



Omohundro Institute of
Early American History and Culture
WILLIAMSBURG, VIRGINIA

The Transatlantic Slave Trade in Ghanaian Academic Historiography: History, Memory, and Power

Author(s): Ella Keren

Reviewed work(s):

Source: *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 66, No. 4, Abolishing the Slave Trades: Ironies and Reverberations (Oct., 2009), pp. 975-1000

Published by: [Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40467550>

Accessed: 19/01/2012 09:13

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The William and Mary Quarterly*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

The Transatlantic Slave Trade in Ghanaian Academic Historiography: History, Memory, and Power

Ella Keren

THE study of collective memory of the transatlantic slave trade in Africa has begun to receive academic attention in the last decade. Most studies have focused on official commemoration or on particular local communities. Scholarly memory, as produced by the academic historical profession, has hardly been examined.¹ Historians are influenced by their societies' collective memory and contribute to its constant reshaping. They also participate in its dissemination through their publications and teaching. Though the past is hardly the exclusive

Ella Keren is a lecturer in the Department of Political Science at the Open University of Israel. This article is based on wider research from the author's 2007 doctoral dissertation. A different version of this article appears as Keren, "In the Chains of the Past: The Transatlantic Slave Trade in Ghanaian Historiography," in *The Changing Worlds of Atlantic Africa: Essays in Honor of Robin Law*, ed. Toyin Falola and Matt D. Childs (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2009), 267–85. The author thanks Sandra Greene, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Robin Law for their useful comments, and Tel Aviv University and the Open University of Israel for their support of this research.

¹ In the Ghanaian context, see Emmanuel Akyeampong, "History, Memory, Slave Trade, and Slavery in Anlo (Ghana)," *Slavery and Abolition* 22, no. 3 (December 2001): 1–24; Jennifer Hasty, "Rites of Passage, Routes of Redemption: Emancipation Tourism and the Wealth of Culture," *Africa Today* 49, no. 3 (Fall 2002): 47–76; Anne C. Bailey, *African Voices of the Atlantic Slave Trade: Beyond the Silence and the Shame* (Boston, 2005); Bayo Holsey, *Routes of Remembrance: Refashioning the Slave Trade in Ghana* (Chicago, 2008). Scholarly memory has hardly been examined with the exception of Ibrahima Thioub, who focuses on francophone Africa. See Thioub, "Regard critique sur les lectures africaines de l'esclavage et de la traite Atlantique" (paper presented at "Historiens Africaines et Mondialisation," 3d meeting of the Association of African Historians, Bamako, Mali, Sept. 10–14, 2001). For discussion of textbooks used in teaching the history of the transatlantic slave trade, see Ella Keren, "The Atlantic Slave Trade in West African History Text Books," in *Africa and Trans-Atlantic Memories: Literary and Aesthetic Manifestations of Diaspora and History*, ed. Naana Opoku-Agyemang, Paul E. Lovejoy, and David V. Trotman (Trenton, N.J., 2008), 235–55. For discussion of the teaching of history in practice in universities and in senior and junior secondary schools in Ghana, see Keren, "In the Chains of the Past: The Collective Memory of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in Ghana" (Ph.D. diss., Tel Aviv University, 2007).

domain of historians, historians' history is a vital source for the reconstruction of the past, and the understanding of collective memory is deficient without consideration of it. Professional historians in Africa are mostly employed by the state but ostensibly enjoy academic freedom. Academic treatment of slavery and the slave trade allows an examination of the relationships between the state and historians and can serve as a measure of the latter's effective intellectual independence.

To delineate a specifically Ghanaian collective memory of the slave trade, Ghanaian historiography is distinguished here from African history written by Africanists in general and from history written by other African historians.² This distinction does not mean that Ghanaian historiography is intellectually isolated. On the contrary it shares many perceptions and trends, especially with African history written by African historians, such as those concerning the role of history in the present and a particular sense of commitment to a usable past. Most African historians are committed to national metanarratives that avoid dealing with the slave trade and slavery. In the 1960s African historians enthusiastically identified with the project of postcolonial nation building. They sought to refute colonial stereotypes of Africa and to contribute to the building of national identity through scholarly expressions of newly won independence. African historiography thus conforms in many respects to the general patterns of national historiography. This kind of territorial-national discourse perceived the slave trade as premodern if not antimodern and excluded the enslaved from the historical narrative and from local imagined communities. Furthermore slavery and the slave trade are morally and emotionally loaded issues, considered highly sensitive in many African societies today. "The word 'slavery' carries with it a bundle of connotations—all of them nasty," Frederick Cooper has written. It is rare to find people who will admit being descendants of slaves because many African societies still attach a stigma to slavery and to slave ancestry. These sensitivities help to explain why African historians have been reluctant to confront subjects such as the slave trade, which are likely to raise questions about internal slavery. Non-African Africanists, less burdened by these considerations, began to make slavery and the transatlantic slave trade a specialized area of research from the 1970s.³

² Due to the difficulty in defining who is Ghanaian, the study adopts an inclusive approach and examines historians who are not Ghanaian by birth but have lived and conducted their research in Ghana as well as Ghanaian-born historians who reside and publish outside the country, mostly in North America.

³ On the problem of slavery, see Frederick Cooper, "The Problem of Slavery in African Studies," *Journal of African History* 20, no. 1 (1979): 103–25 (quotation, 105); Toyin Falola, "Power Relations and Social Interactions among Ibadan Slaves, 1850–1900," *African Economic History* 16 (1987): 95–114, esp. 96. On the role of African historiography in nation building, see J. F. A. Ajayi, "The Place of African

But external contexts alone cannot explain the construction of scholarly memory in Ghana. Analysis of published and unpublished historical accounts, lectures, and interviews makes it possible to appreciate the extent to which Ghanaian historians share a sense of uneasiness about these issues with fellow African colleagues and to examine how this unease has affected their historical accounts. Though Ghana's historians are not a homogeneous group and differ in areas of interest and approaches, they nevertheless exhibit important similarities in regard to slavery and the slave trade, subjects that they tended to marginalize until the 1990s. This omission does not demonstrate a deliberate, concerted decision by scholars. Why and for whom this silence made sense, and how it was constructed, cannot be fully explained without considering these historians' multiple internal contexts, including institutional affiliations and communities and regions of origins. Academic history is centered in southern Ghana, mainly at the University of Ghana in Legon, just north of the capital, and to a lesser extent at the universities in Cape Coast and Kumasi, all of them state institutions. Many historians, like those who make up the political establishment, are Akan and Ewe, whose societies played a significant role in the transatlantic slave trade and are mostly regarded as its beneficiaries rather than its victims. Their marginalization of the slave trade should also be seen in the context of the existing power relations between south and north in modern Ghana. Circumstances specific to Ghana are equally important in understanding the contrary process of historians' participation since the 1990s in breaking the silence surrounding the slave trade. The Ghanaian government decided to bring the collective memory of slavery and the slave trade closer to external memories, particularly those of African Americans, who had been previously excluded from Ghanaian memory and academic

History and Culture in the Process of Nation-Building in Africa South of the Sahara," in *Social Change: The Colonial Situation*, ed. Immanuel Wallerstein (New York, 1966), 606–16; Terence O. Ranger, "Towards a Usable African Past," in *African Studies since 1945: A Tribute to Basil Davidson*, ed. Christopher Fyfe (London, 1976), 17–30; Lidwien Kapteijns, *African Historiography Written by Africans, 1955–1973: The Nigerian Case* (Leiden, Netherlands, 1977); Ndaywel è Nziem, "African Historians and Africanist Historians," in *African Historiographies: What History for Which Africa?* ed. Bogumil Jewsiewicki and David Newbury (Beverly Hills, Calif., 1986), 20–27. For a wider context of the role historians play in nation building, see the work of Gabriel Piterberg, published in Hebrew. For example, Piterberg, "The Nation and its Historians: National Historiography and Orientalism," in *Coloniality and the Postcolonial Condition: Implications for Israeli Society*, ed. Yehouda Shenhav (Jerusalem, Israel, 2004), 224–56. Contrary to the present study, Bogumil Jewsiewicki stresses the affinity between African and non-African historians of Africa. See Jewsiewicki, "Introduction: One Historiography or Several? A Requiem for Africanism," in Jewsiewicki and Newbury, *African Historiographies*, 9–17, esp. 9.

history. Several of Ghana's historians responded to this call, demonstrating again how historians shared and reinforced the objectives of the formal political state.

