority favoured the specific exclusion of Dutch gin, seemed to be an imprecise representation of the chiefs' opinion. Gold Coast Governor Slater and the Colonial Office nevertheless accepted the commission's claim that there existed a 'widespread and influential demand by Africans for the exclusion of geneva and schnapps'.[58] Colonial Secretary Lord Passfield remained unconvinced that gin was particularly harmful and regarded the other arguments put forward to be 'inconclusive'. He, however, was 'not prepared to direct that gin shall be allowed to enter against the wish of the Government and people of the Gold Coast.'[59]

The Geneva and Gin (Restriction of Importation) Ordinance was enacted in 1930.[60] By the time the Ordinance came into effect, gin imports had already declined markedly from its high of 1,181,913 gallons in 1927, down to 334,440 gallons in 1930. Gin imports were to decline further in subsequent years, to a low of 45,966 gallons in 1934.[61] This pattern indicates that the decline of consumer spending power following the sudden deterioration in 1928 of the world market prices for cocoa affected levels of gin consumption much more directly than legislation.[62]

Differing attitudes towards Dutch gin

Meanwhile developments in Nigeria and Cameroon had been rather different from those in Ghana. While anti-liquor trade campaigners in Britain were equally worried about the rising importation of liquor in these territories, and although missionaries sent similarly disturbing reports illustrating the effects of the gin trade,[63] no legislation was

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[58] PRO CO 96/685/2 Minute by J. A. Calder (CO), London, 18 February 1929, CO 96/895/2 Minute by J. E. W. Wood (CO), London, 21 February 1929.

[59] PRAAD/A CSO 6/3/522 Lord Passfield to Gold Coast Government, London, 12 April 1930.

[60] PRAAD/A CSO 6/3/521 *The Geneva and Gin (Restriction of Importation) Ordinance*, 1930.

[61] PRAAD/A ADM 7/1/61 *Gold Coast Colony Blue Book of Statistics, 1927–28*; ADM 7/1/64 *Gold Coast Colony Blue Book of Statistics, 1930–31*; ADM 7/1/67 *Gold Coast Colony Blue Book of Statistics, 1933–34*.

[62] Agbodeka, *An Economic History of Ghana*, 63.

[63] The Churches and the West African Liquor Traffic, *West Africa*, 16 November 1929.

enacted to prohibit Dutch gin. In the case of Cameroon, the seven-fold increase in gin importation between 1922 and 1930 was thought to reflect, not just greater prosperity, but especially the increased number of Europeans that now resided in the territory.[64] While the situation in Nigeria might have appeared less urgent due to the much lower per capita consumption of imported gin, the crucial difference with Ghana seems to have been the absence of a demand for prohibition among African political elites. Instead, Western-style educated Nigerians were concerned with safeguarding their access to imported liquor. In petitions to the Nigerian colonial Government, they emphasised the non-injurious character of the imported liquors they consumed, pointing out that 'even an apparently harmless substance such as water can be made harmful if taken in excess or otherwise abused.'[65]

In Nigeria, as in Ghana, imported Dutch gin was by far the most popular imported liquor, accounting for up to ninety per cent of total spirits imports. The policies of the Nigerian colonial administration were similar to that of the Gold Coast: the duties on liquor imports contributed significantly to colonial revenue, and the normal response to an increase in consumption was to raise the duties even further.[66] However, in Nigeria this did not result in demands for a ban on the importation of Dutch gin. This can be explained out of a combination of the different development of African nationalist politics of the moment, the differing economic fortunes of the territories, and the historical differences in the relative popularity of Dutch gin. Gin had been the most popular imported liquor in Nigeria since the late nineteenth century, and it therefore had had time to become entrenched in African traditional ritual practices. In western parts of the Gold Coast, gin had become the dominant imported liquor as recently as the 1920s, and the shift from the use of rum to gin in particular traditional rituals was still locally remembered and debated.[67] Also, during the 1920s Nigerian consumer spending did not increase to the same extent as in Ghana, which resulted in a more limited increase in colonial Government revenue from import duties. While in the Gold Coast the contribution

[64] *West Africa*, 25 April 1931; *West African Times*, 22 April 1931.

[65] PRO CO 583/104 Petition of the Northern Provinces Central Branch of the Nigeria Civil Service Union, Kaduna, 8 June 1921.

[66] NAI CSO 26/1/01892 vol. I Returns of Quantity & Strength of Spirit Imports; 'Colonial Office vote in the House of Commons', *West Africa*, 4 May 1929.

[67] See chapter three.

of liquor duties to total government revenue rose to twenty-five per cent, in Nigeria the total remained below ten per cent.[68] In Nigeria, as in Ghana, taxation constituted one of the main focal points for the development of African nationalist politics. Yet, in Nigeria, gin duties did not provide as easy a target as in Ghana.[69]

It thus appears that the difference in attitude towards Dutch gin between Gold Coast educated elites and similar groups elsewhere in West Africa mainly reflected strategic political considerations, and was less a manifestation of more deep-seated objections to gin in wider coastal Ghanaian society. In fact, while the Gold Coast government and the Colonial Office were prepared to believe that there existed an overwhelming African majority in favour of an import ban on geneva and schnapps, it appears that the enthusiasm for prohibition did not extent far beyond the political elites who advocated it. An article in the *Gold Coast Spectator* observed that Sir Ofori Atta knew 'very well that he dare not go to Akim Abuakwa and tell his subjects that he has been advocating the non-importation of gin into the country, for he fully knows that this liquid is part and parcel of their custom on all occasions and is become part of their diet.'[70] Indeed, Chief Ofori Atta himself did not hide the fact that most of his subjects did not share his enthusiasm for prohibition. In a letter to the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce, he wrote:

> As you might know, I had a case of gin presented to me in London. I brought this case with me and on the date that my spokesman rendered to the State an oral report of my British tour, the proceedings were ended by burying the gin. The contents of the 12 bottles were poured out, the people unanimously agreeing that gin would no longer be their 'friend'. Of course, it will take some time before one succeeds in this propaganda against its consumption, but I feel that a very good start has been made.[71]

The ritual described in this passage is open to more than one interpretation. On the one hand, the language Ofori Atta used,—including the symbolism of the public destruction of the evil gin, and his exhortation

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[68] 'Colonial Office vote in the House of Commons', *West Africa*, 4 May 1929.

[69] James S. Coleman, *Nigeria. Background to Nationalism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1958); Richard L. Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties* (New York and Enugu: NOK 1983) (first published 1963).

[70] Gold Coast letter, *West Africa*, 22 September 1928.

[71] 'Sir Ofori Atta and the drink trade', *West Africa*, 3 November 1928.

in the last sentence that the actions described were merely the first beginning of a much bigger work—points towards the language and techniques used by Christian missionaries in Africa.[72] Ofori Atta had indeed been trained by the Basel Mission and had attended the seminary, while the cause of prohibition was generally recognised as one of the obsessions of Christian missionaries. On the other hand, the ritual will also have reminded the onlookers of the rituals involving gin that were normally performed by chiefs and elders. To pour out not just one bottle of gin, not two, but an entire case of twelve bottles, must have counted as a demonstration of Chief Atta's importance.

The Gold Coast reconsiders

The anti-liquor propaganda by Ofori Atta and his allies was not very effective. While the importation of Dutch gin declined much faster than had been intended by the Geneva and Gin (Restriction of Importation) Ordinance, the consumption of cheap, illicitly distilled local spirits soared. Evidently, the rapid decline in Dutch gin sales was not the result of the anti-liquor trade campaigns, but of a combination of high prices due to taxation, declining purchasing power of African consumers, and the availability of a cheap alternative. By 1933, the Gold Coast administration no longer believed that the desire for the prohibition of gin was widespread among the African population. More significantly, even African Members of the Legislative Council and other prominent Africans who had demanded prohibition in late 1920s, appeared to be taking a more positive view of imported spirits, and some of them spoke in favour of a less restrictive policy.[73] To the colonial administration, the situation was 'alarming': on the one hand it was facing a decline in revenue, partly due to the rapid contraction of spirits imports, and partly due to the general economic downturn. On the other hand, it was confronted with the rapid increase of illicit distillation which was uncontrolled and untaxed.

In early 1933, the Commercial Members of the Legislative Council moved that the Government should relax its liquor laws as a means

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[72] J. D. Y. Peel, 'For who hath despised the day of small things? Missionary narratives and historical anthropology', *Comparative Studies in History and Society* (1995), 581–607.

[73] 'The drink problem', *The Gold Coast Independent*, 11 March 1933; 'The liquor question', *The Times of West Africa*, 27 March 1933; PRAAD/A ADM 11/1/1606 Hugh Thomas, Memorandum on Liquor Policy, 7 February 1934.

to encourage African consumers to drink imported liquor rather than illicit spirits. This motion received the unanimous support of all African Members of the Legislative Council.[74] To effectuate this change in liquor policy, the administration drew up a number of proposals, ranging from the reduction of the fee for a liquor licence, and an increase in the hours during which the sale of spirits was permitted, to the repeal of the Ordinance. It then circulated these proposals for comment to all the chiefs and elders in the parts of Ghana where imported spirits were consumed, and also to town councils, chambers of commerce, and missionary organisations.[75] The replies to this official 'questionnaire on liquor policy' were overwhelmingly in support of the proposed relaxation, with many being in favour of allowing the importation of Dutch gin.[76] It appeared as if local African opinion had done 'a complete *volte face*' regarding geneva and schnapps in response to the rise of illicit distillation.[77] Indeed, some prominent Africans had altered their stance somewhat and the African Members in the Legislative Council, having made their point about taxation, no longer favoured prohibition. However, a comparison of the opinions of individuals and 'native states' in 1930 and 1933 shows that the opinion of the majority of chiefs and elders remained more or less the same.[78] The difference was that, in the midst of economic recession and confronted with illicit liquor production, the colonial government was listening for a different message.

Between May 1933 and January 1934, over a thousand chiefs, elders, chief's spokespersons, and others, were involved in local discussions to decide on the responses to be given to the Government's 'Questionnaire on Liquor Policy.' While the general mood among the chiefs and elders was in favour of a relaxation of the liquor laws, a number of the respondents argued in favour of the prohibition of the importation

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[74] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Extract of Colonial Secretary's letter of 18 May 1933.

[75] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/19 Memorandum on Liquor Policy Questionnaire (17 May 1933).

[76] PRAAD/A CSO21/18/17 Relaxation of restriction imposed on the importation and sale of spirits 1933–36; CSO 21/18/18 Local opinion on liquor traffic 1932–33; CSO 21/18/19 Replies to Liquor policy questionnaire and memo 1933–34.

[77] This is argued in: Emmanuel Akyeampong, 'Ahenfo Nsa (the "Drink of Kings"). Dutch schnapps and ritual in Ghanaian history', in: Ineke van Kessel, ed., *Merchants, Missionaries and Migrants: 300 Years of Dutch-Ghanaian Relations* (Amsterdam: KIT Publishers 2002), 50–9, there 56.

[78] PRAAD/A ADM 11/1/1606 Memorandum on Liquor Policy.

of gin. To explain this position, they usually referred to the presumed poor quality of geneva and schnapps, the allegedly disastrous effects of gin consumption on the health of Africans, and gin's negative impact on the morals of its users. Chiefs in quite a few locations noted that Dutch gin was particularly unhealthy in comparison to other imported spirits.[79] For example, the chiefs and elders of Akyem Abuakwa (where Ofori Atta was Paramount Chief) strongly advocated the total prohibition of the importation of geneva on the grounds that 'Geneva gin is deleterious to health and causes impotency. It also shatters the nervous system.'[80]

It would appear that these questionnaire results offer us the most reliable snapshot of local opinion on Dutch gin in the early 1930s that we could realistically hope to find. However, interpreting the replies is not straightforward. Not only did the phrasing of the six questions on the questionnaire form itself define what aspects of liquor policy and spirit consumption the chiefs and elders would address, the form was accompanied by a memorandum, which introduced the government's concerns about illegal stills and loss of revenue, while explaining the rationale for each of the proposed changes to the liquor laws.[81] In a number of instances the questionnaire responses address this memorandum directly. More generally, the answers contain many phrases that closely resemble the language and opinions of colonial and missionary debates about the liquor trade. It is not always clear what these phrases were meant to refer to exactly in the context of particular responses, and at times they seem to be merely formulaic expressions that sit awkwardly with other opinions expressed in the same statement. Of course, the chiefs and elders, as well as the secretaries and letter writers who wrote down the replies, were consciously addressing the colonial government. They attempted to deal with government concerns, and included opinions which they thought the colonial administration expected to hear. As a result, it is not always clear how to read a statement by a chief and his elders, that imported Dutch geneva was a particularly deleterious liquor, but that it was not as bad as illicit local gin and should therefore

[79] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Answers by Pram Pram State Council, 25 July 1933, CSO 21/18/18 Answers by Shai State Council.

[80] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Answers of Akim Abuakwa State Council, 12 October 1933.

[81] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Extract of Colonial Secretary's letter of 18 May 1933.

be allowed to be imported.[82] Does this statement reflect their genuine opinion on Dutch gin at that moment, or was the reference to the deleterious nature of geneva perhaps merely a rhetorical claim included to make more believable the subsequent proposal to repeal all restrictions? To complicate matters further, the chiefs and elders were not always clear in their use of terminology. It is often unclear which exact drinks they referred to when they used terms such as liquor, spirit, and even rum and gin. The term 'gin' sometimes referred to imported Dutch gin, and at other times to the illicitly distilled liquor. Even the term geneva was used very imprecisely in these responses. For example, the Akpini State Council favoured the importation at a cheap price of 'Holland Gin (not that of Geneva).'[83] Meanwhile, the members of the Central Province Provincial Council were very specific—though incorrect—in their contention that the Ordinance only referred to 'Holland Trade Gin'.[84]

Many chiefs and elders complained that the gin that was available in the 1930s was not as pure as the gin that had been imported before World War I.[85] For example, the chief of Teshi asked the Gold Coast government 'to advise the distillers in order to manufacture better quality Gin, such as the one or kind we had before the War.'[86] Meanwhile, Amege Akwei, the Sempe Mantse, referred to a 'general feeling that the present stuff with which Gin is manufactured does not seem as pure as that which was employed some 40 years ago.'[87] Thus the cheap Dutch and German gins that had been attacked by the anti-liquor trade campaigners as particularly vile and unhealthy 'trade spirits', and that subsequently had been banned by the colonial governments, were being remembered as the purest and healthiest of all liquors. For that reason, the chief of Tema informed the Gold Coast Government that, only 'if the mercantile members will agree that they will bring

[82] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Answers by Shai State Council.
[83] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Answers by Akpini State Council, 20 December 1933.
[84] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/19 Answers by Central Provinces Provincial Council [1933].
[85] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Letter from Nii Ankrah, 30 June 1933, CSO 21/18/18 Answers by Nee Kpakpo Oti, Adontehene of Otublohum [1933].
[86] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Teshi Mantse to Secretary, Ga State Council, 30 June 1933.
[87] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Amege Akwei's replies to questionnaire (30 June 1933).

good Gin as in the time of Queen Victoria then we shall agree the importation of Gin again.'[88]

Those respondents who were in favour of the importation of gin tended to emphasise one or more of the following four arguments: the importance of gin for local rituals; the medicinal uses of gin; the loss of revenue due to the restriction of the liquor trade; and the rise of unhealthy illicit distillation as a result of the poor availability and high price of imported gin. Other reasons put forward included the needs of fishermen, who were said to require liquor to keep them warm when fishing in the night;[89] the desire to curb gin smuggling from neighbouring territories;[90] and the observation that increased gin consumption was an unavoidable aspect of the country's development towards Western civilisation.[91]

Of the local rituals, announcements of deaths and funerals were most commonly mentioned.[92] The Akwapim State Council explained that liquor stores had to have long opening hours, because when there was a death in the family, the traditions demanded that gin was sent to relatives to inform them of the death. They further added that 'almost all drinkables are purchased on credit by the community when they perform a funeral custom, and the major part of this debt is paid off by moneys contributed by friends as funeral present.'[93] The responses also pointed out that it was a traditional requirement to use gin to offer libation to stools, and at private and public shrines.[94]

Traditional leaders frequently mentioned the use of gin for medicinal purposes, emphasising that it would be those in poor health who

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[88] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Tema Mantse (13 July 1933).

[89] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Answers by Fia Sri II and chiefs of Anlo, 5 July 1933, CSO 21/18/18 Answers by Titus Glover [1933], CSO 21/18/18 Answers from Ga State Council, CSO 21/18/18 Answers by Pram Pram State Council, 25 July 1933.

[90] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Answers by Fia Sri II and chiefs of Anlo, 5 July 1933. On smuggling of gin in this context, also see: Paul Nugent, *Smugglers, Secessionists and Loyal Citizens on the Ghana-Togo Frontier: The Lie of the Borderlands Since 1914* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002), 83–7.

[91] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Answers by Akwapim State Council, 1 July 1933.

[92] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Answers by Omanhene and State Council of Akwamu, 24 June 1933, CSO 21/18/18 Answers by Nee Kpakpo Oti, Adontehene of Otublohum [1933], CSO 21/18/18 Answers from New Juaben.

[93] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Answers by Akwapim State Council, 1 July 1933; see: Marleen de Witte, 'Money and death: funeral business in Asante, Ghana', *Africa* 73.4 (2003), 531–59, for a discussion of this aspect of funeral celebrations in modern Ghana.

