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**Crafting livelihoods, negotiating challenges and realising
opportunities: An ethnography of life, learning and work
amongst young Ghanaian weavers**

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Thesis submitted for degree of PhD in Social Anthropology

Declaration

I have read and understood regulation 17.9 of the Regulations for students of the SOAS, University of London concerning plagiarism. I undertake that all the material presented for examination is my own work and has not been written for me, in whole or in part, by any other person. I also undertake that any quotation or paraphrase from the published or unpublished work of another person has been duly acknowledged in the work which I present for examination.

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Abstract

Crafting livelihoods, negotiating challenges and realising opportunities: An ethnography of life, learning and work amongst young Ghanaian weavers brings together the anthropology of work, apprenticeship and heritage to ask how, in contexts characterised by economic precarity, young Ghanaian craftspeople manage the various challenges and opportunities of their working and educational lives. The research is based on my own apprenticeship as an *agbamevo kente* weaver in a workshop in the eastern Ghanaian town of Kpetoe Agotime during thirteen months of fieldwork, conducted in three periods between September 2012 and June 2015. Tracing the development of the craft skills and social strategies which young weavers need to forge livelihoods in contexts of economic uncertainty, the thesis also considers how questions of heritage, religion and aspiration frame and intersect with young weavers' engagement with craftwork and their broader livelihood strategies. This project embeds an anthropological understanding of craft within wider discussions of young people's experiences of work, learning, livelihoods and aspiration. Taking a multifaceted approach to the various strategies and practices which constitute young weavers' livelihoods, the ethnography grapples with the complexities of young craftspeople's work and learning, and their ongoing attempts to carve out dignified, hopeful and meaningful lives in contexts characterised by social change and economic precarity. As such, grounded in the particular experience of Kpetoe's weavers, this thesis also speaks to wider concerns about contemporary experiences of youth in worlds increasingly riven by uncertainty and inequality.

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Niamh Collard, August 2016

Note on names

As a sign of esteem and recognition for the time and effort my workshop colleagues and others spent training me in the craft and teaching me about their lives, I have retained many of their names in the text. Gabriel, Francis, Bright, Felix, Kwaku, Selorm, Koenya, Mensah, Joshua, Nene, Samuel Agba and Tsiamiga Ampomah were all people I came to rely on in Kpetoe and their work deserves acknowledgement in the text. In cases where I thought revealing someone's identity might prove problematic, their name has been changed, as have the names of all child interlocutors.

Note on Ewe transliteration

Although Ewe is not the Agotime's native tongue (see introduction and chapter six for further discussion of Dangbe, the indigenous language of Agotime), it is the most widely spoken language in Kpetoe and this thesis contains a number of Ewe terms, particularly those relating to loom parts and the craft. Ewe was originally transliterated by missionaries from the Norddeutsche Missionsgesellschaft (North German Mission Society) during the second half of the 19th century, who took the Anlo form from the coastal area as standard (Meyer, 1999: 59). As such, the standard transliteration of Ewe seems to make more intuitive sense to German speakers than English. Borrowing from Geurts' (2002: xv) note on transliteration, Ewe supplements these symbols to the standard Roman alphabet:

Ð/d- Retroflex *ð* or alveolar flap. Sounds like a Spanish *r*.

Dz/ dz- Close to the sound *j* in English.

Œ/œ- Nasalized *e*, pronounced as eh, in bet, but with added nasalisation.

F/ f- Bilabial *f* pronounced with both lips as if blowing out a candle.

Ɣ/ ɣ- Fricative *g*. To produce this sound, make the air pass through a narrow passage formed by raising the back of the tongue toward the soft palate.

N/ ɳ- The sound *ng* in English sing or singer.

ɔ/ɔ- Open vowel *o*, pronounced as *aω* or the *o* in cost.

U/ʊ- Sounds like a *u* in English pronounced with both lips.

Ewe terms are italicised in the text and I have generally followed the transliteration of weaving terms offered by Kraamer (2005), supplementing Kraamer's terms with those offered by my interlocutors in the workshop which have generally been transliterated using only the Roman alphabet. The order of the glossary follows the Roman alphabet.

Introduction

I visited Ghana for the first time in 2010 as an undergraduate student of anthropology and African art history. Courses in the ethnography and arts of West Africa, along with a summer spent reading Ben Okri, Amma Darko and the brilliant Chinua Achebe had filled me with wanderlust and so, I set aside savings and what was left of my student loan for a plane ticket. The original plan had been to head to Nigeria, but the advice of a teacher rerouted me to Ghana where I spent four happy weeks criss-crossing the southern part of the country in the back of a *trotro*. Along the way I travelled to the weaving villages of Bonwire in the Ashanti region and Kpetoe Agotime in the Volta region¹ to see how narrow-strip cloths were made and to speak to young weavers about their experiences of the craft. What I learnt there became an undergraduate dissertation about weaving apprenticeships.

Visiting the workshops where craftspeople gathered to weave richly patterned *kente* and meeting the young men who made a living from their looms, it was clear that a full understanding of the lives of young weavers was bound up with the ways that the material, social and bodily practices of weaving work were enmeshed with the wider complexities of life in the crafting community. As an erstwhile artist I was keen to draw the practical and embodied processes of making together with social analysis of the lives of young weavers. I had also graduated in the middle of the global economic crisis that begun in 2008, and I experienced firsthand the struggles young people were facing finding work and opportunities in the UK. Coming of age myself during a period of increasing economic precarity, in which the effects of rising inequality have been felt most starkly by the young (see Standing, 2011:65-79; Honwana, 2013: 31-37; Dorling, 2014: 26-54) has left an indelible mark on this project, with the acute awareness of the uncertain position I found myself in fundamentally shaping the ethnography I came to write. Moreover, one of the important lessons of my fieldwork was a sense that the struggles for work and livelihoods faced by my generation in post-crisis Europe were challenges that young people in Ghana (and, indeed, elsewhere across the continent) have long had to contend with. The process of researching and writing this thesis has taught me much

¹ The Volta region is predominantly Ewe-speaking, with Ewe being the principle language used in Kpetoe Agotime. Thus, the area is referred to here as “Ewe-speaking” and Agotime weaving is described as belonging to the broader traditions of “Ewe weaving”. However, despite the longstanding relationship between the Agotimes and their Ewe neighbours, the Agotime retain a distinct identity and history of their own as Adangbe people, and community elders retain Dangbe as their mother tongue.

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about the relationship not only between our shared struggles, but also the strategies we deploy in search of dignity and hope. As the Comaroffs have written:

"...given the unpredictable, under-determined dialectic of capitalism-and-modernity in the here and now, it is the south that often is the first to feel the effects of world-historical forces, the south in which radically new assemblages of capital and labor are taking shape, thus to prefigure the future of the global north." (2012: 12)

So, in September 2012, I returned to Ghana as a doctoral researcher and embarked on a workshop apprenticeship (*dorsosoro*/*dɔsɔrɔvi* in Agotime Ewe) in the eastern township of Kpetoe Agotime (see fig. 1), learning to weave *agbamevo kente* amongst the young men I had met two summers before.