When the first generation of Ghanaian academic historians began to write, they drew on earlier publications on local history. Most of this literature was nonacademic and written by members of the local European-educated elite. Looking at these early roots of modern Ghanaian historiography reveals a marginalization of the slave trade. The earlier the writing, the more elaborate the discussion of slavery and the slave trade, usually in their internal context. Over the course of the twentieth century, the importance of these topics in African history gradually diminished, and they were frequently externalized to non-African contexts. Whereas pioneer historian Carl Christian Reindorf openly recognized the involvement of African states and societies in slavery and the slave trade, later writers such as Joseph B. Danquah ignored the topic completely. Others hardly dealt with these subjects and commonly saw them as representing the dark side of European history in Africa.⁴ The place of the slave trade in African history diminished as the historical narrative became focused on Ghana and was written by Ghanaians and for local readers. Ghanaian historians viewed the slave trade as a central feature of European-African relationships, though they minimized its significance in internal history.

This tendency to externalize the slave trade was not peculiar to Africans. Whereas some African writers depicted it as the European trade, in European literature it was sometimes referred to as the African trade. Africans largely viewed it as a European enterprise, which was facilitated by enlisting some African accomplices. This view placed the

⁴ See the difference in arguments between Carl Christian Reindorf and Joseph B. Danquah in Reindorf, *The History of the Gold Coast and Asante* (1889; repr., Accra, Ghana, 1966), 40–41, 43, 49–50, 53–54, 61–62, 64, 68–73, 78–79, 83–84, 92–93, 96, 105, 107–8, 111, 119, 123–24, 133, 156, 169–70, 265–66; Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God: A Fragment of Gold Coast Ethics and Religion* (London, 1968), esp. 188–206. When Danquah discusses Akan idioms, he completely disregards those that mention slavery. By comparison many idioms are found in Akosua Adoma Perbi, "Domestic Slavery in Asante, 1800–1920" (master's thesis, University of Ghana, 1978). See also Casely Hayford, *Gold Coast Native Institutions, with Thoughts upon a Healthy Imperial Policy for the Gold Coast and Ashanti* (London, 1903), 82–84; J. C. deGraft-Johnson, *African Glory: The Story of Vanished Negro Civilizations* (London, 1954), 152–66; John Mensah Sarbah, *Fanti National Constitution: A Short Treatise on the Constitution and Government of the Fanti, Asanti, and Other Akan Tribes of West Africa* (1906; repr., London, 1968), esp. 5, 22–23, 74–76; Hayford, *Ethiopia Unbound: Studies in Race Emancipation*, 2d ed. (1911; repr., London, 1969), 69, 171–73, 179, 192–93; J. W. de Graft Johnson, *Towards Nationhood in West Africa*, 2d ed. (London, 1971), 13.

moral responsibility for the slave trade on Europeans and portrayed Africans as victims of a cruel enslavement, very different from the soft form of domestic slavery that existed in Africa. Addressing slavery and the slave trade thus became increasingly difficult during the twentieth century, and the silence surrounding them grew. In addition to the dimension of time, space was also a significant factor. Most Ghanaian historians who wrote on slavery and the slave trade did so from outside the country, mainly in North America and Europe.

Inspired by decolonization, the first generation of African academic historians was determined to vindicate the past of their societies, to define a positive self-identity, to emphasize continuity between pre-colonial states and the new postcolonial states, and thus to furnish the latter with historical legitimacy. These goals required a critique of the colonial representations of Africa, which historians rejected as false ideological constructions that legitimated European domination. African historians sought to disprove prevalent colonial images of African passivity and backwardness and to replace them with positive images. Decolonizing African history, however, proved a difficult task. Apart from the problems posed by the limitations of available source material, new African historians were trained in European schools and assimilated not only the historical concepts and methods but also nineteenth-century European epistemology.⁵

By its definition as anticolonial, African historiography basically remained within the colonial discourse. New historians tried to emphasize those aspects of their past that could be viewed as modern achievements by European standards and to undermine European perceptions of themselves as civilizers of Africa. But this left intact the European definition of what constitutes modernity. A further challenge was to show Africans as subjects active in the shaping of their own history. Historians were commonly preoccupied with political history centered on the state and its formation and expansion. The state was perceived not only as a product of the historical process but also as its cause. Bogumil Jewsiewicki sees this predicament as unavoidable: "In order to join the Western historiographical tradition . . . was there any choice but

⁵ Ajayi, "The Place of African History"; Robert W. July, *The Origins of Modern African Thought: Its Development in West Africa during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (New York, 1967), 254–55; Kapteijns, *African Historiography*, 24–25; P. D. Curtin, "Recent Trends in African Historiography and Their Contribution to History in General," *General History of Africa*, ed. J. Ki-Zerbo (Berkeley, Calif., 1981), 1: 59; Arnold Temu and Bonaventure Swai, *Historians and Africanist History: A Critique; Post-Colonial Historiography Examined* (London, 1981), 5; Terence O. Ranger, "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa," in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Ranger (Cambridge, 1983), 211–62, esp. 225–26, 247–50, 261.

to write about the past in the form of a narration chronicling an inevitable march towards the nation-state?" African historiography was thus narrowly focused on an elite national genealogy and was open to the criticism of imposing a foreign model on the African past. Nevertheless most historians remained loyal to the national commitment.⁶

Some historians initially identified slavery and the slave trade as important issues in academic agendas. But because these topics were incompatible with the national project, African historians adopted Ernest Renan's suggestion that forgetting is not less important than memory for nations and tended to neglect them.⁷ It was not just difficult to reconcile slavery and the slave trade with the search for a usable past, which would offer the new nation historical roots, continuity, and unity, but perceived as dangerous insofar as they could be used to support colonial images from which Africans wished to distance themselves. The involvement of precolonial states such as Asante in the slave trade, for example, was hardly the sort of appropriate historical antecedent that historians sought for modern Ghana. Furthermore, because the slave trade stressed the conflictual historical experiences of slavers and enslaved, it was likely to bring up bitter memories, which might jeopardize the goal of national unity. Most dangerous, these conflicting historical experiences and memories could be perceived in terms of regional and ethnic distinctions.⁸ By avoiding the subject, historians could be seen as being nationally responsible.

⁶ Bogumil Jewsiewicki, "African Studies in the 1980s: Epistemology and New Approaches," in *African Historiography: Essays in Honour of Jacob Ade Ajayi*, ed. Toyin Falola (Ikeja, Nigeria, 1993), 218–27 (quotation, 219). See also C. C. Wrigley, "Historicism in Africa: Slavery and State Formation," *African Affairs* 70, no. 279 (April 1971): 113–24; Paul E. Lovejoy, "The Ibadan School of Historiography and Its Critics," in Falola, *African Historiography*, 196–99; R. Austen, "'Africanist' Historiography and Its Critics: Can There Be an Autonomous African History?" *ibid.*, 205–8.

⁷ Ernest Renan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation? Conférence faite en Sorbonne, le 11 mars 1882* (Paris, 1882), 2–3.

⁸ Historians who identified slavery and the slave trade as important issues were Terence Ranger and K. Y. Daaku. See Ranger, introd. to *Emerging Themes of African History: Proceedings of the International Congress of African Historians Held at University College, Dar es Salaam, October 1965*, ed. Ranger (Nairobi, Kenya, 1968), ix–xxii, esp. xiv–xv; Daaku, "The Slave Trade and African Society," *ibid.*, 134–40. On the neglect of slavery and the slave trade, see Albert van Dantzig, "Effects of the Atlantic Slave Trade on Some West African Societies," in *Forced Migration: The Impact of the Export Slave Trade on African Societies*, ed. J. E. Inikori (New York, 1982), 187–201, esp. 197; J. F. Ade Ajayi and Inikori, "An Account of Research on the Slave Trade in Nigeria," in *The African Slave Trade from the Fifteenth to the Nineteenth Century: Reports and Papers of the Meeting of Experts Organized by Unesco at Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 31 January to 4 February 1978* (Paris, 1985), 247–49. On the reasons for this neglect, see July, *Origins*, 254–55; Ranger, "Towards a Usable African Past," and, specifically, Ed Cairns and Micheál D. Roe, eds., *The Role of Memory in Ethnic Conflict* (New York, 2003), 3–8.