[94] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Answers by the chiefs and elders of Osudoku, 19 July 1933.

would suffer most from a total prohibition of gin. According to the Kwahu State Council 'Gin produces effective cure and unless we have it the consequences will be disastrous on the sick.'[95] In Manya Krobo, E. Mate-Kole and his elders warned of the 'fatal consequences' that would result if the gin required for medicinal purposes became unavailable.[96] It is of course not surprising that those who were in favour of gin importation emphasised its supposed medicinal value, while those who favoured prohibition knew it to be poisonous. Those who argued that gin was poisonous had clearly adopted the language and posture of the anti-liquor trade campaigners. However, we should not assume that those who discussed the medicinal uses of gin necessarily reflected a more 'authentic' indigenous perspective. For example, Dutch and German distillers had been printing claims about their gins' medicinal qualities on the labels of schnapps bottles since the nineteenth century.[97] At any rate, the argument that Dutch gin was unhealthy was widely known, also among those who did not agree with this viewpoint. Nii Kpakpo Oti, who had been trading in spirits for 33 years before he became a chief, emphasised: 'I drink Rum and Gin personally—any kind of it—Spirits never do any harm to our body. It becomes injurious to our body when one takes too much—without any limit—Too much of anything is, of course, bad.'[98]

Where Kpakpo Oti claimed that he drank 'any kind' of rum and gin, other responses showed the importance of brand-awareness in respect of spirits. Brands mentioned included 'Old Tom' gin (a popular brand of 'dry gin' produced by Gordon's as well as by Erven Lucas Bols),[99] 'Daniel Chase and Nash' rum (an American white rum), and 'Double Flask', 'Prize Medal', and 'Elephant' brands of gin. The brands were thought to reflect differences in the quality of the spirits thus marketed. The Omanhene and State Council of Akwamu deplored the poor quality of trade gin, but made an exception for the 'old gin imported

[95] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Answers by Kwahu State Council, 9 October 1933.

[96] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Answers by chiefs and elders of Manya Krobo, 17 July 1933.

[97] See chapter six.

[98] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Answers by Nee Kpakpo Oti, Adontehene of Otublohum [1933].

[99] NAI CSO 26/1/01965 Vol. II Ormsby Gore to Governor Hugh Clifford of Nigeria, 17 April 1925; PRAAD/A CSO 6/3/490 Gin and other spirits imported into the Gold Coast at a selling price below 20/-f.o.b.

by Messrs African Association and F & A Swanzys.'[100] Chief Akumajay pointed out that the importation of gin should not stop entirely, and specified that the 'importation especially "Prize Medal" should be carried on a proportionate rate'.[101]

Most questionnaire responses mentioned the need to restore lost government revenue.[102] Local African leaders were in support of bringing back the revenue derived from the taxes on gin, because they feared its alternative: direct taxation. The New Juaben State Council noted how: 'The fall of revenue from the duty on the importation of gin gave rise to that objectionable question of Income-Tax.'[103] Many replies pointed out that the Gold Coast was in a state of economic depression, and presented the relaxation of the restrictions on the liquor trade as one way to stimulate the economy. E. Mate-Kole and his elders predicted that an increase in the importation of gin would not only result in a much-needed boost to government revenue, but would also revive the flagging trade in cocoa and palm oil.[104] The elders of Pram Pram specified: 'Much has been said about the trade depression but the root cause of it, especially in this Pram Pram State, is the restriction placed on the sale of liquor.'[105] In the climate of economic depression, African consumers were said to bury their money in the ground, rather than to circulate it. The Pram Pram elders therefore proposed that African consumers should be encouraged to spend their way out of economic recession by facilitating the trade in liquor: 'The only means they resort to, to encourage circulation of money among themselves by setting up small trades in spirits.'[106]

The key government concern addressed in all questionnaire responses is that of the rise of illicit local distillation, which was said to poison the people.[107] The rise in illicit distillation was discussed in some detail

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[100] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Answers by Omanhene and State Council of Akwamu, 24 June 1933.

[101] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Nii Akumajay's answers to Questionnaire on Liquor Policy [1933].

[102] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Answers from Ga State Council.

[103] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Answers from New Juaben.

[104] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Answers by chiefs and elders of Manya Krobo, 17 July 1933.

[105] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Answers by Pram Pram State Council, 25 July 1933.

[106] *Ibidem*.

[107] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Answers by Nana Akpandja II of Buem, 15 January 1934, CSO 21/18/18 Answers by the chief and elders of Yilo Krobo.

in the memorandum accompanying the questionnaire, and no one responding to the questions could have been unaware of the importance the Gold Coast government attached to the suppression of illicit stills.[108] The government assumed that local distillation had only recently started in response to attempts to limit the consumption of imported liquor: 'a new class of criminal has been created as a direct result of the heavy restrictions which have been placed on the sale and supply of liquor.'[109] Of course it is likely that local stills had been used for years without being a focus of police and local administration interest, and that the sudden detection of local stills merely reflected a greater concern, in 1930, about the possibility of this happening—a concern likely to have been informed by the upcoming introduction of new, stricter liquor laws. This is quite possible, as discussions in the British House of Commons and newspaper debates about the intended policy of liquor prohibition in West Africa had frequently warned about the undesired side effects of prohibition in the United States.[110] Some illicit distillation was reported in Nigeria as early as 1910, and legislation prohibiting local distillation had been introduced shortly afterwards.[111] In 1919, the Gold Coast administration noted the existence of local distillation in the Central Province, but this was on a small scale, and not considered a problem.[112]

The rise of illicit distillation

A couple of indicators suggest that the early 1930s witnessed a marked expansion of both the number of illegal stills and their geographical spread. Firstly, neither government sources nor anti-liquor trade campaigners mention illegal distilling as a problem in Ghana until 1930. Also, illicit spirit was described in 1930 as being 'muddy and cloudy in colour' and as 'crude and coarse' tasting, while by 1933 the illicit gin

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[108] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/19 Memorandum on Liquor Policy Questionnaire (17 May 1933).

[109] PRAAD/A ADM 11/1/1606 Hugh Thomas, Memorandum on Liquor Policy, 7 February 1934.

[110] 'Liquor trading in West Africa', *West Africa*, 6 April 1929; 'Colonial Office vote in the House of Commons', *West Africa*, 4 May 1929; J. M. Stuart-Young, Letter to the editor of *West Africa*, 25 July 1931.

[111] Olorunfemi, 'The liquor traffic dilemma', 241; see also NAI CSO 26/1/01532 Local Liquor (Manufacture) Ordinance 1918.

[112] PRO CO 554/41 Governor, Gold Coast, to Milner, 6 March 1919.

was generally clear and—according to the Medical Authorities—much purer.[113] This speedy development may indicate that people were moving into a new industry and were rapidly mastering the new technique involved. Indeed, Akyeampong has described how farmers took up distillation during the recession years to make up for lost income. The material needed to produce a still (two empty kerosene tins and some copper tubing) was easy to acquire, and the ingredients for the liquor (sugar cane or palm wine and some sugar) were widely and cheaply available (see Figure 5.3).[114] Finally, chiefs and elders wrote in their questionnaire responses that they, too, regarded illicit distillation as a relatively recent problem. It is interesting that they used English terms such as 'illicit gin' to indicate the drinks, and not local names such as '*akpeteshie*' or '*sodabi*', although this may reflect attempts to communicate with the colonial administration in an appropriate register, rather than the absence of such local names at the time.[115]

In their questionnaire responses, chiefs and elders agreed with the Gold Coast government that illicit gin was of poor quality and harmful to the health of African consumers, and that its rising production resulted from government attempts to check the consumption of imported liquor:[116] 'if the Gold Coast Native cannot obtain scientifically prepared liquor he will prepare injurious liquor for himself.'[117] They also agreed that the poor quality ingredients and improvised equipment used to prepare illicit spirit meant that it would be preferable for African consumers to drink imported Dutch gin. Chiefs and elders demonised illicit gin in terms that seem borrowed directly from the older anti-liquor trade denouncements of Dutch gin: all the things

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[113] PRAAD/A ADM 11/1/1606 Hugh Thomas, Memorandum on Liquor Policy, 7 February 1934.

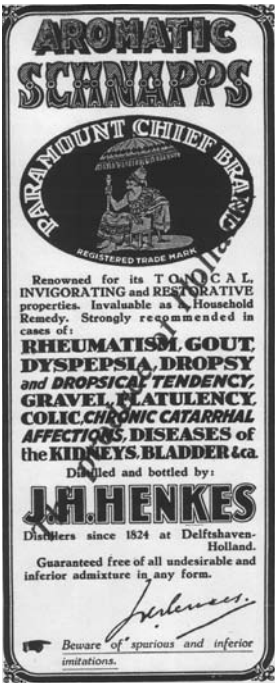
[114] Emmanuel Akyeamong, 'What's in a drink? Class struggle, popular culture and the politics of *akpeteshie* (local gin) in Ghana, 1930–67', *Journal of African History* 37.2 (1996), 215–36, there 226.

[115] The term '*Akpeteshie*'—now commonly used in Ghana to denote local gin—is not used even once in the chiefs' replies. The term '*Kelewole*' is used once, by chief Gbagbo of Avatime (PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Answers by Chief Gbago of Avatime, 3 January 1934). It appears that both terms were in use at the time, as Governor Thomas remarked 'You call it "Kelewele" or "Akpeteshi",' in a speech quoted in the *Gold Coast Independent* (1 July 1933).

[116] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 The opinion of the Ada State Council, 2 July 1933, CSO 21/18/18 Answers by Akpini State Council, 20 December 1933, CSO 21/18/18 Chief Gbagbo of Avatime, 3 January 1934, CSO 21/18/18 Answers from Ga State Council, CSO 21/18/18 Answers by Kwahu State Council, 9 October 1933.

[117] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Answers by Akwapim State Council, 1 July 1933.

5.3 Akpeteshie still in Atiavi, Ghana, 2000



5.4 Label for Henkes Paramount Chief Aromatic Schnapps (not dated)

that were previously said about Dutch gin, including that it was a particularly harmful liquor and was doing great damage to the people, were now said about illicit gin. Even the term 'trade gin' was no longer used to indicate cheap imported gin and rum, and now specified illicit local gin. The vast majority of chiefs and elders argued in favour of the government proposal to make illicit distillation less attractive by reducing the price and increasing the availability of the less harmful imported spirits, while only the chief of La (near Accra) recommended to legalise the use of stills for personal consumption.[118]

The government's proposed policy to allow trade in legal spirits as the best remedy against illegal distillation had been influenced by the arguments of European commercial interests and also by comparison with the widely discussed developments in the United States. In 1933, *The Times of West Africa*, writing in support of the relaxation of liquor laws, observed that 'a death knell was struck to boot-legging and other dangerous practices immediately President Roosevelt decided that America should "go wet" again.'[119] The government also acted directly against illicit distillation by arresting and convicting the producers as well as the consumers of illicit spirit.[120] The number of convictions for distilling liquor quickly rose from seven convictions in 1930, to 444 in 1933, but it was clear that only a small minority of distillers was caught.[121]

The government had an obvious motive for dealing with illegal distillation: as it was outside government control, the administration missed out on a lot of revenue. Additional concerns included the total lack of control over production and trade, as well as the unpredictable strength and quality of the spirits thus produced.[122] The motivation for chiefs and elders to support the government on this matter appears to have been more complex. Their willingness to denounce illicit gin contrasts with Akyeampong's observation that the chiefs generally refused to see

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[118] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Answers from La Mantse and his elders and councillors, 10 July 1933.

[119] 'The liquor question', *The Times of West Africa*, 27 March 1933. See also 'Liquor and liberty', *West Africa*, 15 April 1933; 'Africans, alcohol, and accuracy', *West Africa*, 27 January 1934.

[120] PRAAD/A ADM 41/4/55 Criminal Record Book Keta District, September–December 1933.

[121] PRAAD/A ADM 11/1/1606 Hugh Thomas, Memorandum on Liquor Policy, 7 February 1934.

[122] PRAAD/A ADM 41/4/55 Criminal Record Book Keta District, September–December 1933.

illicit distillation as a moral or legal crime.[123] While chiefs and elders may have had genuine concerns about possible health and social problems associated with the consumption of illicit spirits, they also appear to have used the menace of illicit distillation to achieve other goals. These included not only the reversal of the prohibition policy towards geneva and schnapps, but also the re-admittance of rum in casks as an affordable alternative to bottled gin, rum, and whisky. Cask rum was said to be affordable because it could be retailed in tots so that people could purchase as little as they needed for a particular—ritual—purpose.[124] Furthermore, in the early 1930s cask rum was still seen as 'the first European drink' to have reached Africans, and the distribution of casks of rum by chiefs to their people as part of festivities, and the drinking of cask rum during funerals, were still remembered as being the appropriate local customs: 'If an elderly man dies a full puncheon is bought, rolled throughout the street to show the rank and dignity of the deceased.'[125]

More importantly, the chiefs appear to have been particularly worried that the widespread use of illicit gin threatened the connection between European distilled liquors and the status of chiefs and elders. As was discussed in chapter three, the consumption of imported spirits was one of the ways through which chiefs and male elders expressed their status, and it was claimed that young men and women were not even allowed to purchase or drink spirits (except during funerals). In contrast to this, the responses to the liquor policy questionnaire emphasise that the illicit spirit was mainly produced by 'the young Generation'.[126] At the same time, as consequence of the economic recession and the rising price of imported gin, the European drinks were becoming unaffordable for traditional elites, and it became increasingly difficult for members of the public to bring the bottles of gin required when settling a case in a chief's court or when visiting a shrine. By 1933 people had started to use the illicit spirit to pour libation for stools and shrines.[127] Thus

[123] Akyeampong, 'What's in a drink?', 227.

[124] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Answers by Akwapim State Council, 1 July 1933.

[125] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Answers by Nee Kpakpo Oti, Adontehene of Otublohum [1933].

[126] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Answers by Akpini State Council, 20 December 1933.

[127] PRAAD/A ADM 41/4/55 Criminal Record Book Keta District, September–December 1933. See for example I.G.P. vs. Gawu Ameleka (27 November 1933) and I.G.P. vs. Adowi Akiamede (14 December 1933).

patterns of who had access to spirits were changing. Combined with the situation that imported spirits were becoming increasingly inaccessible, this threatened the manipulation by chiefs and male elders of imported gin and rum as a representation of their social and political power. The chiefs and elders may not really have believed the government's claim that to make imported spirits, and particularly Dutch gin, more available and more affordable would put an end to illicit distillation.[128] However, they will have found it useful in their dealings with the younger generation to again be able to rely on imported liquor for the ritual representation of their status. Meanwhile, as long as the ingredients for illicit distillation were widely and cheaply available, the only factor that could stop individual distillers was police action. If convicted, the owner of an illegal still faced a hefty fine of up to £100, or 6 months imprisonment with hard labour.[129] It is interesting that in the example of the Keta District, the police had received a tip-off in every case that resulted in a conviction for illicit distillation.[130]

The Gold Coast debates assumed (wrongly) that the rise of illicit distillation was linked to the introduction of the Geneva and Gin (Restriction of Importation) Ordinance. However, in territories such as Togo and Nigeria, which did not boast such strict restrictions, illicit distillation took off around the same time as in Ghana.[131] As debates about liquor had repeatedly emphasised the relevance of the experience with prohibition in the United States for policy formulation in West Africa, it is not surprising that it was assumed that illicit distillation had been introduced from America. According to the Governor of Nigeria, 'the knowledge was acquired from natives who had recently returned from the United States of America,'[132] while one of the European traders

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[128] In fact, colonial administrators did not believe that illicit distillation could ever be entirely stopped either. (PRO CO 96/715 Report, Commissioner, Eastern Province, 28 December 1933).

[129] PRAAD/A ADM 41/4/55 Criminal Record Book Keta District, September–December 1933. In 1934 it was proposed to raise the penalty for illicit distillation to £500 or imprisonment up to three years, with the penalty for possession of metal tubing for use in distillation being £100 or 12 months for the first offence, and £100 *and* 12 months for repetitions. (*West Africa*, 20 January 1934).

[130] This contradicts Akyeampong's observation that 'Voluntary informers were rare.' (Akyeampong, 'What's in a drink?', 227).

[131] Philip E. Leis, 'Palm oil, illicit gin, and the moral order of the Ijaw', *American Anthropologist* New Series 66.4 part 1 (1964), 828–38, there 832; Odeziaku, letter to the editor of *West Africa*, 19 September 1931.

[132] Governor Cameron to Secretary of State, 22 December 1931 (PRO CO 554/89/4495), quoted in Akyeampong, 'What's in a drink?', 220.

blamed 'some enterprising American.'[133] Illicit distillation of '*ogogoro*' or '*kai kai*' spread rapidly across Southern Nigeria. As in Ghana, the rise of local illicit distillation was a consequence of the worldwide depression. As the market prices of Nigeria's main agricultural exports dropped, imported goods became unaffordable. The total value of imports declined markedly, and liquor imports were no exception: the quantity of imported gin declined tenfold from over 500,000 gallons in 1927 to 50,546 gallons in 1939.[134] Many farmers entered the distilling business during the depression years, producing not only for local consumption, but also for sale in urban and mining areas, where the affordable spirit quickly became popular among workers. It was reported after World War II that illicit distillation was the most important economic activity in some Nigerian communities, with up to fifty per cent of the men engaged in the distilling and transporting of illicit gin.[135] However, as early as 1931 there were already so many distillers active that competition had begun to drive down the retail price of illicit gin.[136] European traders were complaining about the theft of copper tubing needed to set up the stills: 'In Calabar, launches lying at anchor and at moorings were rifled, and all easily removable tubing stolen from them. Motor vehicles, derelict and otherwise, were ransacked.'[137] The kerosene tins that were used as stills were even easier to come by, as hundreds of thousands of tins of petrol were imported annually and the empty containers were then re-used as domestic utensils. They were in widespread use throughout Southern Nigeria as water-containers, palm-oil carriers, cooking pots, and portable ovens.[138]

The colonial authorities found it impossible to put a stop to illicit distillation, as the equipment used was made from such ordinary components, and could easily be hidden in the sand. The drink itself was kept concealed in a similar way, while often sold through an extensive network, with final retail sales frequently done by women sellers. The illicit spirit was bottled in all sorts of containers, but empty bottles that

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[133] Odeziaku, letter to the editor of *West Africa*, 19 September 1931.