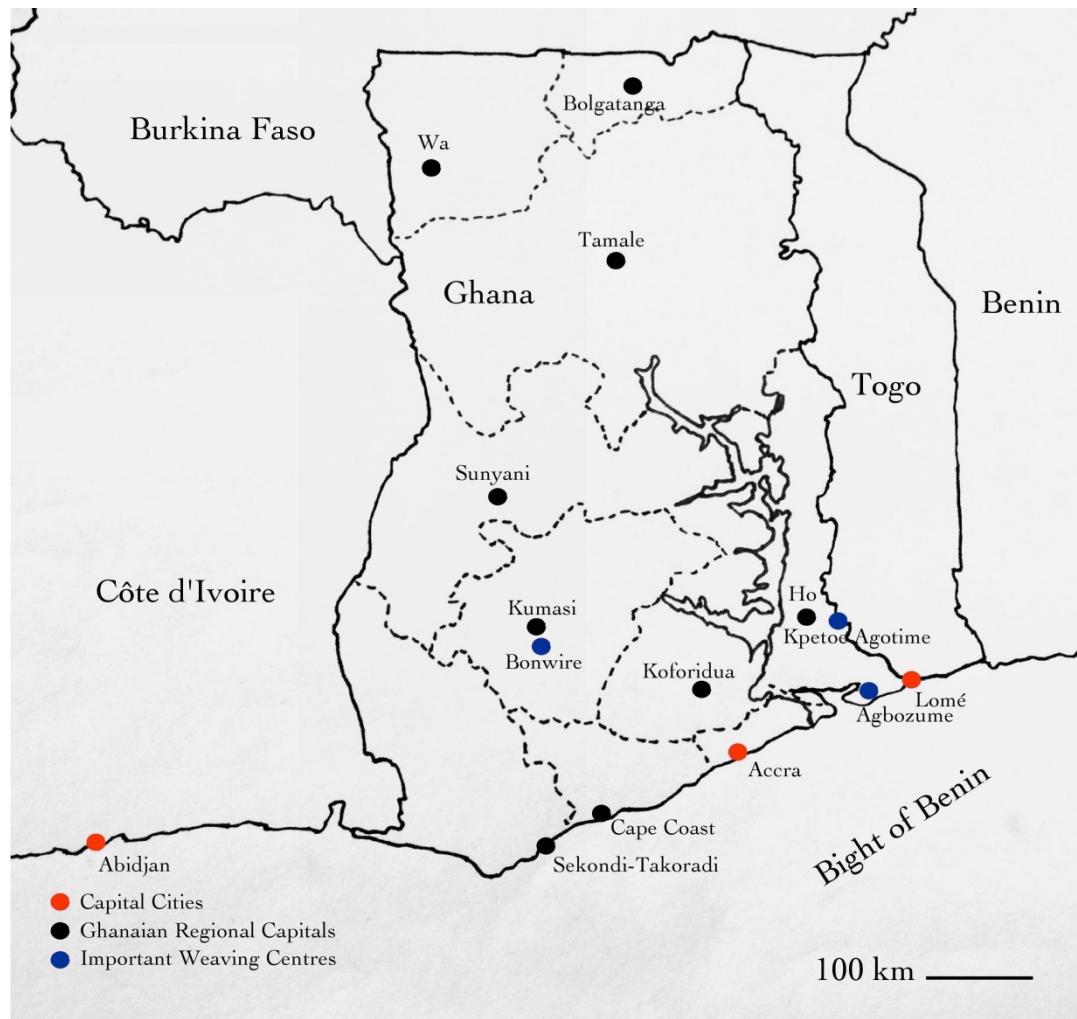


Figure 1- Map showing Ghanaian regions, regional capitals and important weaving centres, including Kpetoe Agotime along the Togolese border

Joining a community workshop that housed about thirty looms, I worked almost exclusively with male weavers. As an apprentice, I learnt the craft over a period of twelve months and this thesis draws on the insights and experience of the thirty or so weavers with whom I shared the workshop during 2012-2013. A core group of seven or so craftsmen, however, inevitably facilitated my entry into the

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workshop, shaping my experience as a learner weaver, and they became primary interlocutors. These men were constant members of a workshop that was characterised by the movement of weavers in and out, pursuing various work and educational strategies, and their regular presence led me to work closely with them. Whilst the eldest workshop member was in his seventies and the youngest was only fourteen, these men, like the majority of workshop weavers, ranged in age from their late teens to their mid-thirties and considered themselves to be “youths”. Shared aspirations for education and sustainable livelihoods bound the workshop community together, although access to educational opportunities was unevenly distributed and implicated in community hierarchies. All workshop members had elementary education, most having completed part or all of their secondary schooling as well. Four had qualifications from higher educational institutions, although at the time of fieldwork only one of these men had professional employment. My key interlocutors were drawn from all three groups and between them had a broad range of educational and work experience. Christianity is an inescapable and fundamental part of life in southern Ghana and religion also played a role in constituting the workshop community. Whilst certain traditional religious practices were important, all my colleagues identified as Christians and a range of sects and denominations were represented in the workshop. The diverse ties of language and ethnicity were also crucial in fostering collegiality and a shared sense of purpose amongst the weavers. Situated along Ghana's border with Togo, Kpetoe is the capital of the Agotime Traditional Area, a cross-border community of thirty-seven towns and villages. Agotime is located in the middle of the Ewe speaking heartlands of both Ghana and Togo, and thus its history has often been conflated with that of their better known and more populous Ewe neighbours. Indeed, Ewe identity itself is a product of the diverse historical entanglements between various polities speaking related, if not mutually intelligible, languages, the colonial legacy and an Ewe nationalist movement that sought secession for Ghanaian and Togolese Ewes in the years leading up to independence (see Nugent, 2003). The predominance of their Ewe neighbours has meant the language most commonly spoken in Agotime, and the workshop, is Ewe². English is Ghana's official language and was spoken fluently by

² The Agotime language Dangbe belongs to the Ga-Adangbe group of languages, a branch of the Kwa language family. In Ghana, Ga- Adangbe is also spoken by the people of Adangbe, Krobo, Kpone, Shai, Ningo, Prampram, Osu, La and Ada. However, in Agotime today Dangbe is the first language only of people from Agotime Afegame, a village close to the Togolese border, and none of the weavers I worked with spoke it.

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all but the youngest of children and those Kpetoe residents who had grown up in Togo; this research was therefore conducted in English with a smattering of Ewe.