The extent of the neglect of the slave trade is evident in the early postgraduate work conducted in Ghana. Out of about three hundred master's theses and doctoral dissertations written at the University of Ghana from 1965 to 1990 in the social sciences, mostly in history, only one focused on slavery. Another thesis by a Ghanaian that dealt with the slave trade was written for a British university and focused specifically on British involvement in the trade. Slavery and the slave trade were relevant to the topics of eight additional dissertations, but only two of these meaningfully addressed them. Some ignored them completely, others partly; to the extent that the slave trade was mentioned, it was relegated to the background, irrelevant to understanding motives and actions of historical players. The marginalization of the slave trade was mostly presented as undisputed, but some openly contested its centrality.⁹ Suggesting a sense of uneasiness, historians commonly attributed the slave trade to others, mostly Europeans but also other Africans.

The silence of this generation of younger scholars followed the academic agenda shaped by the founding fathers of Ghanaian historiography who supervised their research. They were preoccupied with the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the precolonial political history of local societies, frequently their own communities of origin. Many studies featured a particular community "and Its Neighbours" in their titles, which gave historical depth to the unification of the different peoples who made up modern Ghana. They distanced themselves from topics such as the slave trade, which did not contribute to nation building. Some scholars did so by ignoring the slave trade altogether, whereas others evaded it by focusing on pre-eighteenth-century history or, more commonly, on the

⁹ The only master's thesis focused on the subject is Perbi, "Domestic Slavery." The British involvement in the slave trade is discussed in Sammy Tenkorang, "British Slave Trading Activities on the Gold and Slave Coasts in the Eighteenth Century and Their Effect on African Society" (master's thesis, University of London, 1964). The slave trade is mentioned in S. F. Affrifah, "Some Aspects of Hausa Economy, 1817-1857" (master's thesis, University of Ghana, 1965); Ebenezer Assianoah Agyeman, "Gyaman: Its Relations with Ashanti (1720-1820)" (master's thesis, University of Ghana, 1965); John Kweku Kumah, "Denkyira: 1600-1730" (master's thesis, University of Ghana, 1965); C. N. Uban, "Kano Emirate in the 19th Century: A Study of Political Development" (master's thesis, University of Ghana, 1965); Joseph Bidault Yegbe, "The Anlo and Their Neighbours, 1850-1890" (master's thesis, University of Ghana, 1966). The slave trade is ignored in Agyeman, "Gyaman"; Kumah, "Denkyira"; Uban, "Kano Emirate in the 19th Century"; I. Quaye, "The Ga and Their Neighbours, 1600-1742" (Ph.D. diss., University of Ghana, 1972); H. Nyinanse, "A Socio-Political History of Six Contiguous Mixed-Ethnic States of the Forest Hills of the Volta Region of Ghana from the Earliest Times to 1952" (master's thesis, University of Ghana, 1984). The centrality of the slave trade in the history of Asante was directly contested by Prince C. Karikari, "Asante and Her Warfare in the 19th Century" (master's thesis, University of Ghana, 1972).

postabolition period. The single publication specifically on the slave trade was written by a Ghanaian based in the United States. The problems posed by the slave trade were not reflected only by this tendency to avoid it. Historians who addressed it usually subordinated the slave trade to the overriding historical interest in the precolonial state. Ghanaian historians were thus mainly interested in the slave trade's relevance in explaining the political changes, especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The slave trade itself was of minor importance, merely a background to African-European and inter-African political struggles. The enslaved received little attention and sometimes were depicted as a natural resource, as in: the western part of the northern Gold Coast was "rich in gold, Kola [nuts], ivory and slaves." In the view of John K. Fynn, the slave trade was the greatest crime in history, but the victim of the greedy European and African slave traders was not the enslaved, but Africa, which lost its human resources. Viewing the slave trade from an external, primarily British perspective also allowed some discussion of the slave trade, albeit at a safe distance.¹⁰

African historiography did not offer an independent Afrocentric perspective on the slave trade but concentrated on refuting European stereotypical images of Africa formulated in the context of the abolition of the trade. According to these abolitionist images, the slave trade gave rise to states that were no more than institutionalized organizations for slaving and trading in slaves.¹¹ This abolitionist view, which gave great weight to the slave trade in the shaping of African societies, cultures,

¹⁰ John K. Fynn, *Asante and Its Neighbours, 1700–1807* (Evanston, Ill., 1971), title page ("and Its Neighbours"), 4, 43, 81; Agyeman, "Gyaman," 36 ("rich in gold"), 14, 24. On the conflict between the slave trade and nation building, see Toyin Falola, "Research Agenda on the Yoruba in the Nineteenth Century," *History in Africa* 15 (1988): 211–27, esp. 213. Slavery and the slave trade were completely or partly ignored by Kwame Yeboa Daaku, *Trade and Politics on the Gold Coast, 1600–1720* (Oxford, 1970); Francis Agbodeka, *African Politics and British Policy in the Gold Coast, 1868–1900: A Study in the Forms and Force of Protest* (London, 1971); Edward Reynolds, *Trade and Economic Change on the Gold Coast, 1807–1874* (London, 1974); D. E. K. Amenumey, *The Ewe Unification Movement: A Political History* (Accra, Ghana, 1989); Max Assimeng, *Social Structure of Ghana: A Study in Persistence and Change* (Tema, Ghana, 1999). The only publication on the slave trade was by Reynolds, *Stand the Storm: A History of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (London, 1985). An external perspective on the slave trade is found in A. Adu Boahen, "The African Association, 1788–1805," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 5, pt. 1 (1961): 43–64; Boahen, *Britain, the Sahara, and the Western Sudan, 1788–1861* (Oxford, 1964); Tenkorang, "British Slave Trading Activities"; E. A. Boateng, *A Political Geography of Africa* (London, 1978), 58–59, 137–38; Albert van Dantzig, *Forts and Castles of Ghana* (Accra, Ghana, 1980).

¹¹ R. Austen, "The Abolition of the Overseas Slave Trade—A Distorted Theme in West African History," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 2 (1970): 257.

and history, was problematic in several respects. It could imply that there was no independent African history; it supported the colonial justification of civilizing Africans from their brutalized cultures; and it prevented them from finding positive political foundations on which to base postcolonial independence. Ghanaian historians rejected such concepts, which denigrated precolonial African states. They tried to minimize the importance of the slave trade and to distance it as much as possible from African states, were generally critical of external economic explanations, and preferred internal political factors in explaining historical change in Africa.

Historians employed different, at times contradictory, arguments for this purpose. They exerted considerable effort to minimize the effect of the slave trade. Some distinguished between the intensity and nature of different societies' participation in the slave trade as an important factor in determining its influence on African communities. Historians discussed some local societies as little affected or not at all, and they drew examples of societies and states most heavily involved and influenced from non-Ghanaian areas, such as Dahomey. Other historians distinguished among economic, social, and political spheres. Edward Reynolds argued that the slave trade was economically marginal, even for Dahomey, which was closely identified with it. Sammy Tenkorang claimed that its effect on social changes in the Gold Coast was insignificant, though he later mentioned the expansion of education and urbanization in this period. He acknowledged the possibility for political and economic influences but related their extent to a questionable distinction between a "peaceful slave trade" and "a more positive policy of raiding."¹²

These kinds of contradictions could be seen as reflecting different historiographical commitments. While trying to stress African sovereignty, modernity, and agency, historians sometimes projected problematic features of the slave trade onto external factors and emptied them of their content in African contexts, which is especially evident in regard to domestic slavery. Whereas the enslaved, especially those destined for export, were sometimes perceived as commodities, their depiction in the internal context stressed their rights, occasionally making it difficult to understand why they are called slaves. Tenkorang, for example, defined domestic slaves as people of foreign origins (most probably from a different state and of a different ethnicity) and thought the word slave was inappropriate. He further argued that men and women who became

¹² Tenkorang, "British Slave Trading Activities," 262 (quotations), 264. Marginalization of the effect of the slave trade is found in M. A. Kwamena-Poh, *Government and Politics in the Akuapem State, 1730-1850* (Evanston, Ill., 1973), 20, 26-28, 132; Van Dantzig, "Effects," 188-201; Reynolds, *Stand the Storm*, 99-101.