[134] PRO CO 544/123/18 Liquor policy, gin legislation: Nigeria.

[135] Leis, 'Palm oil, illicit gin, and moral order', 832–4; Akyeampong, 'What's in a drink?', 221–4.

[136] George K. Weeks, 'A new, serious social problem in Nigeria', *West Africa*, 28 November 1931.

[137] *Ibidem*.

[138] NAE RIVPROF 2/1/15 G. H. Findlay, Memorandum on illicit distilling, 21 September 1931.

had previously contained imported liquor were particularly popular. A European contemporary described the illicit spirit that was produced as follows:

> The result is a colourless, sweet spirit of fully 60% alcohol, and will burn freely. It is sold immediately, no maturity being allowed, and its fiery nature appeals to the people. In the clear condition they call it gin; coloured with burnt sugar and flavoured with herbs, it is sold as whisky, with a proportion of sugar syrup and more burnt sugar it becomes rum.[139]

As in Ghana, Nigerian government officials and merchants emphasised the poor quality of the illicit spirits. They argued that a spirit that was distilled only once from impure ingredients, using flimsy equipment, of entirely unpredictable strength, and with inappropriate additions, simply had to be unhealthy. In support of this contention, they reported a number of incidents of African consumers falling ill after drinking illicit spirit. The government's main problem with illicit gin was that it was impossible to effectively control, or tax, either its production or its consumption.

The lesser evil

The rise of local illicit distillation brought with it a higher status for imported gin. Now that imported Dutch gin was no longer the cheapest type of distilled liquor available in West Africa, it was also no longer regarded as the worst quality drink. The logic of the assumption that a cheap price indicated poor quality, which had previously worked against Dutch gin, now contributed to its revaluation. Dutch gin was the lesser evil: 'The African can get drunker, and puts himself far more out of gear, on an orgy of "tumbo," than he could on a debauch of honest-to-God "square-face".'[140] The term 'trade spirits' that had been used for more than four decades to disqualify cheap imported rum and gin, was now applied to illicit locally distilled liquor. For instance, both in the Gold Coast and in Nigeria, convictions for the possession of 'trade spirits' no longer related to imported drinks, but were exclusively

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[139] Weeks, 'A new, serious social problem in Nigeria'.

[140] J. M. Stuart-Young, Letter to the editor (dated Onitsha, 27 June), *West Africa*, 25 July 1931. The term "square-face" is a reference to the characteristic shape of the bottles of imported Dutch gin. See chapter two, page 52, for details.

concerned with locally distilled liquor.[141] In contrast to government and commerce, most Christian missions continued to oppose the importation of gin and argued that illicit distillation could be curbed through government repression. However, the Catholic mission in Keta, Ghana, agreed that Dutch gin was not as bad as illicit spirit, and therefore favoured the relaxation of restrictions on importation.[142]

Although colonial governments had rather that Africans consumed imported Dutch gin than illicit spirits, they did not wholeheartedly embrace gin. In the Gold Coast, import restrictions on gin continued, and colonial governments across West Africa encouraged Africans to consume beer as a less harmful alternative to both geneva and illicit gin.[143] Until 1933, when the first West African brewery opened in Ghana, all European-style beer had been imported. The 1920s had seen a steady rise in beer imports, in line with the rise in importation of other commodities, and it was said to be popular because it was more affordable than the heavily taxed spirits, and because its consumption was regarded an emblem of European lifestyles and values.[144] Imported beer nevertheless remained relatively expensive, and beer imports fell back dramatically from 1929 onwards, in line with other imported commodities. After World War II, European-style beer became increasingly popular in West Africa as a social drink.[145] However, it did not achieve the ritual significance of gin.

From the perspective of African consumers, too, the spread of local spirits resulted in a new appreciation of Dutch gin. African consumers did not necessarily agree with the view that local spirits were harmful, or that illicit distillation was a crime. Even though many chiefs and elders in Ghana were prepared, for their own reasons, to support government attempts to restrict local distillation, it is clear that most people would have agreed with the Nigerian distillers who—on being informed that

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[141] PRAAD/A ADM 41/4/55 Criminal Record Book Keta District, September–December 1933; for Nigeria, see Korieh, 'Alcohol and Empire', 123.

[142] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/19 Answers by Augusto Herman, vicar apostolic, Catholic Mission, Keta [1933].

[143] Akyeampong, *Drink, Power, and Cultural Change*, 109–10; Simon Heap, 'Before "Star": the import substitution of Western-style alcohol in Nigeria, 1870–1970', *African Economic History* 24 (1996), 69–89; Diduk, 'European alcohol, history, and the state in Cameroon', 11–3.

[144] Heap, 'Before "Star"', 79–80.

[145] In 1955, *West Africa* reported that one third of all the beer exported from the Netherlands went to Ghana and Nigeria. ('Good beer customers', *West Africa*, 5 November 1955).

their activities were illegal—responded: "To boil palm wine and sugar is not a crime."[146] However, illicit gin held a much lower status than imported Dutch gin because it was cheap, lacked fancy packaging, and was locally produced. Since the days of the transatlantic slave trade, imported liquor had become central to rituals relating to kinship as well as for conspicuous display. This was not only because of its alcoholic strength, but certainly also simply because of its foreign provenance, as the circulation of imported goods of any type was an important marker of social status.[147] In the 1930s it would have been somewhat improper, even disrespectful, to use cheap, local liquor for rituals for which imported gin or rum had been used previously. Furthermore, as the characteristic shape of the geneva and schnapps bottles, the specific labels, trademarks and closures, had al become important for selecting the proper drink for ritual purposes, it was awkward for African consumers to bring along for ritual purposes the illicit spirit that was packaged as generic liquor. According to Torgbui Akpate:

> When someone brought *akpeteshie* while we were with the stool, we would collect it, but it would not in any way be used. We regarded *akpeteshie* as something we could use at any place. For instance, as we were sitting down here, I could enter my room and bring *akpeteshie* for us to drink. Now, using gin for the stool meant that we had shown respect to it.[148]

In the economic crisis years of the 1930s, it was unavoidable that, at times, illicit gin would be substituted for imported gin. One unlucky individual was even arrested at a shrine for being in possession of 'trade spirit' while he was using *akpeteshie* to pour libation.[149] After Word War II, although the use of imported Dutch gin continued to be the preferred option, the use of locally distilled gin for libation and other ritual functions became quite widespread in both Ghana and Nigeria.[150] It is often said that certain smaller gods take the local drink—but only

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[146] George K. Weeks, 'A new, serious social problem in Nigeria', *West Africa*, 28 November 1931.

[147] Joseph C. Miller, *Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade, 1730–1830* (London: James Currey 1988), 94; Don Ohadike, '"When slaves left, owners wept": Entrepreneurs and emancipation among the Igbo people', *Slavery and Abolition* 19.2 (1998), 196–201. See also chapter two *infra*, pages 63–64.

[148] Interview with Torgbui Akpate and elders, held at Srogboe, 1 August 2000.

[149] PRAAD/A ADM 41/4/55 I.G.P. vs. Gawu Ameleka, 27 Nov 1933.

[150] C. U. Ideozu, *Ukpeli Cobra. Ekpeye Burial Rites* (Port Harcourt: Harrison Publishing Co. 1993), 30.

because of financial necessity[151]—while the more important gods insist on the imported gin. In view of the availability of the cheaper alternative, if an African consumer presented Dutch gin to his or her guests, brought it along to a funeral, a shrine, or a chief's court, this was a clear indication of wealth and achievement. Similarly, if chiefs, elders, or shrine priests could insist on being presented with Dutch gin, this indicated their power and importance. This contributed to the perception of Dutch gin as being the most elevated drink available, essential for traditional rituals and display (see Figure 5.4). At the same time, Dutch gin became less and less popular for social drinking, while illicit gin and (later) bottled beers increased their market shares.

Meanwhile in Britain, the anti-liquor trade campaign that had been prominent for so long, gradual declined from the mid-1930s. There may have been a number of reasons for this, including a sense of disillusionment derived from the failure of gin prohibition in Ghana. Commentators concluded: 'no artificial restriction will have any effect on the drinking habits of the African.'[152] Other factors included the world economic crisis that had resulted in a decline of spirits imports into West Africa, and added a range of different social concerns; the collapse of Prohibition in the United States; and the passing away of a number of vocal anti-liquor trade campaigners.[153] By 1940, the importation of Dutch gin into West Africa was no longer perceived as a problem. In fact, during World War II, colonial governments were concerned about potential shortages in the supply of imported gin.[154] At this time, African opinion leaders complained about the high price of Dutch gin in Ghana, and asked for price controls to be implemented. A 1941 newspaper article headed 'Africans Denied Benefits of Price-Control?' argued:

> It is claimed this week that prices of imported articles purchased by Africans only are not being controlled as satisfactorily as prices of articles purchased by the European community. A long list of articles is enumerated. One instance however is illustrative. The price of Holland gin is now eighteen shillings a bottle. The price of whisky is thirteen shillings.

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[151] Interview with Sarah A. A. Afetsi and Yaovi Doe, held at Tegbi, 2 August 2000.

[152] 'Africans, alcohol, and accuracy', *West Africa*, 27 January 1934.

[153] Obituary: Thomas Welsh, *West Africa*, 22 February 1936.

[154] 'The week in parliament', *West Africa*, 27 June 1942; PRAAD/A CSO 6/3/459 Minute by H. R. W. Chandler, 13 December 1943; NAI CSO 26/4/38336 Supplies of whisky and gin.

> Gin has never been dearer than whisky. Since the war started no more gin has been imported from Holland. Yet it is dearer. The point stressed is that Africans alone drink Holland Gin, while Europeans drink whisky. The implication follows. A wide and even application of the principles of price-control appears to be very desirable.[155]

On the face of it, the newspaper article appears to argue the exact opposite from African opinion leaders fifteen years earlier: rather than to advocate the prohibition of Dutch gin, the article made the case that gin should be kept affordable to African consumers. Again, however, gin was not the real point. It was merely used as an example of the claim that government measures that were intended to keep commodity prices within reasonable boundaries in the wartime economy, mainly protected Europeans, and not the African consumers. In this context, Dutch gin was an obvious example of a commodity that was recognised to be important to African consumers. Similarly, the request for prohibition ten years earlier had not been about Dutch gin per se, but about government policies and taxation. Again, gin was used as key example because of its importance to African consumers and, through duties, to the Gold Coast treasury. Thus the debates about Dutch geneva reflected first and foremost the local importance of the drink, and to a much lesser degree genuine disagreements about the role and benefits of gin. If anything, the discussions, certainly those relating to illicit distillation, contributed to a further increase in the appreciation of Dutch gin.

The colonial period saw much discussion about the position of imported Dutch gin. While this gives the impression that the use and perceptions of Dutch gin in West Africa fluctuated wildly, what is remarkable in this period is rather the continuity in the appreciation of Dutch gin. Dutch gin had become an important ritual drink by 1930 throughout most of coastal West Africa, and this has not fundamentally changed since that date. Levels of importation rose and fell during the period, but this reflected the changing economic fortunes of West Africa, rather than a changing appreciation of Dutch gin. Our examination of the debates has nevertheless provided insights into the local meanings of Dutch gin in relation to other liquors. Furthermore, these debates cannot

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[155] 'Africans Denied Benefits of Price-Control?', *Gold Coast Independent*, 4 October 1941.

be dismissed as mere rhetoric, as they illustrate a number of genuine differences of perspective. One of these was the question whether gin was particularly harmful, as argued by the anti-liquor trade campaigners, or whether it had medicinal qualities, as argued by many of the chiefs. Not only did this question go to the heart of local perceptions of Dutch gin, it also provided a platform on which to either attack or promote gin.

The following chapter deals with the period between Word War II and the coming of independence for West African colonies around 1960, and examines the ways in which decolonisation impacted on perceptions of Dutch gin. In this period, imported gin was confronted with increasing local competition. The illicit gin production that had emerged in the 1930s was not going away again. *Ogogoro* was widely drunk by poorer African consumers, and in many instances had also become acceptable for ritual use as an alternative to imported schnapps gin. These inferior liquors were joined in the 1960s by West African quality gins that were legally distilled, and could compete with the imported gins on quality as well as price. In this context some remarkable changes occurred in the strategies used to market Dutch gins to West African consumers. No longer challenged by anti-liquor trade campaigners, Dutch gin producers and their importers and representatives in West Africa began to advertise widely in the local press and on billboards. More importantly, the tone of the adverts changed: they now directly addressed the intended African consumers, and made implicit and explicit claims about the health benefits of the consumption of Dutch gin. They also attempted to reach a new type of consumer. No longer content for Dutch gin to be the drink of choice of illiterate chiefs and elders in rural locations, they turned to advertising that depicted successful urban Africans in situations that spoke of Western-style modernity, prosperity, and leisure.

CHAPTER SIX

'YOUR VERY GOOD HEALTH!' GIN FOR AN INDEPENDENT WEST AFRICA

By the middle of the twentieth century imported Dutch gin had come to represent truly traditional West African culture. It had also become a focal point for local political debates. It was a commodity that was at the same time foreign and intricately bound up with local culture. It represented the power and influence of specific local groups, it was considered undesirable by certain Christian groups, and it had been a source of embarrassment for colonial governments. As a result it was vulnerable to becoming subject of debate whenever there was political tension. The decolonisation period of the 1950s and 1960s was such a time. In the context of the politics of building up pride in African culture, and the economics of import substitution, would it not be better to replace a foreign commodity that was central to African ritual practice with something that was produced in Africa? This question seemed particularly relevant in the wake of the 1948 disturbances in Accra, Kumasi, and elsewhere in Ghana, which had targeted foreign merchant firms. These 'Accra Riots' were part of a wave of strikes and protests that swept across colonial Africa during the immediate post-war period. Africans protested against overcrowding in colonial cities, poor services, and, especially, against high prices and shortages of European manufactured consumer goods. In Ghana the local press and nationalist politicians blamed the high prices of imported goods—and the relative decline of prices paid for Ghana's main agricultural export, cocoa—on the machinations of foreign trading firms. In order to force importers to reduce their prices, African traders and politicians organised a boycott of imported textiles which eventually escalated into riots. The Accra Riots acted as a powerful reminder of African discontent with colonial rule, of the inevitability of independence, and of the unpopularity of European trading firms.[1] They also illustrated the potential of imported

[1] Frederick Cooper, *Africa Since 1940. The Past of the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2002), 30–5; Lisa A. Lindsay, 'Domesticity and difference: male breadwinners, working women, and colonial citizenship in the 1945 Nigerian General Strike',

goods to become sites of contest, reflecting their importance to African consumers, as well as their association with colonial practices and a colonial ideology of consumption.

Dutch gin especially seemed a potential target for African nationalist politics, considering that the foreign import had high status, while the locally produced version was illegal. It was also an undemocratic commodity, as illicit gin was accessible to, and drunk by, the common people, while imported gin was associated with the power of chiefs and male elders. Emmanuel Akyeampong has shown that in Ghana the campaign for the legalisation of *akpeteshie* distillation was an important aspect of post-Word War II nationalist politics, and essential to the Convention People's Party (CPP)'s positioning as a 'commoners' party'.[2] Both illicit gin and imported Dutch gin played a role in political manifestations and in incidents of violence. An example of this is the functioning of *akpeteshie* and imported schnapps gin in the Ashanti Youth Association as emblems of the pro-CPP and anti-CPP factions in that organisation. In one instance in 1954, after anti-CPP members of the Ashanti Youth Association had chased the CPP members out of the meeting hall during a gathering, they went and bought some schnapps gin and poured libation, vowing that they would no longer support the CPP. Akyeampong comments: 'the young men's ritual use of libation as a binding force, and their appeal to the Asante gods and ancestors for success, foreshadowed their eventual alliance with the chiefs—the earthly representatives of the gods and ancestors.'[3]

Even though the promise to legalise *akpeteshie* distillation was an important element of the CPP campaign to achieve the support from the Ghanaian lower classes, the CPP did not immediately move to legalise local distillation once it got to power. In fact, it lifted the restrictions on the importation of gin as early as 1953, while it only moved to legalise *akpeteshie* distillation in 1962—almost ten years later. During the 1950s the CPP government continued colonial government policy by actively prosecuting people distilling, or dealing in, illicit gin.[4] Clearly, the politics

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American Historical Review 104.3 (1999), 783–812; David K. Fieldhouse, *Merchant Capital and Economic Decolonization. The United Africa Company 1929–1987* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1994), 321–33.

[2] Emmanuel Akyeampong, *Drink, Power, and Cultural Change. A Social History of Alcohol in Ghana, c. 1800 to Recent Times* (Portsmouth, NH and London: Heinemann and James Currey 1996), 117–38.

[3] *Ibidem*, 131.

[4] *Ibidem*, 130, 143–4.

of decolonisation had not damaged the position of imported Dutch gin. On the contrary: both the Nigerian and the Ghanaian postcolonial states integrated schnapps gin in appropriate state rituals and in state-sponsored cultural events, such as the official opening of the FESTAC Regatta in Nigeria in 1977.[5] In Ghana such rituals were part of an agenda to integrate the country's various religious communities, as Christian and Islamic prayers were followed by the pouring of libation using one of the well known brands of imported schnapps gin.