The decision to focus on Agotime weaving rather than return to Asante was partly motivated by my earlier studies in the art history of West Africa, where the literature on Asante weaving, craft and heritage is significantly more developed than that of weaving traditions east of the Volta (see Ross, 1998). Kpetoe was also chosen on the basis that I had initially planned to work with female craftspeople (Lamb, 1975: 154; see also Ross: 1998 and Ross & Adu-Agyem, 2008). *Kente* weaving, like many narrow-strip weaving traditions across the region, has historically been a male prerogative and much of the considerable literature detailing craftwork in West Africa has focused on male practices (Aronson, 1989: 159; La Violette, 1995: 170-171). Women's weaving, on the other hand, has been little studied and more closely associated with the broader vertical looms that are not a feature of the craft in Agotime (Gilfoy, 1987: 11). Craftwork in Agotime continues to be highly gendered, and alongside the belief that menstruation constitutes pollution of the loom, weaving is also seen by some to pose a threat to women's fertility³ (Ross, 1998: 102; 137). Nonetheless, Lisa Aronson's account of women weavers in Akwete, Nigeria provides a compelling case study of female craftspeople achieving self-sufficiency through tight control of the dissemination of craft knowledge (1989: 151-153) and in the Ghanaian context, Margaret Peil's study suggests that in comparison to their contemporaries in Akan-speaking areas, Ewe-speaking women are more involved in craft occupations (1975: 85). In recent years a growing number of Ewe-speaking women have taken up weaving and Kpetoe is home to a small number of female weavers who tend to work from home, where they were better able to balance the demands of childcare and household work alongside their weaving. However, despite starting my apprenticeship under the tutelage of Koenya, the workshop's sole female member, I was forced to rethink the project when her struggle to make ends meet from the craft led her, shortly after my arrival, to leave the workshop and take up street hawking⁴. With the home lives of weavers largely closed to me, the fieldwork quickly came to focus on questions of young men's work and learning in the weaving workshop (see Downey et al, 2015: 187). The circumstances of Koenya's departure focused my attention on crafting as a form of work, and the complex interconnections

³ Koenya, the sole female member of the Agotime workshop confirmed these claims, saying that her friends were wary of weaving lest sitting in the loom rendered them barren.

⁴ Koenya's choice seemed to confirm the sense that women's vocations in Ghana are often most closely related to market work and hawking (see Clark, 1999a, 1999b, 2010; Robertson, 1984; Overå, 2007)

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between making textiles and weavers' broader livelihood strategies became increasingly important to understanding life in the workshop and young people's experiences of economic precarity. A period of ill-health interrupted my apprenticeship, forcing me to return home to London to recuperate in the spring of 2013. Upon returning to Ghana that summer I continued my education in the craft under the careful tutelage of Gabriel, Francis, Bright, Kwaku and the workshop as a whole, as well as working alongside community elders who had much to teach me about issues of craft heritage and history. Whilst the main fieldwork upon which this thesis is based ended in November 2013, a return trip to Kpetoe during the summer of 2015 allowed me to develop a deeper understanding of the role that religion plays in the lifeworlds of young craftsmen, as well as giving me the chance to visit old friends and see how life in the workshop had changed over the course of several years.

This thesis, then, draws on longterm fieldwork and sustained engagement with Kpetoe's crafting community to examine how young Agotime weavers live with the challenges and opportunities of their working and educational lives and asks what role aspiration plays in these processes of accommodation. The ethnography looks at the educational and working opportunities available to young craftspeople and considers the relationship between opportunities and the various strategies weavers employ in negotiating access to the social and material resources that underpin their livelihoods⁵. In the following section I offer some brief notes on the history of *agbamevo kente* weaving, its relation to traditions of narrow-strip weaving across West Africa and the contemporary use and significance of *kente* cloths. The second part of this introduction gives a brief overview of the broader social and economic context in which young Ghanaian weavers are working. I then turn to my entry into the field, discuss questions of methodology and outline how the research was conducted. The introduction concludes with an overview of the scope and structure of the thesis.

***Agbamevo Kente* weaving in context- historical links and contemporary trends**

Agbamevo is the Agotime Ewe term for the hand woven textiles which Ghana is famous for. Composed of narrow hand-woven strips of fabric sewn together, edge to edge, *agbamevo* is known more commonly by the Ewe and Asante word *kente*. Unlike the *nyamakalaw* caste of Mande bards, blacksmiths, potters and leatherworkers (see

⁵ The concept of livelihoods is used throughout in reference to the complex and dynamic matrix of social and material resources and strategies that people deploy in forging a means of living and well-being (Hajdu et al, 2011: 253)

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Conrad and Frank, 1995; Frank, 1998; Kasfir, 2013) or Tukolor weavers in Senegal (see Dilley, 1989), *agbamevo* weavers were not organised according to caste, and craftspeople emphasised that learning to weave was a choice. Agotime *agbamevo* cloths are woven on four-pole, two-heddle looms called *agbati* in Agotime Ewe. These are either carpentered with wooden bases so as to be portable, or fashioned from wood poles planted into the ground⁶; the workshop's impenetrable concrete floor means that weavers use looms of the carpentered, portable variety (see plate 1).

Four-pole looms of various types, used to weave narrow strip cloth, are to be found all the way across West Africa from those built by Tukolor weavers in Senegal (see Dilley, 1987b) to those used by Yoruba weavers in Nigeria to make *aso òkè* cloths (which are also double-heddle looms like those used in Ghana; see Clarke, 1998) right through to looms found in Western Cameroon (Clarke, 1998: 26, see fig. 2). A lack of archaeological evidence, the wide distribution of this loom type and the complex, contested histories of interaction across the region make it impossible to definitively trace the origins of West African narrow-strip weaving. However, woven cotton fragments dated between 500 B.C.E and 300 C.E. have been found at Meroe in present-day Sudan, and there is some suggestion that West African weaving might have originated from there (Ross, 1998: 75). During travels to Mauritania in 1068 the Cordoban Arab chronicler al-Bakri described a narrow-strip loom that was being used there to weave cotton fabric (Gilfoy, 1987: 15). Along with fabric fragments dated to the 11th century recovered from burial sites along the Bandiagara cliffs in Mali, we can surmise that the craft has been practised in the region for almost a millennium (Clarke, 1998: 30). In the context of Ghana⁷ and the former Gold Coast, Malika Kraamer argues that the use of two pairs of heddles most likely originated in Agotime first, before being adopted more widely and coming into use in Asante weaving (2006: 38). Furthermore, Kraamer highlights that weavers in both the Ewe-speaking areas and Asante craftspeople weave their cloths “wrong” side up, working

⁶ Doran H. Ross has noted that, unlike in Asante, Agotime weaving tended to happen on planted looms fixed into the ground. During my fieldwork, some fifteen years later, it was common to see both planted and carpentered looms, the latter being used more commonly by weavers working inside. Carpentered looms used indoors were valued as they meant weavers could work undisturbed by rain or the depredations of animals and insects.

⁷ This thesis uses “Ghana” to refer only to the present-day nation-state situated along the West African coast, and not to the ancient royal kingdom of Ghana which existed between the 4th and the 13th centuries and extended across the lands which are now southeastern Mauritania and western Mali. At independence in 1957, present-day Ghana borrowed the name in honour of the once-mighty kingdom to the north.

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with the obverse face of the cloth uppermost in the loom⁸. This and the fact that they share a system for counting and threading the warp elements through the double heddles strongly suggests there is a common point of origin between Asante weaving and traditions in Ewe-speaking areas. Furthermore, it has been noted that over the course of the last half of the 20th century, cloths produced in the central and northern Ewe areas- which include Agotime- have shared many characteristics with Asante weaving (Ross, 1998: 21). This points to a longstanding and complex history of exchange between various traditions. However, the relative uncertainty surrounding the origins of the craft remains evident in the ways that young Agotime weavers speak about their work, with narrow-strip weaving being seen as a form of “traditional” work inherited from the ancestors⁹ and passed down through male kinship ties. One way or another, weaving practices were well established in the Ewe-speaking areas east of the Volta by the 18th century (Kraamer 2005: 165).