domestic slaves were those rejected by European traders and that therefore domestic slavery was a by-product of the transatlantic slave trade. Many historians stressed the rights and social assimilation of slaves held in Africa, in contrast to the brutal form of slavery in the Americas. The mild nature of domestic slavery was indeed a part of a complex historical reality. But the emphasis only on this aspect produced a benevolent image of African societies and served to contradict prevalent views among contemporary Europeans, who justified the slave trade as merely a geographic transfer of slaves from one continent to another, which even improved their conditions.¹³

Another common argument used to diminish the importance of the slave trade contested the causal links made in abolitionist images between the slave trade and historical changes, such as the formation of large and centralized states. These changes were attributed instead to the vitality of African societies, which successfully adapted themselves to the challenges of the slave trade. In this way Ghanaian historians turned on their head the relationships between the slave trade and African states and credited the latter with restraining the trade's negative effects. A. Adu Boahen, perhaps the best example, saw the emergence of Fante and Asante in this period as a positive political revolution, "a noticeable advance in the direction of the evolution of the nation-state of Ghana." According to historians such as Boahen, this internal growth of a new political order counterbalanced the negative external effects of the slave trade, which had caused the destruction of existing political structures. This argument replaced the abolitionist view, which stressed the brutalizing effects of the slave trade on supposedly passive African societies, with an approach that emphasized their success not only in mitigating the destruction caused by the slave trade but also in building a new and better political order.¹⁴

This argument was supported by analysis of the nature of African-European relationships in the slave trade. Many historians stressed the superior power of Africans and the European dependence on African middlemen and rulers who basically dictated the terms of trade: "The

¹³ Tenkorang, "British Slave Trading Activities," 25-32. On the mild nature of domestic slavery in Africa, see Boahen, *Britain*, 130; Daaku, *Trade and Politics*, 28-29; Perbi, "Domestic Slavery," 25-47. Some examples of European justifications for the slave trade are given in Robin Law, "Dahomey and the Slave Trade: Reflections on the Historiography of the Rise of Dahomey," *Journal of African History* 27, no. 2 (1986): 237-67.

¹⁴ A. Adu Boahen, "Asante and Fante, A.D. 1000-1800," in *A Thousand Years of West African History: A Handbook for Teachers and Students*, ed. J. F. Ade Ajayi and Ian Espie (Ibadan, Nigeria, 1965), 165-90 (quotation, 169). On the political order in West Africa during the slave trade, see James Anquandah, *Rediscovering Ghana's Past* (London, 1982), 128-34; Reynolds, *Stand the Storm*, 1, 93.

Europeans soon learnt that in commerce their African counterparts were anything but a simple and ignorant people." This emphasis on the strength of the Africans' bargaining power has the disadvantage of implying a share of moral responsibility for the slave trade, but historians often evaded this implication by omitting specific reference to slaves among the commodities traded. Nevertheless the European presence on the coast was seen as influential in introducing modernity and in its effect on internal politics there. Kwame Yeboa Daaku, for example, was careful to combine external and internal factors in answering the question of why "empire-building" began in the interior. Whereas European interference prevented it on the coast, farther away African states "were able to present a *fait accompli* which the Europeans could do nothing with but accept." Imported firearms also contributed to state building, but Daaku limited their importance. He noted, "It can be said that the political know-how was available and that the introduction of firearms acted as a catalyst in the empire-building," thus shifting the emphasis from the external factor, the firearms, to the use Africans made of them.¹⁵

Firearms are related to the much-debated question of the link between the slave trade and warfare, especially to the question of whether wars were conducted for economic ends—to produce slaves—or if slaves were incidental to battles conducted for other reasons. Prince C. Karikari and Kwame Arhin's efforts to depict Asante as a respectable political entity disconnected its wars from the slave trade. These historians saw the causal link made between warfare and the slave trade as representing a typical abolitionist discourse used to highlight the so-called savage character of African states. The common view in Ghanaian historiography did not challenge this either-or approach and tended to see captives as a by-product of wars fought for political reasons, not for the purpose of generating slaves. Historians distanced warfare from the slave trade by separating causes and outcomes and by counterbalancing European contemporary sources with statements made by some African rulers, who denied that they had provoked violence to procure slaves for sale. They tended to categorize enslavement for economic reasons with slave raiding and kidnapping, as a phenomenon distinct from enslavement generated by political wars fought by states. Emphasizing the role of the former in the procurement of slaves for export was another way to distance African states from the slave trade. The attempt to downplay

¹⁵ Daaku, *Trade and Politics*, 40 ("Europeans soon learnt"), 152 ("empire-building"), 153 ("were able to present"), 24, 26; Van Dantzig, *Forts and Castles*, introd. The effect of the European presence is addressed by Tenkorang, "British Slave Trading Activities," 1; Van Dantzig, *Forts and Castles*, 84–85; Anquandah, *Rediscovering Ghana's Past*, 130–40. On firearms, see Daaku, "Slave Trade," 136–37. See also Fynn, *Asante and Its Neighbours*, 19–20.

the slave trade as a reason for increasing interstate hostilities is understandable as a means of producing a cleaner, more dignified image of the precolonial states.¹⁶ It fails to account for the massive increase in scale of the slave trade along the Gold Coast during the eighteenth century, however, and to explain fully the “commercialization of violence” that this increase entailed.¹⁷

Looking at the slave trade through the lens of the precolonial state remains the basic perspective even in two works of this period that are exceptional in dealing with slavery and the slave trade. Akosua Adoma Perbi’s research on nineteenth-century Asante was innovative in associating the state with slavery and the slave trade, rather than disconnecting them. She fully recognized the importance of slaving and trading in slaves in Asante society rather than underestimating them as others had done, and she elaborated on the central role of slaves in the Asante social and political order. Opposing perceptions of domestic slavery—a legitimate social institution in historical Asante society versus its modern delegitimization—are apparent in Perbi’s ambivalence in depicting it, combining soft images stressing slaves’ rights with slaves’ vulnerability to human sacrifice. Reynolds’s study of the nineteenth-century Gold Coast located the roots of the international market economy in Africa in the period of the slave trade. He associated the slave trade with the origins of modernity, in contrast to other historians who tried to extract a modern image of the precolonial state by disassociating it from the slave trade or by emphasizing its achievements despite the constraints that this trade imposed.¹⁸

One of the most sensitive issues in African historiography is African opposition to the abolition of the slave trade and slavery. No Ghanaian

¹⁶ For criticism of the links between warfare and the slave trade, see Kwame Arhin, “The Structure of Greater Ashanti (1700–1824),” *Journal of African History* 8, no. 1 (1967): 65–85; Karikari, “Asante and Her Warfare,” 186. The political nature of the wars is stressed in Daaku, “Slave Trade,” 135–37; Daaku, *Trade and Politics*, 31–32; Tenkorang, “British Slave Trading Activities,” 69–74; Van Dantzig, “Effects,” 190, 195–97.

¹⁷ Robin Law, *The Slave Coast of West Africa, 1550–1750: The Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade on an African Society* (New York, 1991), 346 (quotation). Examples for undervaluation of the increase of the slave trade in the Gold Coast are Tenkorang, “British Slave Trading Activities,” 40; Van Dantzig, *Forts and Castles*, 50.