This chapter explores how the challenges and opportunities of the decolonisation period led to changing strategies in the marketing of schnapps. I first introduce the 1950s and 1960s as years during which new African modernities emerged alongside a continued commitment by nationalist politicians to the colonial-era modernisation agenda. These years promised rising prosperity and increasing opportunities for individual material consumption, and importers and producers of consumer goods responded by increasing their advertising and other forms of marketing. I then analyse the advertising for Dutch schnapps gin of the leading exporter to West Africa. Three themes dominate gin advertisements in these years: references to a successful, modern, Western middle-class lifestyle; the foreign (Dutch) provenance of the product; and allusions to the alleged medical benefits of the consumption of schnapps gins. Following this, the chapter turns to the challenges brought by the decolonisation period, including the rising competition of cheaper, locally produced schnapps gin brands. This discussion illuminates the changing marketing strategies of Dutch gin producers in West Africa, and also provides insights into local West African modernities and processes leading to the acceptance and rejecting of specific commodities.

Decolonisation, African modernities, and consumption

During the interwar period, the term 'modern' had been used by colonial governments as well as by Western-style educated West Africans. The term had positive connotations, indicating that the person, activity or commodity referred to, was up-to-date, 'civilised', progressive, and contributed towards development. For example, Charles Francis

[5] Andrew Apter, *The Pan-African Nation. Oil and the Spectacle of Culture in Nigeria* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press 2005), 126.

Hutchison called his well-known collective biography of 1920s Gold Coast elite society *The Pen-Pictures of Modern Africans and African Celebrities*. His 'modern Africans' were active in business or education, and concerned with achieving progress.[6] Hutchison's focus on modernity and progress is representative of opinions held by West African educated elites more generally.[7] Meanwhile, the acquisition of foreign 'modern' or novelty products indicated status. Coastal West Africa's elites had a long tradition of acquiring innovative products from Europe to establish social status and distinguish themselves from other Africans.[8] Of course, these imported commodities—such as clothing, photography, food, and music—were incorporated into African culture in different ways that had not been intended by the producers of the commodities, thus contributing to different local African forms of modernity. In this context I use the term 'modernity' not to indicate a theoretical perspective, or as a description of an 'objective' material reality, but rather to indicate manifestations of the modern in African public culture, including political and literary debates, displays, performance, and consumption. Forms of African modernity were influenced by the earlier West African elite preoccupation with progress and by the colonial projects of modernisation and development, and also by contemporary experiences of decolonisation, nationalism, and urbanisation, as well as by a wide range of cultural expressions from elsewhere in Africa, Europe, Asia, and the Americas. Two different types of modernity are of particular interest for the study of consumption and marketing in the decolonisation period. The first is the use of the language of the modernisation paradigm to make political claims—and promises—in the context of independence. These claims tended to be about concrete benefits such as education, health care, and the availability of specific goods. The

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[6] Michel Doortmont, *The Pen-Pictures of Modern Africans and African Celebrities by Charles Francis Hutchison: A Collective Biography of Elite Society in the Gold Coast Colony* (Leiden: Brill 2005).

[7] Richard Rathbone, 'West Africa: modernity and modernisation' in: Jan-Georg Deutsch, Peter Probst and Heike Schmidt, eds., *African Modernities: Entangled Meanings in Current Debate* (Oxford: James Currey 2002), 18–30, there 25–7.

[8] Lynn Schler, 'Bridewealth, guns and other status symbols: immigration and consumption in colonial Douala', *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 16.2 (2003), 213–34, there 223; Kwame Arhin, 'A note on the Asante Akonkofo: a non-literate sub-elite, 1900–1930', *Africa* 56.1 (1986), 25–31; Phyllis Martin, *Leisure and Society in Colonial Brazzaville* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1995), 151–2; Jeremy Rich, 'Civilized attire: refashioning tastes and social status in the Gabon Estuary, c. 1870–1914', *Cultural and Social History* 2 (2005), 189–213.

other is the use of modernity in developing African, individual identities; the modern as subjectivity.[9]

Richard Shain has characterised the late colonial period as a 'laboratory' for the creation of African modernities.[10] By the 1940s, an interest in the 'modern'—both as a concern with modernisation, and as expression of style and relative status—had spread to West African urban youths. This spread was linked to a number of social and material changes, which encouraged young people in towns to express their identities through consumption. A form of modern consumerism emerged in African towns, whereby people operating in the public sphere used consumption as a strategy to create an imagined world in which to anchor their identities.[11] Their sources of inspiration appear to have been quite diverse. Phyllis Martin has suggested that young people in towns with a couple of years of education may have appropriated some ideas about modernisation from their colonial teachers.[12] The cinema constituted another influence.[13] While audiences interpreted films in their own way, the films at the very least provided a collection of modern images upon which African audiences could draw when constructing their own modernities. The educated elite's long-standing concern with progress and the modern may also have served as an example to urban youth. The 'modern' was certainly central in the language of African nationalist politicians. Furthermore, popular newspapers such as the Nigerian *West African Pilot* contained frequent references to the need to create a modern society in their editorials and letters pages.[14] African modernities took many different forms. In post-World War II Ghana, popular theatre that had its roots in the early colonial years, modernised by shifting its language from English to Akan, changing its music from

[9] Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 2005), 113–49; Stephan F. Miescher, *Making Men in Ghana* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 2005), 15, 177.

[10] Richard Shain, 'Roots in reverse: *Cubanismo* in twentieth-century Senegalese music', *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 35,1 (2002), 83–101.

[11] Jonathan Friedman, 'Consuming desires: strategies of selfhood and appropriation', *Cultural Anthropology* 6, 2 (1991), 154–63.

[12] Martin, *Leisure and Society in Colonial Brazzaville*, 152.

[13] Charles Ambler, 'Mass media and leisure in Africa', *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 35, 1 (2002), 119–36.

[14] I found frequent references in the *West African Pilot* between 1950 and 1955 (the last year for which I studied the paper); the term was used less frequently during the years 1944–50. See also Dmitri van den Bersselaar, 'Imagining home: Igbo migration and the village in colonial Nigeria', *Journal of African History* 46.1 (2005), 51–73.

American and British 'rag-time' music and sentimental ballads to West African 'highlife', and through the introduction of Ghanaian folklore to the storylines. Yet it did not discard older existing, often colonial, notions of modernisation altogether. Catherine Cole has described how theatre troupes often promoted their shows by bragging about how 'modern', 'civilised' and 'up-to-date' they were.[15]

The decolonisation period thus was a time whereat the 'modern' was very central to public discourses on a number of levels, including that of nationalist politics. It was also a period of considerable optimism about the opportunities that decolonisation offered: African nationalist political elites were looking firmly towards the future, had embraced the development thinking of the time, and were expecting to develop their countries along Western lines economically, socially, and politically.[16] While accepting the late colonial modernisation paradigm, they were also trying to take the 'modern' away from the colonial government. They argued, therefore, that independent African states would be in a much better position than colonies, to create modern, developed societies. This also included a form of cultural nationalism that attempted to achieve a viable African, or at least non-colonial, modernity. However, the decolonisation era was not an inward-looking period. As decolonisation was expected to give African states a place in the world from which they could compete on an equal level to achieve progress and development, many African nationalists had a decidedly international outlook. It was not necessarily the 'foreign' that had to go, but colonialism. This international orientation was not limited to the political elites.[17] Many Senegalese and other West Africans adopted Cuban music because they saw it as a path to modernity. Shain comments that it was 'modern but not colonial, progressive but not alien to African ears.'[18]

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[15] Catherine M. Cole, '"This is actually a good interpretation of modern civilisation": popular theatre and the social imaginary in Ghana, 1946–66', *Africa* 67.3 (1997), 363–88, there 330, 372.

[16] Paul Nugent, *Africa Since Independence* (Basingstoke: Pallgrave Macmillan 2004); Harry G. West and Jo Ellen Fair, 'Development communication and popular resistance in Africa: an examination of the struggle over tradition and modernity through media', *African Studies Review* 36.1 (1993), 91–114; Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, 147.

[17] Stephanie Newell, *Literary Culture in Colonial Ghana. 'How to Play the Game of Life'* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2002), 48–9.

[18] Shain, 'Roots in reverse', 93.

Decolonisation also posed a challenge to the colonial ideology of consumption, even though the connection that this ideology had established between consumption, civilisation, and 'modernity' continued for decades after independence—in spite of military coups d'états, an ostensibly socialist government in Ghana, and a civil war in Nigeria. Thus the link continued between the consumption of appropriate (often foreign) commodities and 'being civilised', but Africans were no longer limited to 'inferior' goods. Of course, wealthy Africans had frequently ignored such constraints during the colonial period, which had resulted in them being treated with suspicion by the colonial authorities. The nationalist press noted that such limitations no longer applied to 'Africans of modern times'. A letter published in the *West African Pilot* asserted that 'It is from this clothes-wearing class, the civilized class, that health, progress, education and general improvement can be found.'[19] This is not to say that ideologically driven restrictions on consumption disappeared altogether: in 1960s Ghana, for instance, the Nkrumah government banned as colonialist the wearing of wigs of straightened hair.[20]

African consumption was encouraged by a sense of optimism and an expectation of progress to come. The signs of progress were everywhere. 'Africanisation' policies in governments and business sectors meant speedy promotions, which resulted in a rapid expansion of the African middle classes. Africans in 'European' posts received car allowances and other perks, which encouraged spending on modern commodities. Further down the scale, African workers for government or foreign enterprise received a quick succession of pay rises, which seemed to promise further progress, and certainly encouraged consumerism. At the same time, due to migration to the cities, the site of leisure activities had shifted away partially from the family compound and the community meeting ground to more public sites such as bars, nightclubs, and football stadiums.[21] Not only did these public spaces provide locations in which individuals constructed their identity through consumption, they could do so in relative freedom, away from the rigid control of the family. Thus the rise of bars and nightclubs facilitated the individualised consumption of alcohol free from the control of elders.[22]

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[19] Letter to the editor by R. I. Nnoka, *West African Pilot*, 22 July 1954.
[20] Cole, 'This is actually a good interpretation of modern civilisation', 373.
[21] Shain, 'Roots in reverse', 93.
[22] Akyeampong, *Drink, Power, and Cultural Change*.

The decolonisation period was favourable to the development of mass marketing: individualised consumption of mass produced goods was increasing; urban incomes were rising; and colonial and kinship constraints on African consumption were gradually disappearing. In response, producers and importers stepped up their marketing efforts. They advertised on billboards, stuck posters and metal signs onto walls and trees, advertised in newspapers and on the radio, produced cinema adverts, and employed touring publicity vans.[23] The products thus promoted included imported and locally produced soaps, cigarettes, beers, bicycles, banking, and medicinal drugs, as well as various brands of schnapps gin. While advertising aimed at Africans increased significantly compared to the interwar period discussed in chapter four, advertisers still perceived African consumers as 'different', often 'simpler'—especially in rural areas where Africans 'emerged much more slowly into the modern world'—and regarded their requirements as unusual.[24] As late as in 1965, advice given about advertising and promotion to new entrants into the Nigerian market stressed that 80% of the adult population of Nigeria was illiterate, having had little formal education. Therefore, for local marketing campaigns to be effective, they had to be 'direct, forceful, and continuous.' A successful example illustrated the advice: 'the ubiquitous slogan "Guinness gives you power", next to the bulging biceps of an African arm has made Guinness stout the biggest seller in Nigeria.'[25]

Marketing gin: medicine and modernity

Post-World War II advertising for schnapps was 'direct, forceful, and continuous,' repeating the three key themes of 'Holland/foreign origin', 'aspirations to success/modernity', and alleged 'health benefits' of schnapps consumption—often in combination. 1940s advertising for Melchers' brands, for example, was very simple: adverts showed an illustration of the products (including bottles of 'Elephant' gin and 'Tam Tam' wine) and made no further claims about them than that they are 'Hollands Favourites' (see Figure 1.5). Some of these adverts

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[23] Raymond W. Baker, 'Marketing in Nigeria', *Journal of Marketing* 29.3 (1965), 40–8, there 47.

[24] Edward Marcus, 'Selling the tropical African market', *Journal of Marketing* 25.5 (1961), 25–31, there 27.

[25] Baker, 'Marketing in Nigeria', 46.

additionally included a drawing of a modern industrial complex, the function of which is not clear (it may have represented the distillery in the Netherlands). Adverts from the same period for the 'Capstan' brand of aromatic schnapps also show an illustration of the product, with the recommendation to 'Take your Capstan Aromatic Schnapps regularly.'[26] A further line explained: 'It is a very fine tonic backed by modern science and centuries of experience' (see Figure 6.2). While these Capstan adverts made a fairly subtle and implicit reference to health benefits, it was impossible to miss the point of a long-running campaign for Henkes, which featured a picture of an African medical doctor wearing his white coat and holding a stethoscope, standing next to a more than life-sized bottle of schnapps gin, with the phrase: 'Make sure it's HENKES the *genuine* Dutch schnapps' (see Figure 6.1).[27] This advert cannot have failed to create the impression that the medical profession endorsed Henkes schnapps, combining references to the 'health' theme and to that of 'Dutch origins'. The three themes came together in a series of Henkes adverts and posters from the late 1950s that are composed around a drawing of a group of three successful African males (see Figure 6.5). The men are immaculately dressed in formal European clothes, holding a glass of liquor each. They are clearly relaxing and enjoying the occasion. A bottle of aromatic schnapps, drawn to the same size as the men, makes clear what is required to have such a sophisticated good time. The text explains that this is 'the genuine Dutch schnapps' and at the bottom of the advert, a line, printed in a large font, states: 'Henkes for your good health.'[28] In the section that follows I will explore these three themes in gin advertising, and analyse why the distillers considered these to be particularly relevant for the West African market, starting with 'health'.

Marketing claims that emphasised, implicitly or explicitly, the medicinal use of schnapps will have resonated with local uses. Nowadays concoctions of gin with added herbs are frequently used in West African local medicine. It is thought that gin taken this way works against hernia and piles, solves bowel problems, reduces body pains, and gives energy to old people. At least some people I spoke to in Eastern Ghana associated the medicinal use of gin not only with traditional medicine,

[26] *West Africa*, 5 February 1949.
[27] Henkes Archive, Box 21/8.
[28] Henkes Archive, Box 21/3 Clichés.

but also with Western-style medical practice. For example, David Kofi Togobo told me from his own experience how, when a man he knew went to hospital, 'the medical doctor prescribed this gin for him to be taken every day. One day this man failed to take the gin. It was not long before he died.'[29]

The idea that distilled liquor had medicinal qualities was not unique to West Africa, and neither was the practice of adding herbs to increase its effectiveness against specific ailments. Indeed, it is thought that distillation may have started in Europe in the late-Middle Ages as the outcome of attempts to produce medicinal potions. At this time in Europe, much of the distilling was done in monasteries, with herbs and spices added according to secret recipes. It was widely rumoured that the consumption of the new spirits brought health benefits, which is thought to explain their rapid spread across Europe from the fourteenth century.[30] While the early spirits developed into popular brandies, gins, and whiskies for recreational drinking, the production and marketing continued of alcoholic herbal bitters that claimed to have medical benefits or at least strengthened the constitution. These included 'Wolfe's Aromatic Schiedam Schnapps' which became such a global marketing success during the nineteenth century, and was the model copied for the Dutch Aromatic Schnapps brands exported to West Africa since the late-nineteenth century.[31] As recently as during the 1920s, distillers could claim that Dutch gin was put to medicinal uses in the Netherlands and in Britain, and with this they did not refer to its use as a household remedy, but to gin being 'prescribed by the medical profession when it is therapeutically required.'[32] To back up this claim, Johs De Kuyper & Zoon Distillery could even send a reprint from *The Lancet* to the Nigerian Comptroller of Customs. The distillers also printed such medical claims on the labels of their gins (see Figure 5.4). For example, the label of 'Henkes Star Brand, Prize Medal Aromatic Schiedam Schnapps' stated that it was 'highly recommended by the medical faculty as a household remedy for the alleviation and cure of: Rheumatism, Gout, Gravel, Flatulency, Dyspepsia, Dropsy, Diseases of

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[29] Interview with David Kofi Togobo and Mr Yeke, held at Anloga, 28 July 2000.

[30] Hans van der Sloot, *Het Echte Schiedamse Jeneverboek* (Ter Aar: Uitgeverij Van Lindonk 1987), 31–7, 47–9.

[31] See chapter four.