Plate 1- Carpentered, portable loom in the Agotime workshop, November 2012.
Photograph by author.

⁸ Throughout this thesis I use the term “in the loom” both because work at an *abgamevo kente* loom involves the weaver sitting inside the loom structure and this was the way Agotime weavers themselves described their work.

⁹ The mythic origins of a number of narrow-strip weaving traditions have been well-documented, from the famous spider-weaver Ananse of Asante legend, to the Dogon myth in which weaving was part of the process of creation that worked to bring order and shape to a chaotic world (Gilfoy, 1987:17). Roy Dilley’s work on Tukulor weaving in Senegal provides an interesting way of thinking about the relationship between a craft’s origin stories and the contemporary ritual significance of weaving work (1987: 262-265)

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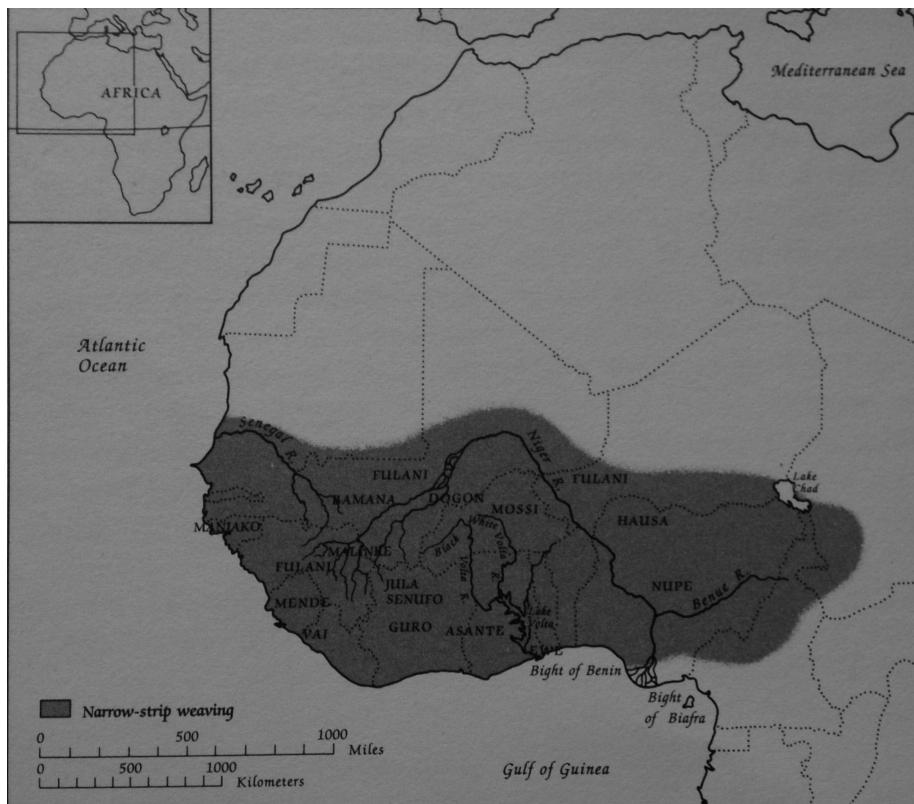


Figure 2- Map showing distribution of narrow-strip weaving traditions across West Africa. Taken from P. S. Gilfoy, 1987, *Patterns of Life- West African Strip-Weaving Traditions*, Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Agotime textiles are also importantly embedded within the weaving traditions of their Ewe neighbours in eastern Ghana and across southern Togo, including in the Ghanaian coastal area of Agbozume and in the Togolese hinterland at Notsé, which is considered the ancestral homeland of Ewe-speaking people (Posnansky, 1992: 113; see fig. 3). Whilst there are important historical and linguistic distinctions to be drawn between Agotime and their Ewe speaking neighbours, not least the fact that elders in the local crafting community spoke Dangbe and not Ewe as their mother tongue, for many the distinction between the Agotime and Ewe peoples is a faint one (see Nugent, 2008: 948;). Indeed, people deploy a regional Ewe identity¹⁰ contingently alongside other social and linguistic markers such as ones' natal community, hometown or the places where a person's forefathers hail from (see Kraamer, 2005: 50). In the everyday usage, workshop members described their work as "Ewe kente" (see plate 2) and referred to themselves both as Agotime and Ewe depending on the context and who they were speaking with. The relationship between Agotime weaving and the textile traditions of other Ewe-speaking people in

¹⁰ Paul Nugent's work on the contested 20th century history of the Ghana/Togo border provides an account of the ways Ewe identity has been forged in the crucible of shifting regional, national and international politics (2003).

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eastern Ghana and Togo is bolstered by the fact that until the mid 20th century a variety of weaving practices were widespread across the region, with the concentration of the weaving industry in Agotime and along the coast arising, most likely, in the past fifty or sixty years (Kraamer, 2005: 63-66). Thus, weaving has been a part of the routine work of many households right across this area in living memory and looms can still be found in many villages. At the start of my fieldwork, when I was based in the regional capital Ho, I even happened to live close by a family where the sons would weave outside of their compound, surrounded by the bustle of the city.

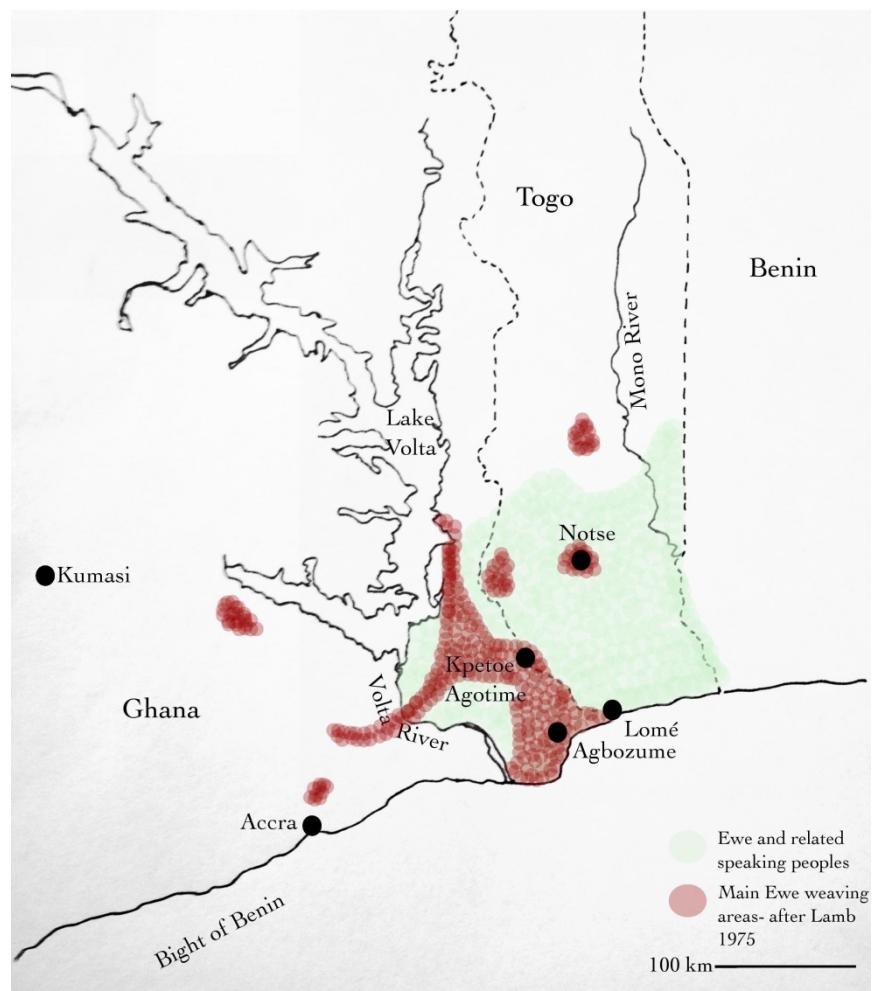


Figure 3- Map showing the Ewe-speaking areas of Ghana, Togo and Benin, the distribution of Ewe weaving and key weaving centres. Adapted from M. Posnansky, 1992, "Traditional Cloth from the Ewe Heartland" in *History, Design, and Craft in West African Strip-Woven Cloth- Papers Presented at a Symposium Organised by the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution February 18-19 1988*. Washington D. C.:

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National Museum of African Art



Plate 2- "Trust Ewe *kente*" signboard advertising the Agotime workshop, Kpetoe Agotime, June 2013. Photograph by author.

These complex ties of belonging are matched by material links between Agotime weaving and the textile traditions of the coastal Ewe peoples. Not least of these is that the market for textiles is fluid and customers commission and buy cloths based on a range of intertwined factors that include personal aesthetic preferences alongside social considerations such as the occasion the cloth will be worn for. Novelty and diversity are valued and there is a market in Kpetoe for cloths from the coastal areas and beyond. At the time of my study, the owner of the largest *agbamevo kente* shop in Kpetoe, Israel Kporku, made regular trips down to the coast to buy cloths which he sold alongside Agotime textiles. What is more, during 2012 and 2013 the workshop was home to Selorm, a university graduate and craftsman from the coast, who had brought his loom up to Agotime from the south of the Volta region¹¹ a few years before whilst he was carrying out his national community service in

¹¹ Before embarking on his studies Selorm had travelled to Nigeria to weave and was thus influenced by the textiles traditions of southern Nigeria as well as those of his home on the Ghanaian coast and those in Agotime. Complex interactions between various weaving traditions have long characterised the craft and Kraamer notes that the economic turmoil and rapid inflation which Ghana experienced during the mid 1990s led to the migration of large numbers of Ewe weavers, particularly from the coastal areas, to Nigeria, continuing a well-established trend that endured throughout the 20th century (2005: 59-60). Axel Klein's ethnography of the Seabeach Ewe of coastal Nigeria provides an account of these movements and the diverse livelihood strategies Ewe people have deployed in securing a living as migrants without land rights in Nigeria (1998).

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Agotime. Selorm worked in a distinctive style that differed from his workshop colleagues in Agotime, using yarn that he bought in coastal markets.

The overlap between various local and regional modes of weaving has made for a vibrant textile tradition, which in Ghana at least¹², is a prominent part not only of cultural displays, but also of the celebrations which punctuate people's lives, where *kente* is worn to mark the birth of a baby, during puberty rites, for weddings and at funerals. Alongside the *kente* wrappers which are draped and tied to cover the body¹³, cloths are also increasingly tailored according to the latest fashions, into suits, dresses, skirts and tops. Foster, who had a loom in the Kpetoe workshop, had a sideline selling purses, shoes, jewellery, bags and ties that were made from *agbamevo kente* strips he wove himself, and local craft NGO Folkfine hoped that they could tap into local and tourist markets for *kente* accessories. Middle-class Ghanaians with salaried jobs or businesses of their own form the largest market for *Agbamevo kente*, and although most families will have a few heirloom cloths, the well-off continue to commission new pieces to wear on special occasions. In this way the craft is sustained and good *kente* continue to be worn with style and prestige.

The sociality of craftwork and its relation to uncertain economies

In thinking about how young weavers navigate the challenges and opportunities of their working and educational lives, this study focuses on the material and social strategies craftspeople deploy in forging livelihoods for themselves and their families. De Certeau's analysis of the relationship between strategies and tactics has been useful for considering the power dynamics at play in weavers' livelihood practices (1984: xvii-xix, 34-37). My use of "strategy" throughout this thesis stands as a hybrid between de Certeau's "strategies" and "tactics". This is because although young weavers must opportunistically negotiate situations that are not solely of their own making, and they occupy uncertain positions within social and economic hierarchies, they are not without agency to define their own narratives, plan their next moves and work to position themselves and their families within rewarding social relations. Aspiration was a powerful means by which my interlocutors took pride in their work and the possibilities for their futures, and to

¹² Both Kraamer (2005: 66) and Nugent (2010a: 91-92) remark on the increased popularity of *kente* cloth on the Ghanaian side of the border and although I did not work in Togo, when speaking with friends in Kpetoe about this disparity they agreed that the fashion for *kente* in Ghana was more marked.

¹³ Both men and women wear *kente*. Men's cloths are usually made up of 24 strips and worn in a togalike fashion, whilst women usually wear a set of two cloths each composed of about 16 strips, one worn as a wrapper and the other draped over one shoulder.

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label it “...an art of the weak” (de Certeau, 1984: 37), does, I think, undermine their ongoing struggles and triumphs. James Ferguson points to how these strategies are shaped, arguing that aspirations are “...powerful claim[s] to a chance for transformed conditions of life [to] a place-in-the-world [and] a standard of living ” (2006: 19). Thus, young people's strategies emerge from ongoing experiences of social and economic precarity combined with the hope that, in the face of uncertainty, “[they] may become other or more than [they] presently [are or are] fated to be...” (Jackson, 2011:xi-xii).

As a condition of neoliberalising regimes, precarity¹⁴ is experienced in terms of the stark material and social realities of economic uncertainty. In this, it is a dearth of opportunities, rather than simply a lack of income, which hamper young Agotime weavers' aspirations¹⁵. Far from being anomalous, uncertainty, precarity and crisis have long underpinned experiences of capitalism. Nonetheless, the global ascent of neoliberalism from the 1970s onwards has seen the severity and frequency of these crises multiply across the world (Harvey, 2010: 54), to the extent that far from being exceptional, crisis is now experienced as a chronic condition. In his research with youth in Guinea-Bissau, Henrik Vigh (2008) has looked at what happens when social, economic and political crises become endemic and form the contexts within which people must live and make sense of their lives. Such a framework is helpful when thinking about how young people in Agotime contend with chronic uncertainty, the unfolding of ongoing challenges and the accretion of trauma.

Whilst significant and serious challenges arise from uncertain economies, they are also bound up with the creation of spaces for change and opportunity as the material and social world are rapidly remade (Harvey, 2010: 119-120). In the case of young Agotime weavers, Pentecostalism, shifting occupational strategies and changing educational opportunities were all part of the multiple challenges and opportunities that they faced. Weavers' experiences of work and learning attest to much broader changes occurring globally, in which precipitous economic and social transitions are mainstreaming marginality and precarity, rather than being an anomaly, is becoming increasingly normalised (see de Certeau, 1984: xvi-xvii).