¹⁸ Reynolds, *Trade and Economic Change*, 5, 36, 82–83; Perbi, “Domestic Slavery,” 53–194, 237–39. Ghanaian historiography is hardly unique in cultivating a soft and benevolent image of domestic slavery. See Boniface I. Obichere, “The Social Character of Slavery in Asante and Dahomey,” *Ufahamu* 12, no. 3 (1983): 191–205. For slavery in Ottoman Empire, Islamic, and Arabic societies, see Ehud R. Toledano, *Slavery and Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East* (Seattle, Wash., 1998), 122–25, 138–39, 141–44.

historian contested the morality of abolition. Instead these historians faced the challenge of how to explain African opposition to abolition without falling into the trap of the abolitionist view, which saw abolition as a symbol of European cultural superiority and opposition to it as representing, if not proving, African moral and cultural bankruptcy. As Boahen (together with J. B. Webster and H. O. Idowu) explained, "Slavery and the slave trade are still emotional subjects. Europeans and Americans frequently display a guilt complex about their eighteenth-century participation in the slave trade; then, turning to abolition, they overstress the humanitarian and the noble role . . . and assume a moral superiority over Africans . . . pointing out that Africans were the greatest opponents of abolition." Ghanaian historians challenged this problematic equation in several ways. Some tried to minimize African opposition to abolition by emphasizing African disapproval of slavery and the slave trade, including by rulers, and by describing Africans' roles in abolitionist struggles. Others demonstrated that all slave traders, not just Africans, opposed abolition.¹⁹ Emphasis on the external demand for slaves to explain the continued trading in slaves after its legal abolition implied a moral critique, that buying slaves was equally as disgraceful as selling them. Hence the key to understanding African opposition to abolition lay not in morality but rather in analysis of economic rationales, which were conceived as legitimate until the slave trade was legally abolished at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Furthermore some historians viewed abolition of the slave trade as far from being a liberation because legitimate commerce that replaced the slave trade brought about a drastic expansion of domestic slavery in Africa and worsened slaves' conditions. Historians widely discredited Britain's commitment to the abolition of slavery as an ideology, which was subordinated to its practical interests of economic profits and political stability. The British in practice limited their abolitionist zeal and condoned slavery in the Gold Coast. Its complete abolition took place only in the twentieth century and did not erase its legacy. Perbi concludes by stating that "the British abolition of domestic slavery in Asante [was] not a complete success story."²⁰ Historians explained African opposition to abolition as opposing the damage it caused rather

¹⁹ J. B. Webster, A. Adu Boahen, and H. O. Idowu, *History of West Africa: The Revolutionary Years; 1815 to Independence* (New York, 1970), 81 (quotation). For Africans' role in the struggle against slavery, see Boahen, *Britain*, 71–72. Criticism of continuing European demands for slaves is found in Reynolds, *Trade and Economic Change*, 37–38, 42–51, esp. 42.

²⁰ Perbi, "Domestic Slavery," 230 (quotation). Examples of critical views of the abolition are Kwamena-Poh, *Government and Politics*, 101, 110; Reynolds, *Trade and Economic Change*, 76, 84, 99, 120, 179.

than the principle. The strongest opponents were those whose economic and political status was undermined by abolition. This approach made it possible to map the focal points of opposition, to distinguish between different levels of it, and to contextualize it, as opposition was largely associated with the lack of available alternatives to the slave trade.

Abolition also necessitated changes in the social, political, and economic orders of local societies and in worldviews that had evolved during the long period of the slave trade. Historians who examined the profound structural adjustments that these changes involved were able to refute European criticism of African persistence in slaving as merely due to "laziness." The apologetic tone in the discussion of African opposition to abolition reached its peak when Ghanaian historians examined the heavy political price African states paid for abolition: increased warfare, state collapse, and a revolutionary change in African-European power relations. Whereas throughout the transatlantic slave trade these relationships had been characterized by interdependency, abolition undermined African sovereignty until it was completely expropriated. Therefore resisting abolition was for Boahen (with Webster and Idowu) a "natural reaction" because "the issue thus became one of sovereignty and independence, rather than the rights and wrongs of the trade in slaves."²¹

The slave trade thus proved a difficult subject in Ghanaian historiography and illustrated the internal contradictions between the different roles history was expected to fulfill. On the one hand, the main concern for the image of precolonial states, which was supposed to give historical depth to the decolonized state and to demonstrate African capability for self-government, required distancing precolonial states from the slave trade. On the other hand, marginalizing the slave trade and stressing African agency undermined European responsibility for the slave trade and weakened the moral blame that was equally needed to shatter the myth of European cultural superiority. Demonstrating African achievements in the context of the slave trade was also problematic, especially in the cultural milieu of Ghanaian historians who condemned it. African power, independence, and agency in this context could be interpreted as reactionary and as compromising the positive historical identity from which pride and inspiration were to be drawn in the present.

By avoiding or marginalizing the slave trade, historians did not fully grasp its significance as a major historical experience relevant to many local societies and individuals. Emphasizing African power during the

²¹ Reynolds, *Trade and Economic Change*, 179 ("laziness"), 37-47; Webster, Boahen, and Idowu, *History of West Africa*, 225 ("natural reaction"), 79 ("issue thus became").

slave trade failed to explain how inequality between Europeans and Africans was created. If historians were interested in refuting Eurocentric myths, the cost of distancing the precolonial states from the slave trade was to nurture new mystifications. The attempt to escape from the grip of two main European stereotypes of Africa—passivity and inferiority—created a contradiction especially in the context of abolition. Accounts of African opposition to abolition refuted passivity, but this kind of African agency reinforced the imputation of cultural inferiority. Because abolition was imposed, it could hardly be compatible with African agency or seen as an African achievement, nor was it possible to perceive Africans as its victims. The national historiography of the slave trade offered a partial understanding, which later became problematic in achieving its own goals. Marginalizing the slave trade and excluding the enslaved, seen as necessary to reinforce the new independence, would contradict national interests at the end of the twentieth century, when American descendants of the enslaved would become a source of hope in Ghana's struggle to rescue itself from underdevelopment and international marginalization.

At the end of the 1960s, there was a growing sense of crisis in African historiography in general. Some historians criticized the nationalist historiography for being apologetic and anachronistic and for failing to fulfill its main goals, including supporting decolonization. Their new aim was to identify the roots of inequality rather than to legitimize postcolonial states. Some African historians shifted the emphasis from African power, which contained the negative effect of the slave trade, to Africans as systematic victims of European agency, beginning in the slave trade and continuing thereafter. Ghanaian historians, however, unlike some of their Nigerian colleagues, basically persisted along the previous patterns with only changes of nuance. The best representative of an attempt to reconcile the original national goals with the new understanding of the slave trade was perhaps Daaku. He, more than his colleagues, elaborated on the politically, economically, socially, and culturally destructive nature of contact with Europeans on the Gold Coast but nevertheless tried to remain loyal to the original goal of highlighting African agency and achievement.²²

²² On the crisis in African historiography, see Wrigley, *African Affairs* 70: 122–23; Thomas Hodgkin, “Where the Paths Began,” in Fyfe, *African Studies*, 6–16, esp. 15; Ranger, “Towards a Usable African Past,” 17; Kapteijns, *African Historiography*, 29–30, 120–21. The need to search for the roots of inequality is found in A. G. Hopkins, “Clio-Antics: A Horoscope for African Economic History,” in Fyfe, *African Studies*, 31–48, esp. 32; Kapteijns, *African Historiography*, 127 n. 22. The most notable Nigerian historian who specialized in the slave trade is Joseph E. Inikori, who published extensively on the slave trade from the mid-1970s. Kwame

African historiography has been characterized by these contradictions and by the ways historians have tried to handle them: to account for the slave trade without either diminishing its negative effect or emptying the historical narrative of content and images that seem necessary for the era of independence; and to highlight past achievements to give historical depth and a positive image to the new states, while also offering a convincing explanation for their weaknesses but without reinforcing Eurocentric stereotypes. The voices of Daaku, Perbi, and Reynolds slightly nuanced the original approach of Ghanaian historiography. But they were far removed from the more critical approach of scholars who have begun to depict the slave trade as the foundation of a prolonged victimization of Africa. This continuity could be regarded as an achievement inasmuch as it remained loyal to the academic agenda shaped in Ghana. But this achievement was temporary.

The last decade of the twentieth century marked a quantitative change in Ghanaian historiography. Slavery and the slave trade attracted more attention and even began to appear in titles of articles in academic journals and books. The changing view of the slave trade, from a burden to a potential asset, could be viewed as the integration of Ghanaian historiography within the wider academic discourse in which the slave trade and related issues were of growing worldwide interest. The slave trade became the focal point of Atlantic studies, which highlighted Africa's role in the development of the Atlantic world. This change was also affected by identity politics, especially among African descendants in the Americas, for whom the experience of slavery and the slave trade was the cornerstone of historical identity. Interest in these issues became more tangible and relevant as awareness of the continuing existence of different forms of slavery around the world, including in Ghana, was growing during the 1990s.²³ Perhaps the key factor in putting the

Yeboa Daaku's main publications are Daaku, "Slave Trade," 136–39; Daaku, *Trade and Politics*, 1–20, 26–27, 44–47, 148, 180–81; Daaku, "Trade and Trading Patterns of the Akan in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," in *The Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets in West Africa: Studies Presented and Discussed at the Tenth International African Seminar at Fourah Bay College, Freetown, December 1969*, ed. Claude Meillassoux (Oxford, 1971), 168–81, esp. 169.