[32] NAI CSO 26/1/01965 Vol. II Johs De Kuyper & Zoon to Comptroller of Customs (3 April 1922).

the Kidneys, Bladder &c.'[33] Another label used by the same distillery claimed that 'the extra ordinary medicinal and invigorating properties of this pure Tonic, have led to its extensive consumption throughout the civilized world.'[34] Meanwhile, the Blankenheym & Nolet distillery attached a medical certificate to each of the schnapps bottles they exported to West Africa.[35]

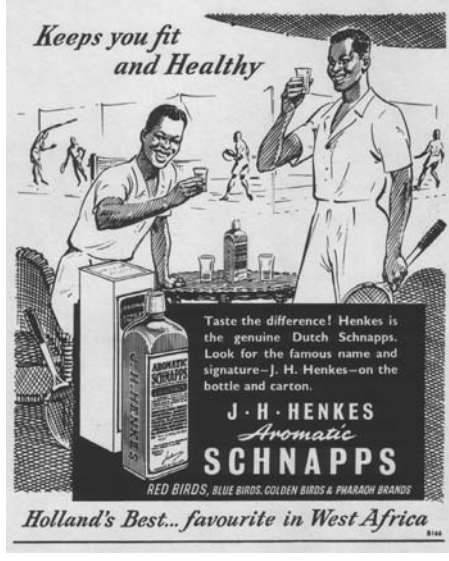
This perspective of course directly contradicted the anti-liquor trade campaigners' claim that, while all liquor was unhealthy, Dutch gin was the most harmful of all to African bodies. Most Christian missions had accepted the latter claim. In 1933 the Superintendent of the A.M.E.-Zion Church pointed out that it was common knowledge that 'gin is a most unhealthy liquor to both male and female.'[36] Some of the Ghanaian local leadership agreed. According to the chiefs and elders of Asogli, 'there is sickness in drinking gin, and it also causes lung-diseases. Whilst whisky and other rums give health and strength.'[37] The Omanhene and elders of Akwamu agreed, pointing out that gin caused 'consumption and weak chest diseases.'[38] In addition to this the chiefs and elders of Akyem Abuakwa suggested that gin caused impotency.[39] However, most of the chiefs and elders focused on the medical benefits of gin taken with herbs: 'we have many medicinal roots with which we mix gin for treatment of certain ailments'[40] There appears to have existed general agreement that gin-based medicine provided an effective cure to problems with the digestive system, urinary organs, and rheumatism, and that is was also effective against the bites of venomous snakes and scorpions. According to the Nungwa Mantse, 'our native doctors uses the pure Gin in curing piles, rheumatism and many other diseases which are capable of attacking urinary organ, by mixing their

[33] Henkes Archive Box [no number] Bescheiden m.b.t. merken; Depôts van merken + inschrijvingsbewijzen (Holland), Depôts van merken (Buitenland).
[34] Henkes Archive Box [no number] 'Bescheiden m.b.t. merken'.
[35] Blankenheym & Nolet Archive 216/68 Exportorderboek Afrikaanse Westkust 1908–1909.
[36] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/19 Answers by F. Ata Osam-Pinanko, 10 June 1933.
[37] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Answers by chiefs and elders of Asogli [1933].
[38] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Answers by Omanhene and State Council of Akwamu, 24 June 1933.
[39] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Local opinion on liquor traffic—Akyem Abuakwa, 12 October 1933.
[40] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Nii Akumajay's answers to Questionnaire on Liquor Policy [1933].

6.1 Poster for Henkes schnapps, ca. 1950

6.2 1940s advert for 'Capstan' brand schnapps

6.3 Poster for 'Capstan' brand schnapps



6.4 Advert Henkes 'Keeps You Fit and Healthy', around 1950

medicines with the Gin.'[41] The chiefs argued that it was these medical uses that required gin to be readily available. As gin could be needed at unexpected hours, for instance in the case of 'unexpected belly-ache at night,'[42] liquor stores had to have long opening hours. Thus prohibition could endanger the lives of Africans, and the chiefs and elders of Osudoku remarked that 'after the Regulation came into force, and its importation was put stop to, such decease have since then troubled the natives a great deal.'[43]

By the 1930s, debates about the restriction of Dutch gin imports had thus become debates about the African body. Were Africans particularly vulnerable to gin, as the anti-liquor campaigners suggested? Were African bodies being ruined by inferior gin of a poisonous nature? Many people in Europe were convinced that Africans were suffering in large numbers from the detrimental effects of gin consumption, and therefore needed to be protected through prohibition for their own good. Meanwhile, many Africans had decided that gin was a product that, because of its pure ingredients and pure production methods, was not only an important ritual drink, but also an appropriate basis for mixing herbal medicine. From this perspective it was rather the prohibition of gin that would ruin African bodies. Additionally, as I discussed in chapter five, the spread of illicit distillation contributed to a revaluation of imported Dutch gin as a purer and less harmful drink than illicit gin. Consequently, by the late 1930s it had become rare for Dutch gin to be attacked as impure and harmful to Africans.

After World War II African consumers continued to use gin as a basis for their medicine. Additionally, the distillers could develop their claims about the health benefits of Dutch gin in their advertising relatively unchallenged. Schnapps gin especially was marketed as a healthy product. During the 1950s and 1960s, for example, Henkes had a long-running series of adverts in West African newspapers such as the *Sunday Mirror, Ashanti Pioneer, Daily Graphic, Guinea Times*, and *Ghana Star* in Ghana, and the *Eastern States Express, Eastern Nigerian Guardian*, and *Nigeria Spokesman* in Nigeria. Repeated weekly and at times daily, the adverts trace two successful West Africans in a range of sophisticated,

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[41] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Nungwa Mantse Tawia IV's answers to Questionnaire [1933].

[42] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Tema Mantse (13 July 1933).

[43] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Answers by the chiefs and elders of Osudoku, 19 July 1933.

modern settings. The adverts' mottos are variations on the 'health' theme: 'For your health's sake insist on J. H. Henkes Schnapps'; 'Keep fit and healthy with J. H. Henkes Schnapps'; 'Enjoy good health! Drink J. H. Henkes Schnapps', and so on.[44] It is unclear to what extent advertising with health benefits reflected a conscious attempt to connect with existing African understandings of gin as exceptionally pure and having medicinal properties, given that this was a theme that is much older and not limited to the West African context. Also, claims to medicinal benefits of the Dutch schnapps gin exported to West Africa had been on their labels since the late nineteenth century. At any rate, this marketing strategy clearly resonated with local African perceptions, and its key claims are still accepted by people across coastal West Africa.

The same cannot be said for attempts to position Dutch gin as a drink associated with modern lifestyles, European-style middle class leisure activities, and with successful careers in business or civil service. This was a common theme in West African advertising in the 1950s and 1960s, also explored in campaigns for beer, cosmetics, cigarettes, and airlines. This style of advertising captured the optimism and the expectations of prosperity and modernist development. This was advertising that aimed to speak not just to the existing members of the middle classes, but also to the aspirations and dreams of those who were hoping to join them. The expansion of Western-style education in the period meant that the readership of West African newspapers—and thus also the potential reach of advertising—increased rapidly.[45] This type of advertising appears to have been very successful for products such as cosmetics and beer.[46] However, the connection with middle class modernity did not work for Dutch gin. While advertising that emphasised the purity and medicinal benefits of Dutch gin correlated with local African understandings, the attempt to position Dutch gin as a commodity that gave entry to 'modernity' clashed with local knowledge of gin as being connected with traditional power and ritual.

The adverts that tried to position Henkes schnapps gin as an attribute of middle-class modernity were based around illustrations of evidently

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[44] Henkes Archive; Plakboeken Advertenties Buitenland.

[45] David Abernethy, *The Political Dilemma of Popular Education: an African Case* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1969).

[46] Isidore S. Obot and Akan J. Ibanga, 'Selling booze: alcohol marketing in Nigeria', *The Globe*, New Series 2.2 (2002) http://www.ias.org.uk/publications/theglobe/02issue2/globe0202_p6.html.

successful, smiling African males, dressed in European clothing, who relax in style with a glass of Henkes gin. One of the adverts presents Africans engaged in a game of tennis, much like the Booth's Dry Gin advert had presented Europeans twenty years earlier (compare Figures 4.5 and 6.4). The aim of the Booth's advert had been to appeal to European consumers, and while the Henkes advert was intended for African consumers, it clearly attempted to convey a modern, European feeling. There is a remarkable similarity in the layout of the two adverts: both show a table with a bottle of drink and glasses in the foreground of the picture, and the tennis courts in the back. Where in the Booth's advert the table was empty, ready for the tennis players returning from the court, in the Henkes advert two confident-looking African players, wearing European-style tennis outfits and still carrying their tennis rackets, raise their glasses and smile at the reader. The rather lame catchphrase of the Booth's advert referred to the tennis game: 'and now it's Booth's gin-all.' The one for Henkes reads: 'Keeps you fit and healthy'.[47] The distillers marketed schnapps gin as a drink for successful males. However, one 1950s advertisement associates schnapps with a female consumer (see Figure 6.6). The advert shows a sophisticated couple toasting with glasses of gin: "Your very good health!" The body language suggests intimacy between the two. The woman is slightly taller than the male. Both are dressed immaculately in Western fashion, and the woman wears what may well be expensive jewellery, including earrings, a necklace, ring, and a broche.[48]

The adverts' references to the highlife show a good understanding of the mood in coastal West Africa at the time. At the same time, this strategy was part of a general trend in the global liquor industry to develop premium brands of distilled liquor and position these as stylish and luxury products, appreciated by stylish and successful people.[49] Indeed, West African adverts for imported whiskies and brandies explored similar scenarios, in which successful, modern African males express their status through the consumption of a foreign quality beverage. Meanwhile, Henkes advertising in Caribbean newspapers such as the *Dominica Chronicle*, *Barbados Advocate*, and *The Westindian*, shows

[47] *West Africa*, 15 June 1935; Henkes Archive, Box 21/3–21/8.
[48] Henkes Archive; Plakboeken Advertenties Buitenland.
[49] Teresa Da Silva Lopes, 'Brands and the evolution of multinationals in alcoholic beverages', *Business History* 44.3 (2002), 1–30, there 16–7.

a striking similarity to their West African adverts.[50] Dutch distillers developed similar themes for their domestic market.[51] The strategy was generally successful in West Africa and elsewhere, as consumers who could afford to do so, claimed sophistication by purchasing the premium brands of whisky and brandy. To present the proper brand of liquor to your guests, to know your drinks, and to consume them in the appropriate fashion, was one of the means through which consumers expressed their identity, status, and aspirations.[52] However, West Africans did not accept Dutch schnapps gin as a commodity that signified modern lifestyles and European-style achievement. Rather, schnapps belonged to the realm of African tradition. It continued to be used by chiefs and elders, as well as for traditional rituals, but was not adopted by the successful new men for social or aspirational drinking. This pattern was so clear and generally accepted, that Willie Ansah could use it throughout his novel *The Stench of Khaki* to indicate the different contexts and attitudes of the characters in the book. This can be seen, for example, in the section wherein Ghana's military Head of State receives a visit from his father, Nana Kwadwo, who is the chief of a small town. Not only does Ansah describe in some detail how the old man insists on pouring libation with schnapps gin before discussing important matters, he also uses the gin to indicate the different outlooks of the Western-educated army officer who dresses and thinks 'modern', as compared to his traditional father:

> It was evening and they were in the sitting room. The President of the NSC had his feet on an ottoman, relaxed in an armchair with a beer at his elbow, and the inevitable cigarette in his hand. Nana Kwadwo, in cloth sat on a stool with a glass of schnapps. They were watching the TV but they did not allow it to interfere with their conversation.[53]

Thus the strategy of advertising with modernity failed, because the adverts' intended public was a middle class audience that had already decided that Dutch schnapps gin was a drink associated with an old-fashioned, traditional, rural Africa.[54] They may also still have associated

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[50] Henkes Archive; Plakboeken Advertenties Buitenland.

[51] Klaas Zaalberg, personal communication, 17 January 2007.

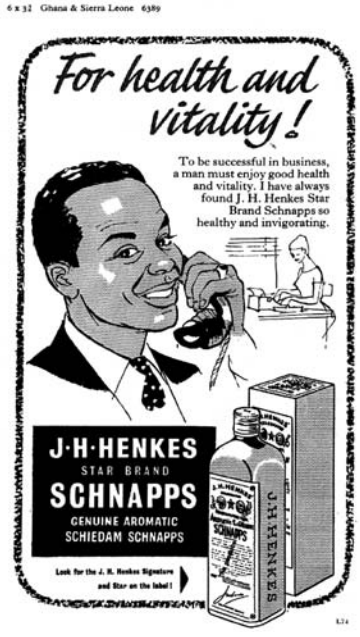
[52] Peter N. Stearns, *Consumerism in World History. The Global Transformation of Desire* (London and New York: Routledge 2001), 31.

[53] Willie Ansah, *The Stench of Khaki* (Accra: Woeli Publishing Services 1994), 73.

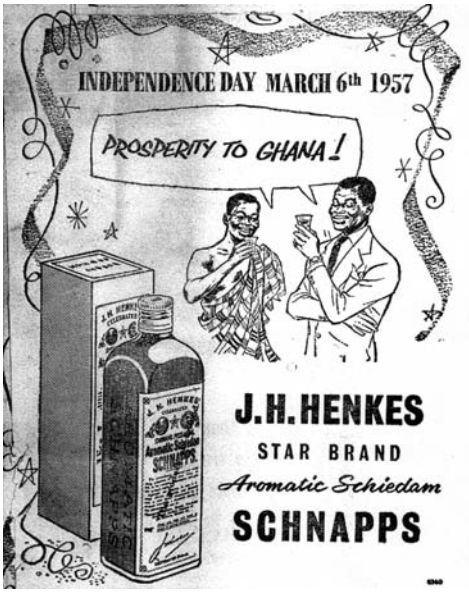
[54] The urban dwellers' view of rural Africa as static and traditional ignored the many changes that had taken place in African villages during the twentieth century.

6.5 Advert 'Henkes for your good health', used in West Africa around 1950

6.6 Henkes Advert 'Your Very Good Health!', used in West Africa, late 1950s



6.7 Advert Henkes 'For Health and Vitality', exploring the theme of the successful African businessman, used in Ghana and Sierra Leone



6.8 Henkes advert 'Prosperity to Ghana', used in the Accra *Daily Graphic* newspaper, 1957

schnapps with the early-twentieth century conspicuous consumption of gin by urban working classes, even though local, illicitly distilled spirits had been the latter's drink of choice since the 1930s. Those who read the adverts and saw the posters for gin in West Africa's main urban centres rejected the message, while those who might have responded favourably to the aspirational claims of the adverts were unlikely to have come in contact with them. Dutch gin distillers appear not to have used cinema advertising, even though cinemas had been a feature of towns and—through mobile cinema vans—even villages, throughout coastal West Africa since the 1920s, and companies such as Barclays Bank had reached large audiences with their cinema adverts.[55]

Decolonisation as a challenge

The political and economic climate that existed in the period of decolonisation was not always easy to read for foreign businesses with interests in West Africa. In principle, Dutch distillers were in a different position from British businesses operating in British West Africa, or French business in French West Africa. Dutch distillers had not made investments in West Africa that would be vulnerable if an independent government decided on a policy of nationalisation. Furthermore, their interests had not been tied to colonial governments to the same extent as some of the British firms, who, even if they were not directly favoured by colonial policies, were often relying on government contracts for at least part of their turnover.[56] Dutch distillers nevertheless faced significant challenges during the decolonisation period. For a start, the distribution network of the merchant firms that they had been relying on for decades to get their goods to African consumers throughout the area, transformed beyond recognition. In the 1940s, boycotts of imported consumer goods

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See: Van den Bersselaar, 'Imagining home'; Thaddeus Sunseri, *Vilimani: Labor Migration and Rural Change in Early Colonial Tanzania* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann 2002); and Wendy Griswold, 'The writing on the mud wall: Nigerian novels and the imaginary village', *American Sociological Review* 57.6 (1992), 709–24.

[55] Stephanie Decker, Advertising and the language of development: British multinationals in West Africa, 1945 to 1975 (unpublished conference paper, EBHA conference, Frankfurt, 2 September 2005).

[56] Sarah Stockwell, *The Business of Decolonization: British Business Strategies in the Gold Coast* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000); Robert L. Tignor, *Capitalism and Nationalism at the End of Empire: State and Business in Decolonizing Egypt, Nigeria, and Kenya, 1945–1963* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1998).

in Ghana and Nigeria, as well as the Accra Riots, made clear that the merchant firms' highly visible retail operations were a liability in the politicised context of the decolonisation period.[57] In response, trading companies such as the United Africa Company (UAC) directed their activities away from retail trade. Concerned with their public image they also developed public relations campaigns to convince African nationalist politicians and the public that they supported decolonisation, and embarked on policies of 'Africanisation': replacing European managers with Africans. By the 1950s, African traders who had acted as middlemen for UAC and other European merchant firms began to operate on their own. So did many of the retail shopkeepers, market stallholders, and wholesalers.[58] For Dutch distillers this meant that the marketing of gin became a lot more complex, as there were so many more resellers to deal with, and this also provided an incentive to attempt to reach more African consumers directly through an increase in advertising efforts.

Meanwhile, trading companies diversified to make up for the loss of their retail trade. While the UAC maintained agencies for international companies such as General Motors, Caterpillar, and Raleigh, it also embarked on local production through joint ventures. One of these was the opening in 1949 of Nigerian Breweries Limited, a joint venture with Heineken as technical advisor and the UAC as managing agents.[59] Although at this stage none of the trading companies had moved into local distillation, Dutch distillers had to consider the possible challenge of local production. The economic strategy of import substitution that the postcolonial governments were likely to adopt could possibly lead to new import restrictions, or to subsidies for local competitors. It was, therefore, imperative not just for the trading companies, but also for the producers of 'foreign' commodities to use advertising to convince African politicians and consumers that they should not be seen as a hangover from colonialism, and that they—through the commodities

[57] Mazi Ray Ofoegbu, 'Igbo national dress and acculturation' in: F. C. Ogbalu and E. N. Emenanjo, eds., *Igbo Language and Culture* (Ibadan: Oxford University Press 1975), 205–16, there 214–5; Fieldhouse, *Merchant Capital and Economic Decolonization*, 321–33.

[58] Charles Wilson, *Unilever 1945–1965. Challenge and Response in the Post-War Industrial Revolution* (London: Cassell 1968), 215; Geoffrey L. Baker, *Trade Winds on the Niger. The Saga of the Royal Niger Company, 1830–1971* (London and New York: The Radcliffe Press 1996), 273–6, 289; Fieldhouse, *Merchant Capital and Economic Decolonization*, 375–82.

[59] Baker, *Trade Winds on the Niger*, 274–5; Fieldhouse, *Merchant Capital and Economic Decolonization*, 382–90.