¹⁴ I use ideas of precarity in this thesis, rather than the language of marginality, because it encapsulates the possibility of resistance whilst helping us to find common cause between a broad spectrum of experiences under neoliberalism. Guy Standing writes compellingly of the way that thinking in terms of precarity can help to “...revive an ethos of social solidarity and universalism [which] is the only principle that can reverse growing inequalities and economic insecurity.” (Standing, 2011: 155; see also Waite, 2008; Standing 2014)

¹⁵ Whilst material scarcity in Agotime was an ongoing challenge, following Jackson's work on well-being, the fulfilment of young craftspeople's hopes and aspirations also lay in the cultivation of social ties and the “...capacity to realise ourself in relation to others.” (2011: 60).

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Situating young weavers' work and learning strategies as responses to this unfolding terrain of endemic crisis, the ethnography contributes to an emerging literature on how chronic uncertainty is socially mediated, and what the social implications are when precarity becomes the norm. Thus, whilst the business of getting by in Agotime is entangled with the economic and social currents at work in Ghana and the wider region, this ethnography speaks to broader questions about how work, learning and sociality are being reconfigured in the face of rapidly shifting capitalisms.

Shaped by extractive mineral industries¹⁶, the vagaries of a globalised system premised on inequality, and the depredations of neoliberalism that function as "...a set of uneven social struggles" in which "...the weak state and strong market do not produce and distribute life, its qualities, vitalities and borders evenly or equitably" (Povinelli, 2011: 17; 162), the Ghanaian economy has long been characterised by chronic uncertainty. At the dawn of Ghana's independence in 1957, under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah and his CPP (Convention People's Party), the country embarked on an ambitious socialist programme of modernisation, premised on Nkrumah's anti-imperialism and made up of heavy investment in infrastructure projects and social services (Nugent, 2012:172). Poor economic growth and a decline in the world price of cocoa, Ghana's key export, pushed the Ghanaian government to rely on external investors and bank loans to finance these projects. Whilst the government stockpiled debt the country did benefit from investment in healthcare and educational provision. However, living standards for most Ghanaians fell during the early 1960s (Nugent, 2012: 178). A coup in 1966 forced Nkrumah into exile in Conakry, the Guinean capital, and he lived there under the protection of the then Guinean president Sékou Touré until his death six years later.

A succession of military and civilian regimes followed throughout the late sixties and seventies, accompanied by state violence and the devastating disintegration of the Ghanaian economy. Between 1970-1979 GDP growth rate slumped to -0.1%, industrial production declined by 1.5% and the agricultural activities which had long formed the basis not only of government revenues but also, more importantly, people's livelihoods fell by 0.2% on average (Nugent, 2012: 205-206). In 1979, the charismatic Jerry Rawlings staged the first of two coups which would see him running the country over the course of more than twenty years (see

¹⁶ Ghana is Africa's largest producer of gold and has significant reserves of bauxite, manganese, diamonds, aluminium and silver, as well as offshore oil reserves amounting to 3 billion barrels. See Ferguson (2006: 194-210) for a discussion of the economic and social impact of extractive industries in sub-saharan Africa.

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Nugent, 1995). Rawlings and his People's National Defence Council (PNDC) pointed to the failings of a bloated and overly bureaucratic state as the root of Ghana's ongoing economic woes (Nugent, 1995: 51). Furthermore, a drought in 1983 lead to crop failure and bush fires ravaging cocoa farms, and the famine was compounded by a mass expulsion and return of over a million Ghanaians who had migrated to Nigeria in search of work and opportunities (Nugent, 1995: 108). With hunger stalking the country and lacking the foreign exchange reserves to import enough food for the population, Ghana's government declared a national emergency and set about constructing a programme of economic liberalisation in concert with Western donors, the World Bank and the IMF (Nugent, 1995: 113).

As an early adopter of the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) which were to be rolled out across sub-Saharan Africa, Ghana devalued its currency, sought to reduce budget deficits, incentivised the private sector and liberalised prices (Loxley, 1990: 10). Whilst adherence to austerity won the Rawlings regime respect with their international creditors, the acute and long-lasting effects of these poorly conceived and implemented "reforms" were enormous. Many thousands of public sector jobs were lost, shrinking both the state and the country's middle class, wages fell across the board and inequalities in health provision grew (Nugent, 2012: 347). What is more, a widespread antipathy towards austerity from both the unions and agricultural workers meant that the government was pursuing SAPs without popular support (Nugent 2012: 343-344). SAPs continued throughout the 1990s and have laid the foundations of a faltering economy in which any "...gains were fairly marginal as well as unevenly distributed." (Nugent, 2012: 346). Ghana's experience of SAPs also importantly presaged that of other countries in the region and across the continent, and Kate Meagher's research on the impact adjustment policies have had on garment and shoe manufacturers in southern Nigeria offers insights onto the wide-ranging social and economic change wrought by neoliberal reform. Meagher writes:

"Far from encouraging network development, the economic pressures of liberalisation and globalisation have served to erode institutionalised practices and relations of trust... Faced with the erosion of community based production networks, and a lack of formal institutional support...informal producers have turned to new types of ties to solve problems of economic coordination and assistance under increasingly squeezed and unstable conditions [calling on] a wider range of personal ties, as well as...the creation of new ties..." (2010: 81)

I embarked on this project in the hopeful years following the discovery of the Jubilee oil field in 2007, when Ghana had managed two peaceful handovers of government and was being touted as the golden child in a seductive narrative of

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"Africa rising". It was hoped that oil revenues would fuel the motor of development and the then NPP President John Kufuor hailed "...the discovery as a 'shot in the arm' that could propel his country to the status of an 'African Tiger' in a few short years." (Gyimah-Boadi and Kwasi Prempeh, 2012: 94). Indeed, GDP growth reached a peak of 14% in 2011 and between 2009 and 2013 GDP per capita grew from just under \$1100 to over \$1800 (World Bank data).

However, despite initial high hopes, the discovery of oil has made little difference to the lives of ordinary Ghanaians, with Agotime weavers expressing their frustration that this perceived windfall has not translated into improvements in public services or their livelihood opportunities. Scheduled daily power outages across the whole country¹⁷ have worsened in recent years, crippling the economy and prompting angry protests against President John Mahama. There is also evidence that the "curse" of mineral resources is undermining the political process, entrenching a toxic politics in which clientelism rules and voting patterns have become increasingly ethnically polarised (Gyimah-Boadi and Kwasi Prempeh, 2012: 102; see also Abdulai and Hickey, 2016 for further discussion of the effects of competitive clientelism).

A shortfall in projected oil revenues, a fall in world gold prices, rapid inflation and currency devaluation lead Mahama's government to seek a bailout from the IMF, which was approved in April 2015. Worth up to \$900 million over the course of three years, the conditions of this latest programme include an increase in VAT, a freeze in public sector wages and hiring, and cuts to subsidies which will further undermine the longterm wellbeing and livelihood strategies of people across the country. Craftspeople's work is expensive and in a context of unfolding crisis, prospective customers forego the beauty of a new *agbamevo kente* cloth for the necessities of food, shelter and medicine. The resourcefulness of West Africa's craftspeople in the face of multiple and ongoing challenges has been eloquently explored in Trevor Marchand's rich ethnography of Djenné's masons, and that work underpins the approach taken here (see Marchand, 2009a: 191-207; 2013). Although Agotime weavers have always lived with economic uncertainty, these latest setbacks and the wide-ranging, long-lasting effects of SAPs and economic uncertainty have been felt in the Kpetoe weaving workshop. Commissions have dried up as middle-class customers have lost their jobs or seen their frozen wages lose value to inflation

¹⁷ In the summer of 2015 the Volta Region was enjoying more hours of power per day than Accra. There President Mahama had been christened "Mr Dumsor", *dum so* being the Twi and Fante term for "off and on", referring to the sporadic and unreliable availability of power.