²³ Toledano, *Slavery*, 136 n. 29; Herbert S. Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (New York, 1999), 213–15. Notable examples of an Atlantic perspective are John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1680* (New York, 1992); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993). Sandra E. Greene relates a form of religious slavery in modern Ghana. See Greene, "Modern *Trokosi* and the 1807 Abolition in Ghana: Connecting Past and Present," in "Abolishing the Slave Trades: Ironies and Reverberations," ed. Scott E. Casper, Christopher Grasso, and Joseph C. Miller, special issue, *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 66, no. 4 (October 2009): 959–74.

transatlantic slave trade on the international agenda was the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

In the early 1990s, UNESCO launched two influential projects on the collective memory of the slave trade: the "Slave Route Project" and a related educational initiative, "Breaking the Silence." These projects included exhibitions and international conferences in Elmina and Cape Coast castles that aimed to commemorate and draw worldwide attention to the neglected subject of the slave trade. As a result Ghana established a national committee responsible for raising awareness of the slave trade through commemorative and educational activities. Ghanaian historians and the Ghanaian state did not initiate those changes but joined them. The external, international umbrella made it easier for them to approach this troubled topic in an internal context.²⁴ By the mid-1990s, the Ghanaian state had become the dominant force in reviving the memory of the slave trade in Ghana and actively encouraged its study and commemoration.

Internationally marginalized and economically impoverished, the Ghanaian government wished to capitalize on a global change of attitude toward the slave trade. The external funding and global legitimacy given to study of the slave trade as well as its developmental potential and the new links with the international arena explain the government's strategic decision to encourage the commemoration of the slave trade in Ghana. The Ghanaian government hoped to compete successfully with other West African states in attracting African American roots tourism. Closer ties among Africans across the Atlantic could also prove politically beneficial to African states, whose importance in foreign relations was fading at the end of the Cold War.²⁵ Changes in Ghanaian historiographical treatment of slavery and the slave trade followed formal government policy. Though a few historians such as Akosua Adoma Perbi had published works on slavery and the slave trade long before the government's newfound interest in the subjects, many scholars began writing on and researching the subjects only after the government had identified the slave trade as a preferred topic of discussion and study. Several Ghanaian historians responded to the change in government policy by assuming formal positions in the national Slave Route Project, which was assigned to the Ministry of Tourism. They contributed to

²⁴ Some elements of commemoration of the slave trade were already included in the castles of Elmina and Cape Coast in the 1980s, but these were substantially expanded in the 1990s. Akosua Adoma Perbi acknowledged the contribution of UNESCO's slave route project in a lecture on Africa and the Atlantic slave trade (lecture, University of Ghana, Legon, Nov. 26, 2003).

²⁵ Marguerite Michaels, "Retreat from Africa," *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 1 (1993): 93-108.

and participated in commemorations of the end of the slave trade, which were mainly designed to attract tourists to Ghana through events such as Emancipation Day.

Notwithstanding substantial changes in Ghanaian historiography, continuities should not be overlooked. Much of the political history written in the 1990s remained silent on slavery and the slave trade. A doctoral dissertation that examined cultural changes in colonial Asante, for example, skipped the issue of slavery because of its sensitivity. Publications, too, partially addressed or marginalized slavery and the slave trade, including Francis Agbodeka's economic history of Ghana, which criticized the limitations of political history and did not try to distance precolonial states from the slave trade. He denied the reality of domestic slavery, however, by calling the enslaved "serfs" and by emphasizing their social integration. In yet another instance, an article jointly written by a Ghanaian and a Brazilian-born scholar was innovative in focusing on an African-Brazilian community, the Tabon, in nineteenth-century Accra but largely ignored that the slave trade had been a key element in the creation of this community; the article mainly dealt with the community's local status and its cultural legacy. Its members' slave past was left out, but the authors mentioned that some had been slave traders and had owned slaves. A list of the slaves appeared in an appendix, but no use was made of it in the main text.²⁶ This study thus remained within the Ghanaian historical tradition, centered on slave traders and masters rather than on slaves.

Continuity was also evident in contemporary scholarship that emphasized the external, mostly European context. The slave trade and Danish plantation slaves were a case study of European domination for Yaw Bredwa-Mensah, whose research showed that "global encounters" affected even plantation slaves quite far from the coast. Benedict G. Der,

²⁶ Francis Agbodeka, *An Economic History of Ghana from the Earliest Times* (Accra, Ghana, 1992), 25 (quotation), introd., 25–27, 35. Silence on slavery and the slave trade remained in Agbodeka, ed., *The Ewes of Southeastern Ghana* (Accra, Ghana, 1997); Kofi Affrifah, *The Akyem Factor in Ghana's History, 1700–1875* (Accra, Ghana, 2000); N. J. K. Brukum, *The Guinea Fowl, Mango, and Pito Wars: Episodes in the History of Northern Ghana, 1980–1999* (Accra, Ghana, 2001); Wilson K. Yayoh, "Krepi States in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, new ser., 6 (2002): 67–81; Assimeng, *Social Structure*. W. J. Donkoh avoided slavery in her thesis because of its sensitivity. See Donkoh, "Colonialism and Cultural Change: Some Aspects of the Impact of Modernity upon Asante" (Ph.D. diss., University of Birmingham, 1994); Donkoh, interview by author, Dec. 8, 2003. Slavery and the slave trade are downplayed in Robert Addo-Fening, *Akyem Abuakwa, 1700–1943: From Ofori Panin to Sir Ofori Atta* (Trondheim, Norway, 2000); Alcione M. Amos and Ebenezer Ayesu, "'I am Brazilian': History of the Tabon, Afro-Brazilians in Accra, Ghana," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 6 (2002): 35–58.

in his account of the slave trade in northern Ghana, continued to externalize involvement in slaving and trading in slaves, but now the foreigners were fellow Africans. Looking at the slave trade from a northern perspective (mainly that of the Dagara-Dagaba minority), he argued that Asante was responsible for the imposed incorporation of northern Ghana in the transatlantic slave trade from the mid-eighteenth century. Asante heavily taxed the areas it conquered, and the slaves exacted either satisfied the European demand or were absorbed locally, which is the reason why “many Akan of today, particularly the Asante, are of northern origin.”²⁷

Perbi's reply to Der's argument reflected a typically national perspective. She imposed the modern definition of Ghana onto the past and added that historians had overstated Asante's involvement in the slave trade and had neglected that of other societies. Though “for three centuries, Asante became the largest slave trading, slave owning, and slave dealing state in Ghana,” slavery existed throughout Ghana, and all societies were involved in enslavement and trading in slaves, she insisted.²⁸ By emphasizing the similarities among Asante and other Gold Coast societies, Perbi nationalized slavery and the slave trade and normalized Asante. Though Der and Perbi did not directly engage with each other's arguments, the differences between them serve to illustrate both continuity and change in the historiographical discourse. By the mid-1990s, a highly sensitive issue was now being addressed despite its explosive potential in contemporary ethnic and social relationships in Ghana. Bitter collective memories between descendants of slavers and enslaved, which are evident in Der's arguments, threatened to jeopardize national unity. In contrast Perbi wished to divert the blame from Asante and Akans and spread it evenly to all Ghanaians. Perbi's argument is

²⁷ Yaw Bredwa-Mensah, “Historical-Archaeological Investigations at the Frederiksgave Plantation, Ghana: A Case Study of Slavery and Plantation Life on a Nineteenth Century Danish Plantation on the Gold Coast” (Ph.D. diss., University of Ghana, 2002), 249 (“global encounters”), 26–28, 268, 275; Benedict G. Der, *The Slave Trade in Northern Ghana* (Accra, Ghana, 1998), 15, 19, 32 (“many Akan of today”). The European context is emphasized in David N. A. Kpobi, *Saga of a Slave: Jacobus Capitein of Holland and Elmina* (Legon, Ghana, 2001), 16, 41; Kpobi, “Free to Be a Slave: Capitein's Theology of Convenient Slavery,” in *Merchants, Missionaries, and Migrants: 300 Years of Dutch-Ghanaian Relations*, ed. I. van Kessel (Accra, Ghana, 2002), 81–87, esp. 81. See also Akosua Adoma Perbi, “Merchants, Middlemen, and Monarchs: Dutch and Ghanaians in the Atlantic Slave Trade,” in Van Kessel, *Merchants, Missionaries, and Migrants*, 33–39. The European context is also emphasized in Bredwa-Mensah, “Archaeology of Slavery in West Africa,” *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, new ser., 3 (1999): 27–45, esp. 29.