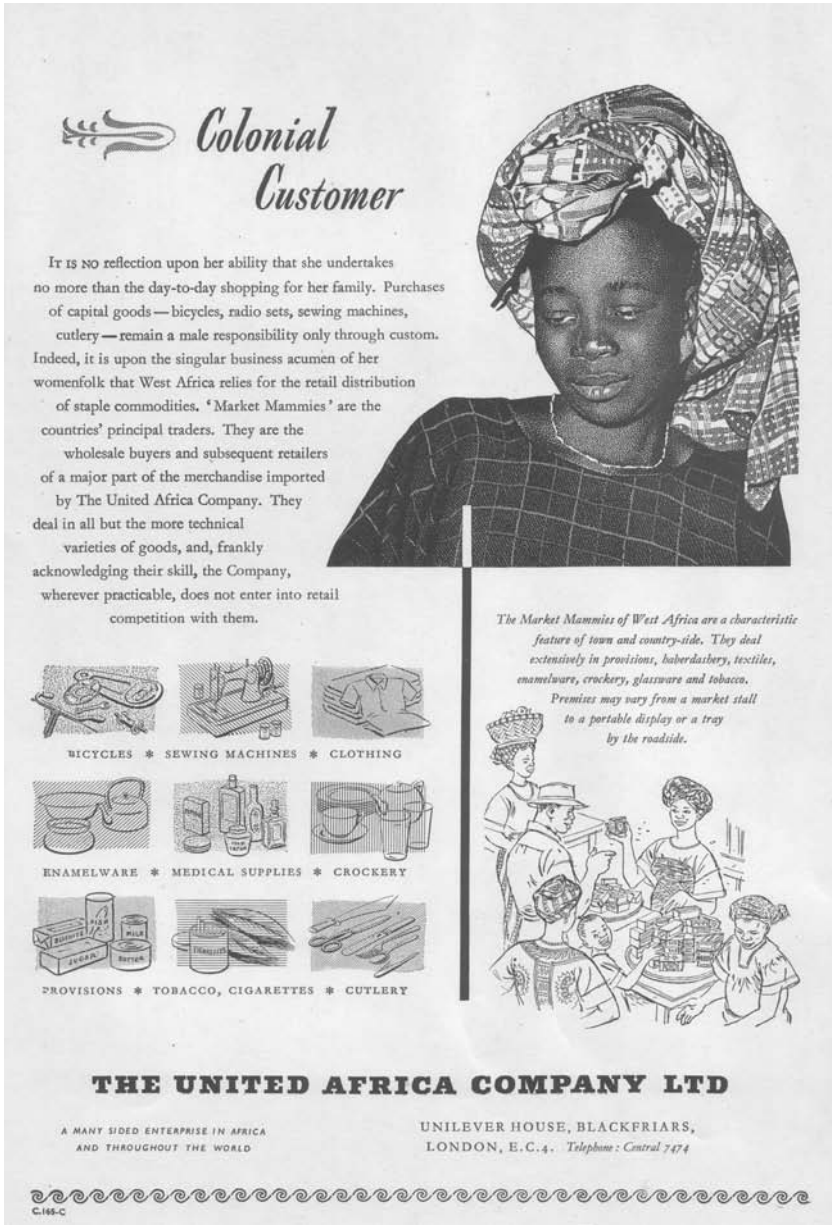
they sold—were aiming to support and contribute to the new and prosperous, independent Africa.

One way in which gin distillers and importers could respond to the challenges posed by decolonisation, was by adapting their advertising to fit a new mood of optimism and pride in the achievement of newly independent—or soon to be independent—West African nations. To tie in with Ghana's Independence Day celebrations in 1957, Henkes produced a festive advert, showing a picture representing the familiar theme of successful African males enjoying gin, and the exhortation: 'Prosperity to Ghana!' (see Figure 6.8). The same advert was later used to mark the coming of independence in Nigeria (1960) and Sierra Leone (1961).[60] Foreign distillers could also follow the example of the larger British companies such as Barclays Bank, the Bank of West Africa, and UAC, who between 1950 and 1960 changed the tone of their advertising, and made an effort to come across as responsible partners in the development of independent West Africa. This can be illustrated with two advertisements from UAC, which firm had been by far the largest single importer of Dutch gin into West Africa for many years.[61] In a 1955 advert captioned 'Colonial Customer' the company presents West Africa and its retail traders and consumers in a traditional light (see Figure 6.9). The advert pays homage to the business acumen of West African women traders and explains that UAC relies upon them for the retail distribution of staple commodities such as soap, provisions, textiles, and (but this is not mentioned in the advert) imported gin. However, it also presents these African traders as small-scale operations, and suggests that the sale of capital goods is done through the UAC's own organisation.[62] This advert thus skilfully combines an acknowledgement of the skills of West African traders with a condescending tone. The tone of a 1960 advert captioned 'Men of Tomorrow' is quite different (see Figure 6.10). While the main picture in the 'Colonial Customer' advert showed a rather demure-looking woman dressed in recognisably West African fashion, the illustration of the 'Men of Tomorrow' portrays two professional males in an office environment, immaculately dressed according to European fashion, radiating confidence and success. The text exclaims: 'Progress and expansion are the driving forces

[60] Henkes Archive; Plakboeken Advertenties Buitenland.

[61] PRAAD/A CSO 6/3/521 Statement showing the average yearly imports of geneva and gin by the under noted firms [1930].

[62] *West Africa*, 23 July 1955.



6.9 UAC advert 'Colonial Customer', 1955

6.10 UAC advert 'Men of Tomorrow', 1960

of the country today!' and adds that: 'The United Africa Company is proud to play an important part in the training of such highly-skilled "Men of Tomorrow."'[63]

The UAC's 'Men of Tomorrow' closely resemble the successful middle class males portrayed in Henkes' advertising of the same time. Both advertisers work with ideas of modernity, progress, and individual success, expressed in the language of the Western middle classes. The adverts are aspirational and look towards the future. However, only the UAC adverts engage explicitly with decolonisation, and acknowledge the roles and responsibilities of foreign business in independent West Africa. Another 1960s UAC advert captioned 'Change in West Africa' observes: 'To Ghana and Nigeria independence is no longer an ideal, but a reality: and all must co-operate to ensure its success.'[64] While the UAC explicitly discusses in its adverts how it contributes to decolonisation, Henkes and the other gin brands continue to develop the 'successful modern man' theme in different ways that connect with the public mood of the time. One Henkes' advert captioned 'For health and vitality!' shows a picture that is remarkably similar to that of UAC's 'Men of tomorrow': in the foreground is a successful African businessman, immaculately dressed in a Western suit, holding a telephone (see Figure 6.7). In the background we see a woman at a desk—presumably his secretary—typing out a letter on a typewriter. A testimonial reads: 'To be successful in business, a man must enjoy good health and vitality. I have always found J. H. Henkes Star Brand Schnapps so healthy and invigorating.'[65] Adverts in the 'For good health!' series illustrate that in independent West Africa, a successful man can be wearing a European-style suit and tie, a watch, and a handkerchief in the breast pocket, but he may also be wearing traditional cloth. In these adverts, modernity and tradition meet, and appear to agree on the quality of Henkes 'Star' brand Aromatic Schiedam Schnapps.[66] The traditional African dress in these adverts is recognisably Ghanaian, probably reflecting the fact that this country was the first to gain independence (see Figure 6.11). The representation of African clothing

[63] *West Africa*, 16 January 1960.
[64] *West Africa*, 23 April 1960.
[65] Henkes Archive; Plakboeken Advertenties Buitenland.
[66] *West Africa*, 23 January 1960.

was not adapted to fit local styles when the same adverts were used for the Nigerian and Sierra Leone markets.[67]

The post-World War II marketing strategy for Dutch gin met with limited success. By continually emphasising the quality of the product, the fact that it was imported from Holland, and the claim that it was the 'original'—the genuine Dutch gin—the adverts placed a distance between the gins imported from Holland on the one side, and illicit local gins (even if these were to be legalised) on the other. The frequent references to health benefits were also widely accepted, although it is unclear to what extent this convinced the predominantly middle-class audiences that the distillers were targeting. During the first half of the twentieth century, Dutch schnapps gin had become a commodity that was highly regarded in the ritual context, and henceforth its use would remain largely limited to ritual. Thus it appears that the advertising succeeded in protecting schnapps gin brands' share of the existing, 'ritual' market, but failed to reach a new market segment, which limited the potential for sales growth in post-independence West Africa. The problem with the attempts to extent the appeal of Dutch gin to middle class consumers, was that it ignored the hierarchy of drinks for social drinking that had emerged in coastal West Africa during the preceding half century. African consumers resolutely refused to regard Dutch gin as a drink suitable for social drinking among the educated middle classes that had embraced notions of progress and modernity. In French-speaking West Africa the drink of choice for the Western-style educated elite was brandy, while in English-speaking areas it was whisky.

It is clear that Dutch distillers got their message wrong. Why this happened remains unclear, as they had previously studied the West African market and had discussed their products in detail with the trading companies that sold most of their gins in West Africa. Three factors are likely to have played a role. These include the development in the global marketing of alcoholic drinks towards international brands, which were positioned as emblems of wealth and international modernity. It thus appears that the needs of an international marketing strategy were allowed to overshadow the knowledge that companies had previously acquired about the consumption of gin in West Africa. This may have been facilitated by a second factor, namely the need to work through new and more fragmented distribution channels, as the

[67] Henkes Archive; Plakboeken Advertenties Buitenland.

major merchant companies withdrew from retail trading in the run-up to independence. This change is likely to have caused some disruption to long-established flows of marketing information. Although many of the new African distributors had started their business careers working for the European merchant firms and therefore represented an element of continuity,[68] it also appears that much of the marketing information previously collected through the merchant firms had been lost. A final factor will have been the impact of the predominant belief that the transition to independence would result in wealth, progress and development for African populations.[69] This expectation was widely shared by African leaders, its educated populations, and by many of its farmers and workers. Therefore, to tap into this positive feeling for the marketing of commodities was—on the whole—a reasonable strategy. However, what the Dutch distillers failed to realise, was that to West Africans, gin no longer belonged to the realm of progress and modernity. This marketing failure illustrates that imported schnapps gin was no longer an ordinary commodity, but that its use had become restricted to the ritual sphere. While the consumption of gin was restricted to specific, ritual and traditional occasions, beer and other alcoholic drinks could still be advertised—and successfully so—with reference to Western-style modernity and success: 'You got the contract? Great! Join me for a Gulder!' exclaims the sophisticated executive to his associate on the telephone in one Nigerian television commercial for beer from the 1970s.[70]

During the late colonial period West African colonial governments had started to develop industrialisation policies. As the UAC had anticipated, independent West African governments continued these policies as part of their nationalist agenda, starting with the local manufacture of goods hitherto imported from abroad. The UAC therefore claimed it was 'quick to respond to West Africa's need, providing capital, skill and services for the establishment of factories and also for the marketing of local manufactures.'[71] By 1960, the company had invested in a range of ventures, including cycle-assembly plants, vehicle-assembly plants, breweries, a cement works, a bed and mattresses factory, soap and toiletries

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[68] Tom Forrest, *The Advance of African Capital. The Growth of Nigerian Private Enterprise* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 1994), 231–2 and *passim*.
[69] Cooper, *Africa Since 1940*, 91–2.
[70] Apter, *The Pan-African Nation*, 232.
[71] *West Africa*, 23 April 1960.

6.11 Henkes advert: modernity and tradition meet, used late 1950s–early 1960s

6.12 Gihoc Distilleries advert

6.13 Local depot of Paramount Distilleries. Koforidua, Ghana, 1999

factories, and a pig farm.[72] Other foreign companies, some of which had been long active in West Africa while others were newcomers to the market, were similarly investing in industrial ventures, including textile manufacturing, transportation, and the tobacco industry. Governments felt that the extent of foreign involvement was stifling opportunities for local entrepreneurs, and they soon developed policies to encourage the development of locally-owned industries. While the Nigerian economy remained a relatively open economy with a friendly attitude towards foreign companies until the 1970s, Ghana embarked on a policy of state-led industrialisation which, from 1961 onwards, was protectionist and hostile to foreign companies operating in the country.[73]

It is in this context of economic policies of import substitution that the manufacture started in West Africa of branded gins that could compete with the imported brands in terms of quality (unlike the illegal distillates that had been around since the 1930s). The first West African distillery was established by the Ghanaian government in 1958 as part of its policy of state-led industrialisation. While the name of its 'Kaiser Imperial Aromatic Schnapps' may have suggested a connection with the German gins that had been imported in large quantities during the period before World War I, it also had the text 'Original recipe of Holland' stamped in large red letters diagonally across the label. The shape of the bottle and the layout of the label show a remarkable resemblance to the Dutch schnapps gins such as Henkes 'Star' brand: the Kaiser label shows medals, just like the Dutch schnapps, uses a similar letter and layout, and has a signature in the same place as where the signature would be on the Henkes schnapps (see Figure 6.12). While producing mainly for the Ghanaian domestic market, the distillery has been exporting the drink to other countries in the West African region, including Ivory Coast, Togo, and Nigeria.[74] Another local brand was 'J. H. Benson', whose bottles closely resembled the Dutch schnapps brands, and even claimed to be 'The produce of Holland'.

West African distillers used the same square green bottles and a similar carton around them as Henkes, De Kuyper, and Blankenheym &

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[72] Fieldhouse, *Merchant Capital and Economic Decolonization*, 394–5.

[73] Tignor, *Capitalism and Nationalism at the End of Empire*, 220–2; Douglas Rimmer, *Staying Poor. Ghana's Political Economy* (Oxford: Pergamon 1992), 133–70; Agbodeka, *An Economic History of Ghana*, 142–8.

[74] Akyeampong, 'Ahenfo Nsa (the "Drink of Kings")', 58; *Daily Graphic*, 8 July 1999; GIHOC Distilleries website: http://66.241.198.95/000/gihoc/.

Nolet had long been using for their schnapps gins. The layout of the labels followed the same basic pattern, with similar font sizes and types being used, illustrations in the same place, similar claims to quality and purity, and a signature printed at the bottom of the label that supposedly denoted authenticity. They also tended to include references—either in the product name, or otherwise in the description on the label—to Holland. It is of course unclear to what extent consumers of Nigeria's 'Seaman's Aromatic Schiedam Schnapps' realised that the term 'Schiedam' referred to a town in the Netherlands. The carton of 'Eagle' schnapps at least explained that 'Eagle XXX was originally produced in Schiedam, Holland many hundreds of years ago according to a secret formula.' Thus the fact that the gins were actually distilled in West Africa was downplayed, while the connections with the Netherlands were emphasised. This combination of close resemblance between competing gin brands and attempts to gloss over the actual provenance of the gins, repeats an older pattern: in the second half of the nineteenth century, Dutch and German gin producers exported such a wide variety of gins to West Africa that tended to have so many features in common, that one brand could easily be mistaken for another. Not only did German producers export gins with labels that suggested the gin was the product of Holland, or—more specifically—was 'Schiedam schnapps', the 'original' Dutch aromatic schnapps brands on sale in West Africa had themselves been copied from Wolfe's Aromatic Schiedam Schnapps.[75]

While the packaging for the locally produced gins was a straightforward imitation of that of Dutch schnapps gins, in other ways their marketing strategy was very different. Rather than aiming at successful middle class consumers with a modern, international outlook—and those aspiring to become like them—the local brands were aimed at the ritual market. In Nigeria, 'Eagle' schnapps advertised with the slogan 'Respect tradition, enjoy tradition', while the Ghanaian Kaiser schnapps was promoted as 'Schnapps for Kings' and as 'the best choice on occasions such as traditional festivals, the performance of customary rites from birth, through marriage to death, in Ghana and in the neighbouring countries.'[76] The advent of local gin manufacture and

[75] See pages 55–56 and 133 for details.

[76] GIHOC Distilleries website: http://66.241.198.95/000/gihoc/KaiserImperialAromaticSchnapps.htm.

the way in which the local gin was marketed marks the final stage of the transformation of schnapps gin from a modern, foreign good that had a broad appeal, to a local, traditional good, limited to the sphere of ritual. It appears that local West African producers realised this earlier than the Dutch distillers did. The latter continued to try and market their schnapps gins as a drink for modern, successful African males until well into the 1960s. How the Dutch distillers responded to the rise of local gin manufacture, and the question of to what extent their subsequent marketing strategies were informed by the activities of their West African-based competitors, will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SCHNAPPS GIN FROM MODERNITY TO TRADITION

In 1968, the Henkes distillery moved from their old, early-nineteenth century premises on the quayside in Rotterdam, to a modern complex with a state-of-the-art automated distillery and bottling plant, located on an industrial estate away from the port. This move had been necessitated in part by a change in business strategy: Henkes had decided to develop the Dutch domestic market after having operated exclusively as an export distillery for over a century. In the post-World War II period a number of factors had convinced the Henkes management of the need to build up sales in the Netherlands. These included the loss of overseas markets due to the disruption caused by war, the rise of local production in those areas, the on-going difficulty of influencing foreign governments on their liquor policies, and the expectation that nationalist governments in developing countries would implement import-substitution policies. The new distillery complex was therefore designed to accommodate the different logistics of domestic sales.[1] Overseas exports, especially to West Africa, nevertheless remained important, as was evident at the ceremonial opening of the new distillery in March 1968, which was an event infused with ritual and tradition (see Figure 7.1). Among the guests were business contacts and local notables with their wives, all formally dressed according to the international Western fashion of the moment, in addition to which the mayor wore a heavy chain of office. The members of the distillers' guild '*Het Gouden Glaasje*' ('The Golden Tumbler') wore elaborate robes illustrated with pictures of stills and sheaves of grain, while a group of Dutch ladies were dressed in the traditional costume of the region. The Representative of the Queen of the Netherlands delivered the openings speech, after which the Ambassador of Ghana, Dr De Graft Johnson, officially opened the new distillery. His First Secretary, wearing a traditional Ghanaian kente cloth, then poured libation using the 'Henkes Star Brand, Prize-Medal Aromatic Schiedam Schnapps' that the distillery exported to

[1] [Hans van der Sloot], *150 Jaar Henkes. Enkele Aspecten van Anderhalve Eeuw Gedistilleerd-Industrie in Delfshaven en Omgeving* (n.p. n.d. [1975]), 53–9.