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and currency devaluation and the workshop, once home to up to thirty weavers, was in the summer of 2015 hollowed out, with less than half that number actively working there.

It is against this background of uncertainty that young weavers develop patterns of sociality¹⁸ which work to buffer them from the worst of the economy's depredations. In his work with young men in Côte d'Ivoire, Sasha Newell argues that the moral economies that maintain and develop social relations emerge from "...the micropolitics of sociality in a society where the state, rather than providing the infrastructural framework within which society unfolds, is encompassed within the informal economics and the face-to-face interactions of social networks." (2012: 67). I would argue that this point holds in Ghana too, where the broader forces of the economy are not only acutely felt in the everyday but are also routinely contested and, to varying degrees, reconstituted at a personal level.

This ethnography, then, explores these dynamics, looking at the intersections between young weavers' educational and working experiences, their social and material strategising, and an uncertain and shifting economic terrain. It focuses on the challenges and opportunities of uncertainty, as well as the pleasures and pains of contemporary *agbamevo kente* weaving. In negotiating ever-changing terrain, Agotime's craftspeople were working not only to secure dignified livelihoods for themselves and their families (see Fischer, 2014: 91-110; 161-180; Standing, 2011: 155-183) but also to establish integrity in the face of uncertainty. Integrity in this sense served to anchor young craftspeople's multiple and changing experiences within a coherent narrative (at least partly) of their own making. Young Agotime weavers' aspirations for education formed part of a widely accepted and "socially legible" narrative of progress, whereby current conditions of hardship and struggle might be transformed into a more prosperous and dignified future. Whilst these hopes could, in reality, seem misplaced as rising levels of education do little to ameliorate the challenges young people face (see Mains, 2012: 72-73), this narrative was a powerful one which worked to anchor young craftspeople's efforts and helped them to foster a sense of their integrity. For weavers with families, the hope that their children might benefit from the educational and occupational opportunities that they themselves missed out on gave meaning to their ongoing efforts for dignified and

¹⁸ The processual character of ideas about sociality are useful for thinking about how Agotime weavers negotiate the shifting terrain of their work and learning and this term is used alongside the notion of social networks throughout this thesis to discuss both the processes and relationships at work (see Long and Moore, 2014).

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meaningful livelihoods. For others, who were childless or living apart from their families, integrity came from the sense of self fostered in the practice of Pentecostal Christianity. Integrity was also to be found in the social valorisation of entrepreneurialism as well as the ingenuity, skill and pride that young craftspeople vested in their work. As such, this ethnography shows not only how Agotime weavers managed the routine struggles of working with uncertainty, but also how they tried to make sense of and give meaning to this work in terms of hope, aspiration and dignity.

Youth and hopefulness amongst Kpetoe's weavers

Acknowledging the impact upon Kpetoe's weavers of uncertain economies and unfolding crises entails careful consideration of how ideas of youth and hopefulness are configured in the workshop. Neoliberal reforms and the economic uncertainty they have wrought have not only fundamentally shifted the opportunities and challenges faced by young people across the world, but they have also remade the category of youth itself (De Boeck and Honwana, 2005: 1). "Youth" in African contexts refers to a social, rather than a biological category, with seniority defined according to a complex calculus of social prestige and economic power (Argenti, 2007: 7; Janson, 2014: 15). In this, youthfulness indexes subordination within politically charged hierarchies (Bayart, 2009: 112), whilst elder status was conferred on those in positions of relative power, sometimes regardless of biological age. With the advent of endemic economic crises, conventional routes to social adulthood have become increasingly blocked and young people's struggles to forge livelihoods have translated into protracted periods of dependence (De Boeck and Honwana, 2005: 9; Hansen, 2005: 4; Mains, 2007: 660; Masquelier, 2013: 470). As stated by Honwana:

"African youths today are grappling with a lack of jobs and deficient education. After they leave school with few skills they are unable to obtain work...become independent...and gain social recognition as adults...They are forced to live in a liminal, neither-here-nor-there state; they are no longer children who require care, yet they are not yet considered mature social adults. They lead a precarious existence; their efforts are centred on trying to survive each day." (2013: 3-4)

It is, however, in these ambiguous spaces of "waithood" that young people are actively forging new ways of strategising uncertainty (Honwana, 2013: 4; Masquelier, 2013: 474-475). Whilst many of Agotime's workshop weavers define themselves as "youths" and were keenly aware that they "...might never become adult in the normative social and cultural sense" (Hansen, 2005: 4), they did not passively occupy positions of marginality. Instead, not only were their experiences of precarity

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becoming increasingly mainstream, but they were also shaping their lives with hope and determination. The relationship between youthfulness and hope has been remarked upon in ethnographic work focusing on the, often painful, disjuncture between young people's aspirations and the challenging realities of their everyday lives (Schielke, 2009: 172). However, hope can play a productive role and a key contribution of this ethnography is in linking studies on youth in Africa with debates in the emerging field of the anthropology of hope and aspiration.

The fundamental importance of hope in the ethos of the workshop and its members was clear in the place's name- *Agbenenyo*, Agotime Ewe for "things should be better". Implicitly recognising the challenges the weavers faced, *Agbenenyo* pointed towards the work that was called for in forging a more hopeful future. Anthropologist Jarrett Zigon has theorised hope as arising out of the determined struggles to live through difficult times and accommodate ourselves to the social worlds in which we are emplaced (2009: 259-262). In this, hope is actively maintained through perseverance and focus "on the task at hand" (Zigon, 2009: 265), such that it becomes a property of everyday resilience, enabling young people to withstand experiences of exclusion (see Schepers-Hughes, 2008).

A place of productive activity, the workshop offered a focus for the efforts of young men who otherwise struggled to find work. As studies of un- and underemployed youth elsewhere in Africa have shown, time spent without a "proper" occupation weighs heavily (Hansen, 2005: 10; Mains, 2007: 660; Masquelier, 2013: 473; Gilbert, 2014: 219-220). Of the value of an occupation in giving meaning and structure to ones' life, Christenson writes:

"...Occupations are key not just in being a person, but to being a *particular* person, and thus creating and maintaining an identity. Occupations come together within the contexts of our relationships with others to provide us with a sense of purpose and structure over time in our day-to-day activities. When we build our identities through occupations, we provide ourselves with the contexts necessary for creating meaningful lives..." (1999: 547, cited in Solomon, 2013)

In focusing their efforts on weaving and committing themselves to routine work in the loom, workshop members invested themselves, at least in the moment, in craftwork as an occupation. This alleviated the burdens of idleness and offered them work to be proud of. Given the interlocutory nature of hope, produced in the context of social relations between weavers, their customers and the wider community (Crapanzano, 2003: 16), the workshop was a place that generated hopefulness.