²⁸ Akosua Adoma Perbi, *A History of Indigenous Slavery in Ghana from the 15th to the 19th Century* (Accra, Ghana, 2004), 17–23 (quotation, 23). This work is a published version of Perbi's dissertation. See Perbi, “Indigenous Slavery in Ghana from the 15th to the 19th Centuries” (Ph.D. diss., University of Ghana, 1997).

more historically accurate because the story of slavery and the slave trade was indeed common to most societies in the region, whereas Der's silence about the deep involvement of some northern communities in slaving and trading might be seen as representing an attempt to cultivate a modern sense of northern nationalism.

Perbi and Der were exceptional in writing and publishing on slavery and the slave trade in Ghana without external funding or collaboration, but distance from Ghana as well as external backing such as funding or joint ventures remained important factors in allowing Ghanaian academics to address these sensitive issues. This backing was particularly evident with a group of young archaeologists from the University of Ghana, headed by James Anquandah and funded by U.S. grants. Others continued to publish abroad; for example, Kwabena O. Akurang-Parry's dissertation on the abolition of domestic slavery was written for a Canadian university, Brempong Osei-Tutu's doctoral research started in an American university, and David N. A. Kpobi wrote his book after moving to the Netherlands.²⁹ This continuity illustrates the difficulty in dealing with this highly sensitive issue in a local (social and cultural) context. Distance from Ghana seems to have had a liberating effect, and external involvement furnished necessary support.

Historians in the 1990s did not divorce the discussion of slavery and the slave trade from European contexts, but they began to pay more attention to internal, African contexts. For the first time, the enslaved were recognized and even placed at the center of historical narratives. This recognition paved the way for their inclusion in African history more generally, which until then had been solely the preserve of states and elites. This change did not always mark a fundamental shift from a political history to a more critical social history. Though Akosua Adoma Perbi focused on slavery, her heroines were not the enslaved but rather historical and contemporary Ghanaian societies, with emphasis on the similarities in their attitudes toward slaves and their descendants. Other historians have focused their research on the enslaved, basing their nar-

²⁹ James Anquandah, *Cape Coast Castle and Fort St. Jago, Elmina, Ghana—Archeological Reconnaissance Survey Phase Two: Report for Midwest Universities Consortium for International Activities (MUCLA)* (Legon, Ghana, 1997). The excavations were initiated and funded by American factors such as USAID. Additional publications outside Ghana are Kwabena O. Akurang-Parry, "Missy Queen in Her Palaver Says De Gole Cosse Slaves is Free': The British Abolition of Slavery/Pawnship and Colonial Labor Recruitment in the Gold Coast [Southern Ghana], 1874–ca. 1940" (Ph.D. diss., York University, 1999); Kpobi, *Saga of a Slave*; Kpobi, "Free to Be a Slave"; Brempong Osei-Tutu, "The African American Factor in the Commodification of Ghana's Slave Castles," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, new ser., 6 (2002): 115–33.

ratives on oral traditions gathered from interviews. Such scholars have reported their difficulties in overcoming popular perceptions and accompanying sensitivities still prevalent regarding slavery and the slave trade. Der, for example, observed that though many Akan are of northern origin, "They however, fear or are reluctant to acknowledge their northern ancestry on account of the stigma attached to persons of servile status in Akan society."³⁰ Der's account embodies a different approach on the part of historians, from evading the troubled collective memory to facing it.

Ghanaian historians have begun to connect contemporary residues of slavery to the limited nature of abolition, but in a different way than before. Unlike historians who once suggested that the slave trade was abolished in 1807 and that domestic slavery disappeared with the British prohibition law in 1874, historians in the 1990s recognized that slave trading continued until the end of the nineteenth century and that different forms of slavery persisted into their day. Historians have widely discussed the reasons for this gap between legal abolition and historical reality, usually blaming the failure of abolition on the British, who condoned slavery and benefited from it while appearing to crusade against it. Whereas Perbi ascribed slaves' decisions to remain with their masters to the mild nature of domestic slavery, Kwabena O. Akurang-Parry blamed the alliance between the colonial state and the slave-owning elite for preventing abolition and trapping so many slaves in different relationships of servility and dependency. He attributed the eventual effective abolition of slavery mainly to the initiative of the slaves and their families. They, not official policy, shaped the pace and modes of liberation. This empowerment of the slaves, making them into active agents

³⁰ Der, *Slave Trade*, 32 (quotation). The African context of slavery and the slave trade is widely addressed in Akosua Adoma Perbi, "Mobility in Pre-Colonial Asante from a Historical Perspective," *Institute of African Studies Research Review* 7, nos. 1–2 (1991): 72–86; Perbi, "The Relationship between the Domestic Slave Trade and the External Slave Trade in Pre-Colonial Ghana," *Institute of African Studies Research Review* 8, nos. 1–2 (1992): 64–75; Perbi, "The Legacy of Indigenous Slavery in Contemporary Ghana," *Fass Bulletin: A Publication of the Faculty of Social Studies, University of Ghana, Legon* 1, no. 1 (1996): 83–92; Perbi, "The Acquisition of Female Slaves in Pre-Colonial Ghana: Labour or Love?" *Legon Journal of the Humanities* 13 (2002): 1–18; Perbi, "Merchants, Middlemen, and Monarchs," 33–39; Perbi, *History of Indigenous Slavery in Ghana*. Slaves are the center of the discussion in Akurang-Parry, "Missy Queen"; Kpobi, *Saga of a Slave*; Bredwa-Mensah, "Historical-Archaeological Investigations." Problems in collecting information on slavery through interviews are reported in Perbi, "An Evaluation of the Source of Information on the Slave Trade in Ghana" (paper presented at "The European Archives on the Slave Trade," UNESCO Slave Route Project Meeting, Copenhagen, Denmark, February 1998); Akurang-Parry, "Missy Queen," 39; Bredwa-Mensah, "Historical-Archaeological Investigations," 278; Perbi, "Oral Tradition and the Study of Slavery in Ghana" (paper presented at the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences Symposium on Oral Tradition, Accra, Ghana, 2002), 8.

in the shaping of their own history, has been a revolutionary innovation in Ghanaian historiography.³¹

Historians in the 1990s no longer excused African opposition to abolition and tended to address it directly. They also followed the fate of liberated slaves. Unlike historians who stressed the full social integration of slaves into their owners' families, Akurang-Parry, for example, found that the new arrangements between former slaves and masters perpetuated inequality and that many of the emancipated, especially female slaves, were subsequently trapped in different forms of bondage. He argued against those who emphasized assimilation and the ability of some slave descendants to rise to high levels in the host societies, insisting that most ex-slaves did not enjoy this experience. Instead he argued that the slaves' and their descendants' social integration was limited and superficial and that in practice they remained nonprivileged, stigmatized, and discriminated against within their own communities.³² Whether Akurang-Parry's argument is equally valid for all societies within Ghana does not undermine the significance of an ever-greater emphasis on the experiences of slaves in academic discourse.

Since the 1990s Ghanaian historiography has changed markedly, reflecting a new attitude toward slavery and the slave trade. Most obviously, the silence has been broken and these topics have been incorporated into the academic agenda. If slavery and the slave trade were hardly present in earlier postgraduate theses, at the beginning of the twenty-first century three doctoral dissertations and two master's theses on these topics have already been completed in Ghana, and others are in progress. These works identify slavery and the slave trade as a potential specialized area of study. Moreover, as the desire to distance precolonial states from the slave trade fades, more scholars acknowledge that slaves were sold by Africans and not just bought by Europeans. Historians are beginning to better contextualize domestic slavery within the social, political, and cultural structures of African states. Perbi, for example, has elaborated on the link between the development of domestic slavery

³¹ Kwabena Opare-Akurang, "Slaves of Salaga' and the Post-Emancipation Slavery in the Gold Coast and Neighbouring Territories, ca. 1874-1897," in *Identifying Enslaved Africans: The "Nigerian" Hinterland and the African Diaspora, Proceedings of the UNESCO/SSHRCC Summer Institute*, ed. Paul E. Lovejoy (Toronto, Ontario, 1997), 790-815, esp. 795. The reasons for the gap between legal abolition and historical realities are discussed in Perbi, *Fass Bulletin* 1: 83; Opare-Akurang, "Slaves of Salaga," 799-801, 808-9, 815; Perbi, *History of Indigenous Slavery in Ghana*, 152-96.