7.1 Official opening of the new Henkes distillery by the ambassador of Ghana. Hendrik-Ido-Ambacht, Netherlands, 1968

West Africa. The official role of the Ambassador of Ghana, and the incorporation of Ghanaian ritual practice in the opening ceremony illustrate the continued importance of West Africa as an outlet for Dutch gin, and also an awareness of the different meanings and ritual functions that Dutch gin had acquired there. The ritual significance of gin was an important reason why West Africa remained one of the main export-markets for Dutch distillers, even though sales never returned to the levels of the late-1920s, and continued to fluctuate with the economic and political ups and downs of the region.

The following year saw the official opening of another distillery, this time in Ghana: the Paramount distillery in Kumasi. Paramount Distilleries had been set up as a joint venture between a group of Ghanaian industrialists and Heineken of the Netherlands.[2] The Ghanaian partners were closely connected to the Asante royal family, and one of the first directors of the new distillery (a lawyer by training) later became the Asantehene Otumfo Opoku Ware II. The distillery itself had been designed and built in partnership with Henkes. The facility was used not only for the production of local brands, such as 'Paramount' schnapps gin, but also for the bottling of 'Henkes Star Brand Aromatic Schiedam Schnapps' for the Ghanaian market (see Figure 6.13).[3] As the Henkes gin it distributes is marketed as 'King of Schnapps', it claims that its Ghanaian-made Paramount brand is 'Prince of Schnapps' and in demand all year round 'for every traditional occasion such as outdoorings, weddings, land acquisition, festivals and funerals.'[4] The packaging of the local product closely resembles the imported brand: there are medals, there is the claim 'Original Dutch Recipe' stamped diagonally across the label in red, there is the signature, and in every other aspect as well, the layout of the bottles are very similar. It is interesting to note, that it was the Asantehene Osei Agyeman Prempeh II who officially opened the Paramount distillery and not the Netherlands ambassador, even though the distillery's technology and a large part of the capital investment were Dutch. Clearly, the connection between Dutch schnapps gin, local African rituals, and the power of chiefs, had become more

[2] Heineken's share would later be taken over by Bols Distilleries. Today, Paramount Distilleries is a fully owned subsidiary of PHC (Pepera Holding Company Ltd.).

[3] http://www.phcgroup.com/pdl/pdlhome.html; http://paramountdistilleries.com/history.html.

[4] www.paramountdistilleries.com.

significant than the drink's Dutch origins. What mattered most were its local meanings. Dutch schnapps gin had become 'African'.

West African commercial distilleries nevertheless continued to package their gins to look very similar to the Dutch product. The local distilleries' aim with these similarities was to position the new, locally produced gins into the specific market of gins used for traditional festivals and rituals. By offering products that resembled the imported gins but were much more affordable, the distillers intended to take market share away from the distillers of illicit gin. The latter product was used for ritual purposes where and when imported Dutch gin was unaffordable—even though this was widely considered to be inappropriate. The intended connection with tradition was emphasised in advertising. For example, in Nigeria, 'Eagle' schnapps advertised with the slogan 'Respect tradition, enjoy tradition,' while 'Seaman's Schnapps' built up its links with traditional leaders such as the Alake of Egbaland. When the latter brand paid homage to the Alake on his thirtieth coronation anniversary, its sales manager explained that the visit would 'help reinforce the brand's positioning as the original drink at all occasions where the importance of culture and tradition is appreciated.'[5] This strategy was successful, and the local branded schnapps gins have become widely accepted for ritual purposes. However, the preference for imported Dutch gins remains to this day. Nowadays, four types of 'gin' are in use for ritual purposes. In order of increasing status, these are: 'local' or 'illicit' gin (known under a variety of local names such as *akpeteshie* in Ghana and *ogogoro* in Nigeria), dry gin, domestic-produced schnapps gin, and imported Dutch gin. Due to the relatively high price of the imported gin, and the poverty of many West African traditional communities, Dutch gin has become a commodity that African consumers aim to use, but often cannot afford. As Dutch schnapps is no longer popular for social drinking, sales have been modest since World War II. It has nevertheless remained a highly respected commodity in West Africa.

This is not to say that there have been no challenges to imported schnapps gin: especially since the 1980s some West African churches have been firm in their attacks against the use of gin for rituals. In this final chapter, therefore, I examine these two developments: the confinement of Dutch gin to the sphere of traditional ritual and chiefly power, in actual West African practice as well as in the gin producers'

[5] 'NDL seeks to reposition Seaman's Schnapps', *This Day*, 27 August 2002.

marketing strategies; and the challenge of born-again Christianity to the traditional use of gin. In the final paragraphs, I draw out some of the key strands of this book, especially the gradual change from gin as a drink that signified modernity and access to the international world, to a drink that signifies local, traditional culture, and—connected to this—the restriction of the use of gin from being a commodity that was used in a number of different ways and contexts, to a good the use of which is restricted to the ritual context. I also explore the limitations of efforts to fix the meaning of schnapps gin through marketing, and conclude that African meanings were more important than European distillers' advertising campaigns.

Marketing tradition

Dutch distillers responded to the challenge of West African production in various ways. One approach was to work together with the local distillers, selling technical assistance or signing up the local company as bottler and distributor of the imported gin. It appears that De Kuyper at some stage advised GIHOC Distilleries.[6] Henkes' partnership with Paramount Distilleries has been discussed above. In Nigeria, collaborations emerged that were similar to that of Paramount in Ghana, whereby local distillers bottled and distributed well-known Dutch gin brands alongside locally produced look-alikes. West African Distillers Ltd. prepared and bottled Blankenheym & Nolet's 'Key Brand' schnapps as well as Bols' 'Aromatic Schiedam Schnapps', while the carton of 'Eagle' schnapps explained that the drink was produced under license from the Dutch company Selviac.[7] However, not all the Dutch schnapps gins bottled and distributed in West Africa resulted from a formal arrangement with a Netherlands-based distiller: counterfeit was widespread.[8]

Another response to legal local distillation was to focus on the same ritual market that the local brands were targeting, and advertise with 'tradition'. Dutch distillers have been aware of the importance of their products for African rituals since the 1920s. Nevertheless, for a long

[6] GIHOC Distilleries website: http://66.241.198.95/000/gihoc/.

[7] Selviac worked with, and held stakes in, a number of distilleries in countries in Africa and Latin America, and elsewhere. I have not found evidence for its collaboration with the distillers of Eagle schnapps other than the claim made on packaging collected in Nigeria during the 1980s.

[8] Klaas Zaalberg, personal communication, 17 January 2007.

time they did not seize upon this as a factor they could develop to increase brand awareness or sales. At one stage, Henkes came up with 'Paramount Chief' schnapps gin, which may have been the precursor to the 'Paramount' schnapps brand that they helped develop in the 1960s for local production in Ghana. However, this did not reflect their marketing strategies more generally, which from the 1940s onwards aimed to position their schnapps gin as a modern and international drink of choice for successful middle class males.

As described in chapter six, the West African competitors and local partners of the Dutch distillers were the first to consistently market their schnapps gins as the drink required for local ritual, preferred by chiefs and elders. The drinks they marketed were produced locally and, therefore, marketing with reference to tradition and ritual was an attempt to create an association in the minds of African consumers between the local brands and the imported schnapps. They thus attempted to locate their drinks in the same category of ritual drinks as the schnapps from Holland. The Dutch distillers followed the lead of their West African competitors. Around 1970 they changed the advertising of their schnapps gins to emphasise traditional, ritual uses, and the connection with chiefs and elders. The decision to no longer attempt to position their gins as emblems of a successful, modern, international lifestyle, meant that, rather than to use advertising to create a new image and new meanings for the product in an attempt to increase the range of occasions whereat schnapps gin was consumed (and thus increase total sales), distillers now satisfied themselves with merely attempting to follow and claim the existing meanings that Africans had already given to the product, thereby protecting their existing market share.

A 1970s advert for 'Claeryn' brand gin portrays a chief, recognisable by his sandals and traditional cloth, pouring libation (see Figure 7.3). The gin advertised—Claeryn's *jonge jenever*—was of a type that would not normally have been sold under the name 'schnapps', and its packaging did not have the characteristic shape of the schnapps bottle, nor did the label mention the word 'schnapps'. The adverts nevertheless proclaimed: 'It's Schnapps It's Gin' in recognition of the fact that, by the 1970s, major brands used for ritual were all 'schnapps' gins. Meanwhile, adverts for 'Bols' gins tied in with traditional festivals such as the Ga Homowo festival, for which special deals were offered (see Figure 7.4). Henkes, with its connections to the Asante royal family, advertised in Ghana with references to Akan ritual and chiefly power, while its 'Royal Stork Gin' brand was official sponsor of the Conference

7.2 Owusu-Bempa Laid to Rest

7.3 Advert for Claeryn gin

7.4 Adverts for Bols gin and Star beer

7.5 Henkes promotional calendar, 1994

of Francophone West African Traditional Rulers, held in Benin (see Figures 7.5 and 7.6).[9] De Kuyper similarly sought the support of tradition when it re-launched its 'Aromatic Schnapps' with the aid of the Offinsohene, who endorsed it as 'a leading drink used for all customary occasions in the past.'[10]

Foreign schnapps, local meanings

In previous chapters I have shown that the local meanings that imported Dutch gin acquired in coastal West Africa were assigned to it by African consumers, and not by distillers in Europe, anti-liquor trade campaigners, or colonial administrations. As West Africa constituted one of the most important export markets for Dutch gin, it was African consumptive choices that to a large extent determined the fortunes of the Dutch distilling industry. Between the mid-nineteenth century and World War II, the interaction between Dutch distillers and West African markets resembled that of other metropolitan producers for peripheral markets, such as the New England cloth industry analysed by Jeremy Prestholdt, or the European cloth producers described by Christopher Steiner.[11] African consumers had specific requirements regarding products and packaging, which the Dutch distillers attempted to comply with. As a result, gins from different distillers tended to resemble each other, and African buyers appeared not very interested in knowing exactly who produced the gin, but rather whether it fitted one of the categories of drink defined by African consumers themselves. Hence, at this stage Africans who bought Henkes Prize Medal Aromatic Schiedam Schnapps did so not because of the Henkes brand, but because it was a 'money gin' (*Oti Olow* or *Cavegevi*).

There was, of course, scope for cross-cultural misunderstandings: African local meanings and categorisations often eluded the Dutch distillers, even though they collected information about West African market conditions and consumer preferences through agents and business partners,

[9] *International World of Bols* 8.13 (n.d.), 15.

[10] *Modern Ghana*, 30 November 1998 (http://www.modernghana.com).

[11] Jeremy Prestholdt, 'On the global repercussions of East African consumerism', *American Historical Review* 109.3 (2004), http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/109.3/prestholdt.html (viewed 12 July 2004); Christopher B. Steiner, 'Another image of Africa: toward an ethnohistory of European cloth marketed in West Africa, 1873–1960', *Ethnohistory* 32.2 (1985), 91–110.

as well as through study tours of the region. Market information thus collected was often interpreted according to preconceived ideas about African people or colonised subjects in general. In this context, the colonial ideology of civilisation through appropriate consumption, as analysed by Timothy Burke for Zimbabwe, is helpful to understand the place of imported Dutch gin in colonial West Africa.[12] Contemporary perspectives on the consumption of Dutch gin by Africans differed in two significant aspects from the pattern identified by Burke, and these aspects illustrate the extent to which gin was not an 'ordinary' commodity—not to African consumers, and not according to colonial understanding either. Firstly, while colonial African consumers were expected to purchase commodities of a quality inferior to that acquired by Europeans, this expectation did not stretch to gin: the importation of 'trade spirits' intended for African consumption was specifically prohibited. Thus while Africans were encouraged to consume inferior versions of many commodities, such as soap, cloth, and clothes, in the case of gin they were only allowed 'high class' spirits. Secondly, while it was generally considered essential that Africans consumed imported commodities in the appropriate way as intended by the producers, in the case of gin colonial administrations considered the unintended uses of gin—as a means of storing wealth, to pour libation, and so on—less problematic than the use intended by the distillers. Indeed, while much of the advertising to African consumers was concerned with explaining the appropriate use of imported commodities, gin distillers appeared quite content with Africans' 'improper' use of gin as this could be used to counter claims that gin imports had turned Africans into degenerate drunkards. Meanwhile, of course, the anti-liquor trade campaigners and the colonial state attempted to control African consumption. The former through temperance societies and the intended total prohibition of spirits imports, the latter through import restrictions and high duties on gins. These attempts largely failed. To African consumers who were considering whether to buy gin or not, the state of the economy was a much more important consideration than colonial legislation. Indeed, the amount of Dutch gin imported in West Africa fluctuated wildly during the period 1880–1940, which reflected disruption through war, changing import restrictions, as well

[12] Timothy Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption, and Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe* (London: Leicester University Press 1996).

as changes in the purchasing power of African consumers due to fluctuations in the price and demand for the agricultural produce that was the basis for West African economies.

Dutch distillers only started newspaper advertising aimed at African consumers from around 1940. This was a late start compared to other imported commodities and reflected, on the one hand, the extent to which Dutch gin was considered a drink for illiterate people in rural locations who at the time would not normally be reached by advertising, and, on the other hand, the care that gin distillers had to take until the late 1930s, so as to avoid being accused of producing 'trade gin' aimed specifically at African consumers. Once advertising took off, however, it did not result in rising sales of Dutch gin in West Africa. Rather, the two peaks of gin importation into West Africa—in the 1880s and in the 1920s—took place before the advent of advertising for gin. During the period 1940–2000, importation of schnapps gin continued to fluctuate in line with the changing fortunes of West African economies (albeit on a lower level than during the period 1880–1940). During the worst years of economic depression in Ghana (1970s and 1980s) and Nigeria (1980s and 1990s), the importation of some brands such as Blankenheym & Nolet and De Kuyper, stopped altogether. Importation was not always resumed when the economic tide turned again.[13]

The failure to increase gin sales through advertising partly reflected the fact that imported Dutch gin had become a commodity the use of which was restricted to the ritual sphere. It was also the result of the availability of cheaper, local alternatives for social drinking by those African consumers who were on a limited budget, while those who could afford to spend more on social drinking tended to prefer beer or—if they were looking for a stronger drink—whisky or brandy. Of the themes worked out in gin advertising—international modernity, Dutch origins, and health benefits of gin consumption—only the latter theme resonated with African consumers. We, therefore, have to conclude that Dutch gin distillers and importers failed to reposition gin as a modern drink that could be consumed in a wide range of circumstances. They thus failed to increase the number of connotations

[13] De Kuyper was re-launched in Ghana in 1992 (see: *Modern Ghana*, 30 November 1998 (http://www.modernghana.com)), but Blankenheym & Nolet did not return to Nigeria.

of Dutch schnapps gin beyond the meaning that African consumers had already assigned to it.

This is not to say that it was impossible to relate the marketing of schnapps gin to African understandings. As we have seen, three themes tended to translate well: purity, health, and tradition. The understanding that Dutch gins were especially pure qualified them for use with rituals relating to gods and ancestors. To African consumers, the purity of gin was evident, not necessarily from the claims on the label to that effect, but because unlike whisky and rum, gin was colourless; because of the many seals and signatures and other features on the packaging that were regarded as a guarantee that the drink had not been tampered with; and—later on—the white or silver colour of the closure of the bottle. The supposed medicinal properties of Dutch gin that the distillers touted conveniently fitted the African use of gin as a basis for traditional medicine. Also, these claims as to the health benefits of gin consumption neatly inverted the anti-liquor trade campaigners' assertion that Dutch gin was particularly harmful.

The theme of tradition was slightly different, if only because West Africans had begun to associate gin with African tradition long before the Dutch distillers started to market their gins as traditional. Indeed, chiefs and elders described the use of gin for funerals and other rituals as an ancient tradition in the early 1930s.[14] As we have seen, Dutch distillers only turned to tradition when their other strategies had failed to generate increased sales. In emphasising gin's link with traditional rituals, they followed the lead of their local, West African competitors. A similar shift in emphasis, from attempts to position gin as an international, fashionable, and youthful drink, to the presentation of gin as being steeped in tradition, occurred in the Dutch domestic market a good ten years later.[15] Today, in West Africa, as well as in Netherlands, Dutch gin is an unfashionable drink, overshadowed by other drinks for aspirational social drinking. However, it is also accorded great respect as a traditional drink, and Dutch gin is considered part of cultural heritage in both areas. Furthermore, throughout coastal West Africa, due to its ritual uses and its connection with consumption by traditional chiefs and elders, Dutch gin is regarded as the most important drink: the 'king of drinks'.

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[14] PRAAD/A CSO 21/18/18 Local Opinion on Liquor Traffic, *passim*.
[15] Wim Verstraaten, *Het Groot Jeneverboek* (Baarn: In den Toren 1984), 68–9.