³² See Opare-Akurang, "Slaves of Salaga," 810; Kwabena O. Akurang-Parry, "Missy Queen," 357-90. Direct addressing of African opposition to abolition is found in Perbi, *Fass Bulletin* 1: 90; Perbi, *History of Indigenous Slavery in Ghana*, 161-62, 170-71, 194-96.

and the institutionalization of precolonial states. As states grew richer and stronger, she argues, their ability and inclination to base themselves on slave labor increased, and some became slaveholding societies. Perbi's work is representative of a larger recognition by Ghanaian scholars that slavery was institutionalized within the social and political structures and assimilated into the cultural norms of states and societies throughout Ghana.³³

Ghanaian historians have also increasingly recognized slavery's living legacy by investigating family traditions that preserve the memory of slave ancestry. Memory permits the reproduction of power relations between descendants of masters and slaves. It excludes the latter from certain titles no matter how remote their slave ancestry is or how well they are socially integrated. In addition scholars such as Perbi have addressed differences within the judicial system. Though civil courts tend to disqualify rulings based on recognizing slave ancestry, traditional courts continue to recognize it and thus to contribute to the maintenance of the status quo in the relationships between descendants of slaves and descendants of masters.³⁴ This overt recognition of the legacies of slavery marks yet another fundamental change in Ghanaian historiography. Whereas until the 1990s historians rejected slavery and the slave trade as antimodern, as supporting colonial stereotypes, and as threatening the national project, since the 1990s they have begun to confront the subjects directly. Ghanaian historians are beginning to view slaves and their descendants as victims and, instead of externalizing the blame, are engaging in introspection and self-criticism. They placed responsibility for needed social and cultural changes in the hands of the Ghanaian state and thus began to challenge it.

Though the external context of the slave trade remains important, the borders of African history have been extended to include the African diaspora. Bredwa-Mensah dedicated his research not only to the memory

³³ Perbi, *History of Indigenous Slavery in Ghana*; Akurang-Parry, "Missy Queen"; K. Boakye, "Breaking the Silence: Community Perceptions and Attitudes towards the Atlantic Slave Trade: A Case Study of Assin Manso" (master's thesis, University of Cape Coast, 2002); Bredwa-Mensah, "Historical-Archaeological Investigations"; N. Nilirmi, "The Search for Evidence of the Slave Trade—Historical Archeological Investigation at Kasana and Sankana, Upper West Region," (master's thesis, University of Ghana, 2003). Two Ph.D. dissertations on slavery and the slave trade by Brempong Osei-Tutu and A. Okoro are in progress. Both teach in the Department of Archaeology, University of Ghana. Different aspects of domestic slaving and trading are discussed in Akurang-Parry, "Missy Queen," 13; Bredwa-Mensah, *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 3: 29; Bredwa-Mensah, "Historical-Archaeological Investigations," 94; Perbi, *History of Indigenous Slavery in Ghana*, 20–23, 28–32.

³⁴ Perbi, *Fass Bulletin* 1: 90–93; Akurang-Parry, "Missy Queen," 378.

of those enslaved in Africa whom he studied but also to the millions uprooted from Africa and enslaved in the Americas who had not been studied. Nevertheless he hopes that his study will be helpful in understanding the social worlds Africans created in the diaspora. Bredwa-Mensah looks for Africa in the Americas because he assumes this is the direction of the research and wishes to contribute to it. Historians such as Der have shared the fruits of their research with wider audiences, including African Americans who are increasingly interested in family genealogy. Der writes, "The roots of African-Americans and West Indians of Ghanaian origins do not end at the forts and castles on the coast, nor in the coastal states and in Asante. They can be traced further to Northern Ghana."³⁵

Der expresses a widely held belief in Ghana that the north was the place of origin for most enslaved Africans taken to the Americas. He hints at the political and cultural dominance of the south, which not only continues to discriminate against the north but also has appropriated the story of the slave trade and its economic fruits. Ironically, tourists on the coast are being told the story of the transatlantic trade by potential descendants of enslavers and slave traders. Historians' change in attitude toward slaves, however, has the potential to affect social relationships between north and south, between communities, and even between descendants of slaves and masters within families. A greater recognition of the part of the north in the story of the slave trade, as Der suggests, may take a political form, as in a demand by northern leaders for a larger share of the national resources that are expected to increase with slave trade heritage tourism. The inclusion of the northern perspective into the narrative of Gold Coast enslavement could spark more dramatic changes, beginning a struggle over Ghanaian collective memory.

The discussion of slavery and the slave trade in an American context could indicate a change in understandings of issues of morality as well. Whereas in many cultures slavery is identified with shameful weakness, the human rights-based international discourse perceives slaves and their descendants as victims, not only worthy of protection and empowerment but also entitled to reparation.³⁶ To be identified as victims of enslavement is no longer seen as a social stigma to be concealed but rather as a mechanism to demand equal access to economic and political

³⁵ Der, *Slave Trade*, 32 (quotation); Osei-Tutu, *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 6; Bredwa-Mensah, "Historical-Archaeological Investigations," iii, 278–79.

³⁶ R. Austen, "The Jewish Holocaust as a Model for African-American Slave Trade Discourse: History, Politics, and Memory" (paper presented at "The Atlantic Slave Trade in African and African-American Memory," University of Chicago, May 23–25, 1997); Elazar Barkan, *The Guilt of Nations* (New York, 2000).

resources. Underlining the links with North America and drawing inspiration from its discourse of inalienable rights may indicate that a moral change toward descendants of slaves in Ghana itself is taking place.

By replacing enslaving states and societies with the enslaved as the historical subjects, a new generation of Ghanaian historians would attempt to show that Africans were not only slavers and traders of slaves but also victims of enslavement. Such a shift could help to tighten the ties between Africans and those of African descent across the Atlantic. The Ghanaian state has a vested interest in benefiting from these connections and therefore encourages these changes. The changes in Ghanaian historiography toward slavery and the slave trade are thus now compatible with shifting government policy. Ghanaian historians continue to operate in accord with the state, just as they did following independence, when they assumed national responsibility and mobilized themselves for the task of nation building.

The last decade of the twentieth century saw the beginning of a change in the national historiographical discourse in Ghana. Slavery and the slave trade, which had been largely marginalized, were now incorporated in the historical narrative. Whereas the collective memory in Ghana had previously tended to represent the perspective of states involved in slaving, a subversive narrative began to appear in the 1990s, one from a northern perspective, albeit still in its infancy, and a narrative of the descendants of the enslaved that originated outside the country. Ghana and its historians are facing complex challenges: how to respond to the narrative of the descendants of the enslaved, who are seen as vital to Ghana's existence, without undermining the national achievements of the historiographical discourse that had largely excluded them; how to maintain Ghana's fragile territorial entity and prevent the growth of a narrative that could jeopardize it; and how to break the silence on an issue over which previously accepted cultural norms required discretion.

Ghanaian historians are only beginning to confront these highly sensitive issues, which helps to explain their tendency to cling to formal, state-promoted memory that defines the discussion's borders and creates a zone safe from the tension between traditionally accepted concepts of slavery and modern universal values that condemn them. In this respect historians perceive their social role as carriers of formal collective memory. This memory is not imposed on them from above. As Marc Ferro reminds scholars, a national memory always represents only part of the nation and serves to defend the legitimacy and hegemony of elites. The similarities in social composition between the political and intellectual elites, mostly from southern Akan- and Ewe-speaking communities, partly

explain historians' attitudes. Only in the 1990s did Ghanaian historians begin to criticize the previous collective memory, especially its denial of existing forms of slavery and discrimination against descendants of slaves. This criticism may indicate a change in scholars' perception of their social role from one as professional rememberers to what Peter Burke has called "debt-collectors," the guardians of the awkward facts, whose task is to remind others of what they would prefer to forget.³⁷

³⁷ Peter Burke, "History as Social Memory," in *Memory: History, Culture, and the Mind*, ed. T. Butler (Oxford, 1989), 97–113 (quotation, 110); Marc Ferro, *The Use and Abuse of History; Or, How the Past is Taught* (London, 1984), xii–xv, 135–62.