The born-again challenge

Throughout the twentieth century, the consumption of gin was central to debates about legislation and politics in West Africa. In West Africa itself, this was not a case of 'moral panic' (though there might have been an element of this to the discussions in Britain about gin in Africa). Rather, it reflected the importance of Dutch gin to local African politics and colonial administrations alike. First defined as contentious by nineteenth-century anti-liquor trade campaigners, 'gin' soon became an arena for debating a very diverse range of issues, on local as well as on national levels. On the local level, rituals involving imported gin were an important aspect of the settling by violent means of local (trade) disputes in the Nigerian Niger Delta around 1900.[16] In Southeast Ghana in 1928 the question of whether or not Torgbui Sri II of Anlo had given a bottle of gin to a traditional priest was crucial in deciding if he was guilty of treason.[17] On the national level, calls for the abolition of the importation of liquor were part of anti-colonial agitation since the 1910s.[18] In Ghana, Dutch gin was central to late-1920s campaigns against colonial taxation, while it was also a key ingredient of improvised rituals during political meetings in the 1950s. Both in Ghana and in Nigeria, schnapps gin was incorporated in the public rituals of the postcolonial state. Thus while West African mission churches were fairly consistently opposing the consumption of gin, their focus on the drink came to be shared by a number of other actors at very diverse moments during the twentieth century. Generally speaking, gin became a focus of attention—either negatively or positively—whenever West Africa went through a phase of rapid economic or political change. It is thus not surprising that when, during the economically depressed 1980s, born-again Christianity rose rapidly throughout West Africa to bring 'Hope for the SAPped Generation',[19] these Pentecostal churches

[16] J. E. I. Bebeke-ola, The man Bebeke-ola (Bebekala) Dubakemefa of Igbedi (typescript, n.d.), 18 and *passim*.

[17] PRAAD/A ADM 11/1/1091 Proceedings Meeting of the Anlo (Dua) State Council held at Keta's Srogboe village, 6 February 1928. I discuss this case in slightly more detail in chapter 3.

[18] Emmanuel Akyeampong, *Drink, Power, and Cultural Change. A Social History of Alcohol in Ghana, c. 1800 to Recent Times* (Portsmouth, NH and London 1996), 89.

[19] *Hope for the SAPped Generation* is the title of a booklet by born-again pastor Michael Ojewale. 'SAPped' refers to the Structural Adjustment Programme imposed on Nigeria, the impact of which was being keenly felt by the late 1980s. Ruth Marshall, 'Power in the name of Jesus', *Review of African Political Economy* 52 (1991), 21–37, there 25.

turned against gin. One Ghanaian born-again Christian publication explicitly attacks the use of schnapps gin for official state rituals:

> A Fetish Priest pouring Libation to the fetish gods (demons), the stool gods (demons) and the ancestral spirits (demons) at a State function in Ghana. Immediately after this, the Reverent Minister supposedly prays to the Living God at the same function.
>
> Who is Ghana worshipping—the Living God through Jesus Christ or Satan?[20]

It concludes that it is a practice, 'which is eating into our personal and national lives as a cancer' and should be stopped by the churches, preferably with government backing.[21]

In chapter one I defined the area where Dutch gin was widely consumed and accorded high ritual status, as a strip of a few hundred kilometres wide along the West African coast. Beyond this coastal belt the prevalence of Islam limited the widespread consumption of gin and prevented it from achieving ritual importance. The 'gin belt' thus coincided geographically with the West African 'Bible belt', even though the ritual use of Dutch gin was a feature of African traditional religion, not of Christianity. To European missionaries and some African clergy, the consumption of gin was thus not only problematic because of its alleged negative effects on African health and social life, but also as a powerful symbol of the limitations of Christian conversion.

In West African Christianity, objections to gin consumption went beyond the call for temperance and abstinence found in Europe and North America. Due to the close association of Dutch gin with rituals of African traditional religion and local power, its consumption by Africans came to be regarded as distinctly un-Christian. It is thus no coincidence, that Nana Ofori Atta's description of the public ritual whereat cases of gin were destroyed and its consumption denounced,[22] bore such strong resemblance to the widespread practice of Christian missionaries to publicly and dramatically destroy African artefacts that were thought to have traditional religious significance ('idols'). This was part of a broader tendency in West African mission Christianity to perceive the relationship between Christianity and African traditional

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[20] Kwaku Achampong-Baifie, *The Sacrifices of God (The Pouring of Libation)* (Accra: Pinamano Press Ltd. 1992), [no page number].

[21] *Ibidem*, 16.

[22] 'Sir Ofori Atta and the drink trade', *West Africa*, 3 November 1928. See chapter five for a more detailed discussion.

religion through a set of binary opposites.[23] One common theme was that of the perceived sexual immorality of traditional, polygynous Africa, with women described as walking naked in public. Here, the theme of civilisation through appropriate consumption can again be observed, as conversion to Christianity also implied a consumptive change from a 'primitive' state of 'undress' towards 'civilised' clothing.[24] A further manifestation of the understanding of tradition as the opposite of Christianity was the depiction of traditional rituals as drunken debauches or orgies, while the deceitfulness of traditional priests was 'exposed' and condemned, and compared to the truth of the Christian message. Furthermore, death—through human sacrifice, traditional medicine, or excessive drinking[25]—was contrasted to the lives saved by Christianity. Finally, the darkness of African traditional religion was contrasted to the light that had been brought by Christianity. Within this dichotomous conceptual framework, the importation of cotton cloth brought enlightenment, while imported Dutch gin obviously belonged to the 'dark' side.

Contemporary West African born-again Christianity defines itself through a similar dichotomy between true Christianity and a 'traditional' or 'corrupt' Africa. It creates a 'community of the saved' that needs to be protected against pollution by the 'forces of evil'. These forces of evil ultimately emanate from the devil, yet manifest themselves in many ways, including corruption, witchcraft, African traditional religions, and mainstream Christianity. Meanwhile, born-again Christianity looks towards the West, especially the United States, for inspiration. It emphasises modernity, the international nature of the Pentecostal movement, as well as material success as a sign of God's blessing and

[23] V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa. Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press 1988) 49; Birgit Meyer, 'Modernity and enchantment: the image of the devil in popular African Christianity' in: Peter van der Veer, ed., *Conversion to Modernities. The Globalization of Christianity* (New York and London 1996), 199–230.

[24] Sandra E. Greene, *Sacred Sites and the Colonial Encounter. A History of Meaning and Memory in Ghana* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press 2002), 97–9; Birgit Meyer, 'Christian mind and worldly matters. Religion and materiality in the nineteenth-century Gold Coast' in: Richard Fardon, Wim van Binsbergen and Rijk van Dijk, eds., *Modernity on a Shoestring. Dimensions of Globalization, Consumption and Development in Africa and Beyond* (Leiden and London: EIDOS 1999), 155–77.

[25] TC DA44/1/4 Correspondence relating to the libel case of Herbert Tugwell, 1899.

7.6 Royal Stork Gin sponsored the 1998 Conference of Francophone Traditional Rulers in West Africa

7.7 Billboard advertising Kasapreko gin in Tema, Ghana

as a reward for leading a righteous life.[26] In order for God's blessings to flow, the righteous should not take bribes; they should not drink, smoke, or fornicate; they are not allowed to gossip or steal; and they should keep away from the forces of evil, such as may be found in African traditional religion. The born-again rejection of gin is thus two-fold: it is not only against consumption of alcohol (and tobacco) in general, but specifically against gin as associated with African tradition: 'The believer who pours a libation to the fetish gods, the stool gods and the ancestral spirits breaks fellowship with Christ.' As a result, 'he becomes the slave of Satan again.'[27] Therefore, for God's blessings to flow, gin should not flow. In many born-again churches, members are encouraged to object to, and block, all idolatrous practices in their family or community. These include many of the practices that I have described in earlier chapters, such as the use of gin in weddings and burials, its use for the outdooring of newborn children, oath taking, and the pouring of libation. All of these are now being hotly contested by born-again Christians throughout coastal West Africa, which results in considerable tensions within many families and communities.

At the time of writing it is still unclear to what extent the born-again challenge will succeed in reducing the importance of gin for African ritual and as symbol of the status of chiefs and elders. On the one hand, born-again Christians are often the relatively wealthier members of families and communities, which should add weight to their arguments. On the other hand, while a powerful force, born-again Christians are still in the minority across West Africa, and their attacks on African values are already inspiring counter-movements demanding respect for African traditions. Furthermore, in spite of the strict teachings in the churches, some born-again Christians continue to be traditionalists as well.

These challenges from various Christian religions to the consumption of gin in West Africa appear to fit Peter Stearns' global model, which links the growth of consumption to the decline of religious intensity. According to Stearns, consumer society advanced rapidly in areas with

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[26] Rijk van Dijk, 'The Pentecostal gift. Ghanaian charismatic churches and the moral innocence of the global economy' in: Richard Fardon, Wim van Binsbergen and Rijk van Dijk, eds., *Modernity on a Shoestring. Dimensions of Globalization, Consumption and Development in Africa and Beyond* (Leiden and London: EIDOS 1999), 71–89; Marshall, 'Power in the name of Jesus'.

[27] Achampong-Baifie, *The Sacrifices of God*, 41.

a weak alternative value system, such as in sub-Saharan Africa, or with declining level of religious intensity, such as in Western Europe, while it advanced slowly in areas with strong rival value systems such as in China and the Middle East.[28] The Christian attacks on gin consumption thus seem to fit this model. However, they also expose some of its flaws and point towards an alternative connection. A first problem is Stearns' characterisation of African traditional value systems as not providing an alternative to consumerism. Indeed, if anything, the continued importance of schnapps gin illustrates the now well-established understanding that African traditional value systems were far from weak. A second problem is the claim that in Britain, consumerism rose while religious intensity was declining. Frank Trentmann has pointed out that, on the contrary, religious intensity increased steadily with the rise of an Evangelical Christian movement that strongly opposed consumerism.[29] However, West African Christianity shows that a very vocal opposition to one aspect of consumption—schnapps gin—can go together with a positive appreciation of consumption, and material success, more generally.

In Nigeria a further challenge to Dutch gin is presented by the introduction of Islamic Sharia law in northern states of the federation. Although northern Nigeria lies outside the gin-belt, it is an area where millions of Christian and traditionalist, gin-using southerners reside. These non-Muslims experience that Sharia affects their lives in many ways, including that of the sale and purchase of alcohol. The rise of born-again Christianity and the call for Sharia are two manifestations of a single phenomenon: West African citizens who experience widespread injustice—economic hardship, corruption, declining educational and other facilities, insecurity, and an unreliable judicial system—turn to those strands of religion that offer protection and justice based on strict morality. Indeed, when northern politicians established Sharia in their states against the wish of the Nigerian Federal Government, they faced a President, Olusegun Obasanjo, who is a born-again Christian.[30] Meanwhile, in its impact on the sale and purchase of gin in northern

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[28] Peter N. Stearns, *Consumerism in World History. The Global Transformation of Desire* (London and New York: Routledge 2001), 110–13.

[29] Frank Trentmann, 'Beyond consumerism: new historical perspectives on consumption', *Journal of Contemporary History* 39.3 (2004), 373–401, there 379.

[30] Karl Maier, *This House Has Fallen. Nigeria in Crisis* (London: Allen Lane 2000), 143–8.

Nigeria, the establishing of Sharia law reflects a return to a colonial pattern. During the colonial period, the sale of liquor had been prohibited in northern Nigeria on the grounds that liquor consumption was not a feature of the predominantly Muslim culture in the area, and had not yet spread to that area from the south. Indeed, southerners stationed in northern Nigeria repeatedly complained to the colonial administration about the difficulties they experienced trying of purchasing liquor, and asked for a repeal or easing of the prohibition so as to allow non-northerners residing in northern Nigeria to purchase gin. This specific bit of colonial legislation was lifted when Nigeria became independent, but Sharia appears to reverse the situation.

To conclude: while the consumption of Dutch gin remains at a relatively low level because other drinks, such as beer, soft drinks, and non-alcoholic malt beers, are preferred for social drinking, its importance as the drink associated with African traditional ritual and the status of chiefs and elders, continues to be widely recognised. However, this connection with tradition has become exactly the reason why born-again Christian leaders so strongly denounce the consumption of schnapps gin, more so than other alcoholic drinks. Since the nineteenth century, contesting the consumption of Dutch gin has continually functioned as a way of debating a wide range of social, political, or religious concerns. In this context, the current challenges to gin consumption by Sharia and born-again Christianity, are merely the most recent manifestation of a long-established pattern. Nevertheless, given the widespread popular following of these movements, their current attack on gin is probably more widely supported by African consumers than any previous attack on gin since its introduction into West Africa.

From modernity to tradition

By tracing the history of imported Dutch gin in West Africa, I have uncovered how one particular imported good was localised. Analysing what kinds of local meanings were given to this foreign import, and how these meanings changed over time, can shed some light on the consumption of foreign goods in colonial—and postcolonial—Africa more generally. Of course, in many ways, Dutch schnapps gin was not an ordinary imported good. Firstly, alcoholic drinks often carry or acquire additional meanings, which set them apart from other goods. Secondly, the importation of gin was contested in the colonial sphere

to an extent that other imports, such as cloth, hardware, soap, and even tobacco, were not. Not only will some of these debates have influenced the perception of Dutch gin for at least some African groups directly, the resulting attempts by colonial governments to restrict gin importation influenced African perceptions of gin indirectly—by making the product more expensive and therefore exclusive. Finally, the trajectory of Dutch gin appears to differ from other imported goods in that, over time, its circulation became restricted, rather than that it expanded.

However, the exceptionalism of Dutch gin in West Africa should not be exaggerated. Comparisons can be made with a whole range of imported alcoholic drinks, which have been localised in ways that were different from Dutch schnapps gin. Furthermore, although gin was probably the most intensely contested of all imports, *all* goods imported into West Africa for African consumption came with added meanings that had been informed by the colonial ideology's emphasis on the notion of civilisation through appropriate consumption. That this connection has continued to be relevant until this day was demonstrated to me during a recent visit to a friend living in the distinctly aspirational 'Community 18' area of Tema, near Accra. Driving along a bend in the road towards Texpo Junction, a large, new, three-storey house came into view. It had a driveway, a row of columns to the front, and a roof tiled in red concrete tiles, which carried, in three-meter high letters, the word 'civilized' in contrasting green tiles. However, goods are not always good: newly acquired commodities can be dangerous until they have been rendered harmless through prayer or other means.[31] Furthermore, debates in Europe about the morality of the importation of commodities into West Africa have not ended together with the demise of the anti-liquor trade movement. In fact, such debates are still common, only now they are concerned with Coca Cola, unsafe powdered milk for babies, military systems, or cheap agricultural produce from the European Union cultivated with the aid of generous subsidies.

What is striking about the precise process through which Dutch gin was localised in West Africa, however, is just how diverse the factors and actors were that played their part in the history of gin in West Africa

[31] Birgit Meyer, 'Commodities and the power of prayer: Pentecostalist attitudes towards consumption in contemporary Ghana' in: Birgit Meyer and Peter Geschiere, eds., *Globalization and Identity. Dialectics of Flow and Closure* (Oxford: Berg 1999), 151–76.

and, also, how interconnected such diverse spheres such as African ritual practice, distilleries in the Netherlands, missionary enterprise, and colonial administrations turned out to be. We have seen that, ultimately, the meanings ascribed to gin were local, African. However, colonial governments, anti-liquor trade campaigners and Dutch gin distillers and importers all tried to fix the meaning of Dutch gin and, in doing so, contributed to the African meanings that emerged (and changed over time). While, in the end, the local African context was the most important, the outcome of this process was also shaped by a host of outside factors, including war, technological innovation in the production of gin, and specific strategies in the packaging of gin.

Nowadays, a born-again Christian movement, which perceives itself as belonging to a sphere of international modernity, rejects the consumption of gin, which it regards as a symbol of local, traditional African rituals. In the late-nineteenth century, both Christianity and gin were new to West Africa and associated with the then-popular European style and fashions. They played different roles in West African societies: mission Christianity turned against both gin and African tradition, while imported Dutch gin was quickly integrated in African traditional rituals. At the time, the use for rituals was merely one of many functions that Dutch gin had in African societies. It was also a modern, fashionable status symbol, an indication of the wealth and influence of big men, a currency, a social drink popular among young men in West Africa's coastal urban centres, and a medicine, to mention but a few of the uses of gin discussed in this book. One by one, these other uses of gin disappeared. Colonial currency replaced gin as a way of storing wealth, urban young men switched from drinking gin to the consumption of illicit spirits or beer, and so on. By the end of World War II, gin had only one major use left: the ritual one. The continued use for ritual purposes is linked to notions of gin as being a particularly pure drink, and to the belief that it was the choice of the ancestors. As a result of this continued ritual significance, the status of gin has remained high, in spite of the many restrictions placed on its consumption.

Dutch gin is still used for rituals, births and funerals, but is too expensive for regular consumption to most West Africans. Thus, after the nineteenth-century start as a contemporary, fashionable status symbol, by the beginning of the twenty-first century, Dutch gin had acquired the role of a traditional aspect of West African society, characteristic

for local, African culture, and going back to 'time immemorial from our great, great grandfathers.'[32] This is in itself not an unusual development, but what is unusual, is that this went alongside a process of decommoditisation: schnapps gin is purchased especially for use with specific traditions, in which context it is no longer a commodity, but a ritual good. While as such, sales of Dutch gin are limited, especially in comparison to the levels of importation seen at the beginning of the twentieth century, its availability is considered of great importance to the continuation of coastal West African traditional culture. According to the chiefs and elders of Denu in Ghana:

> All Hollands Gin are pure beverage and shall ever be accepted as the true and only alcoholic drink to be used for all purposes especially in the field of invoking spirits. We do recommend the continuation of its production no matter what the case might be. More grease to the elbows of its producers, for, it is our hope that success will crown their efforts.[33]

[32] Interview with Torgbui Baku and twenty other chiefs, elders and queen mothers, held at Denu, 5 August 2000.

[33] Torgbui Baku and his Elders of Denu, personal communication, 4 August 2000.

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