Young weavers were also navigating uncertainty in the course of their personal relationships and challenging accepted notions of what constituted youth. In

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accommodating the uncertainties of insecure work with their desire to have families, craftsmen were looking with hope to the future. Marriage is an established route to social adulthood in Africa, with male and female personhood across the continent being tied to processes of marrying and bearing children (Honwana, 2013: 104; Janson, 2014: 15). Nicolas Argenti's Cameroonian ethnography attests to this link, highlighting how men who died bachelors in the Grassfields were denied a proper burial "...'because they never became people'- a slogan otherwise used with reference to slaves" (2007: 46). The mainstreaming of economic precarity and prolonged periods of youthful dependence have led to a precipitous increase in the numbers of youth who lack the resources to marry and find themselves excluded from adulthood. The challenge of forging livelihoods at a time of ongoing crisis has not, however, stopped all young people marrying and starting families. Islamic piety amongst Tablighi youth in the Gambia leads them to marry young (Janson, 2014: 16) and religious reformers in Niger have responded to the constraints of structural adjustment and a faltering economy by calling for token bride payments that will allow youth to marry earlier (Masquelier, 2005: 68).

Shifts in family structure amongst Agotime's young weavers have not been prompted by religious reform, so much as a process of pragmatic accommodation between changing religious ideals and economic realities. Marriage remained a goal which some attained. For others, such as Gabriel, Kwaku and Selorm, the time to marry had not arrived and bachelorhood offered them the freedom to move around for work. Most interestingly, though, were Francis and Bright, who were married with children and yet still referred to themselves as youths. Despite their complete commitment to their wives and children, the manner in which they had married departed from their matrimonial ideals. Whilst these partnerships had been recognised "traditionally" through the offering of cloth and drinks to the bride and her family, both men said that their marriages had not been marked in the church. For Bright the main obstacle was a reluctance to proselytise which impeded his full membership of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Francis, on the other hand, lacked the financial resources which would be needed to throw the large party which was expected of a church wedding, although he and his wife were saving in preparation, eventually, for a celebration. The emphasis placed on validating marriage in the church and through conspicuous displays of hospitality points to the increasing importance of religious ideals that are being formed in conjunction with the rise of Pentecostalist practice and neoliberal discourses. The lived contradictions of these

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discourses and practices has created a situation where men who are married with children feel they have yet to attain full adulthood and continue to see themselves as youths. The ethnography thus complicates ideas about what how categories of youth and adulthood are defined in Kpetoe and contributes to ongoing debates in youth studies.

Much like weaving itself, parenting and the work of providing for a family formed a nexus around which craftsmen's aspirations coalesced. Hopes were vested in children and fathers dedicated their work to bettering the chances they might offer their sons and daughters. Achievement, along with the hope that it could inspire, was then, "...more than the successes or gains of a lone striving individual..."(Bayly, 2013: 161), and was socially mediated by weavers and their families.

Weaving in the Agotime workshop- the opportunities and challenges of a fieldwork apprenticeship

From the time of my first visit to Kpetoe in the summer of 2010, my interests lay in understanding the link between the material processes of making and the social relationships which underpinned craftwork. Before embarking on an undergraduate degree in anthropology and art history, I had spent a year working in a fine art studio. Having experienced there how knowledge emerges from doing and the ways that sociality is patterned by making practices¹⁹, when it came to planning my doctoral fieldwork several years later I knew that embarking on a fieldwork apprenticeship with Agotime weavers would form the basis of my study. I looked forward to working once more with my hands and learning about the craft from inside a loom and I approached fieldwork as an opportunity to re-engage with the creative and practical problem-solving that I had enjoyed in the art studio.

On a fundamental level, apprenticeship and fieldwork share a footing in that both are structured around sustained experiential encounters, between initiate and master, interlocutor and researcher, consisting of "...a working through, partly through repetition, of experiences that progressively teach...what might be...important and vital to our interlocutors." (Hammoudi and Borneman, 2009: 271). Describing apprenticeship as a "...rite of passage that transforms novices into

¹⁹ There is a considerable overlap between the dialectical process of learning to craft and the practice of fieldwork, conceived of as "...the registering of sensory impressions in a (temporal) process of mutual subject-discovery and critique, an engagement with persons, groups, and scenes that takes into account the dynamics of our interactions..." (Borneman and Hammoudi, 2009: 19)

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experts...[and] a means of learning things that cannot be easily communicated by conventional means...employed where there is implicit knowledge to be acquired through long-term observation and experience" (Coy, 1989: xi-xii), Michael Coy could well be describing the disciplinary initiation of the anthropologist through fieldwork. Indeed, immersion in and sustained social contact with the people, spaces and practices of the anthropologist's "elsewhere" lead the researcher to increasing participation within their new community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 49-52; see also Dilley, 1999: 45), such that all fieldwork is effectively apprenticeship.

Moreover, as a newcomer hoping to learn about craftwork in Agotime, I hoped that a fieldwork apprenticeship would offer me a role that would be "socially legible"²⁰ for my interlocutors, as well as opening up a space in which I could become immersed in a new community of practice (see Coy, 1989 c; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Djohari et al, 2016). In becoming an apprentice, I took on a role that "made sense" to my colleagues and friends in Kpetoe in a way that anthropologist or fieldworker would not. What is more, in asking experienced weavers to teach me their craft, I was engaging them in a process with which they were familiar and expert (Coy 1989 c: 117; Downey et al, 2015: 186). This position opened up crucial opportunities for dialogue and learning, and unlike interviews, which could be experienced as interrogatory and unsettling of local social hierarchies, apprenticeship allowed me to safely occupy a position of ineptitude whilst my mentors practised their work with familiarity and skill (Downey et al, 2015: 191). Indeed, direct questioning sometimes yielded bafflement from my workshop friends, whilst the slow and steady accretion of know-how that came with long hours in the loom more often lead to understanding the social and material world of the workshop.

Arriving in Ghana in September 2012 my priority was to establish a relationship with members of the workshop in the hope that they would agree to take me on as a learner weaver. In the first months of fieldwork I was "on trial", observing my mentors in the loom and helping now and then with the preparation of weft bobbins. This time gave my would-be masters a chance to observe me at work and gauge my commitment to learning the craft and becoming a part of the workshop community. It also offered me the opportunity to become attuned to the feeling of

²⁰ Despite taking on a role that "made sense" in the Agotime workshop, I was also called upon often to explain what exactly I was doing in Kpetoe. Goffman terms this part of fieldwork "telling practices" (1989: 126). Apart from attempts to explain anthropology, my "telling practices" revolved around the idea that I sought to translate the work of weaving and life in the workshop into a written account. In this, the idea of ethnography and the process of writing structured my fieldwork experience in important ways, as my interlocutors understood that a "book" would result from my time in the workshop.

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everyday life in the workshop. As Coy has noted in his work on the methodological uses of fieldwork apprenticeships, interlocutors often approach the training of a new apprentice with some gravitas, negotiating the terms of engagement with prospective learners with thought and seriousness (1989 c: 119).

Another facet of this initial “trial” were the long periods spent with little to do but to watch others work, and I struggled with feelings of boredom as I waited to start making myself. This time gave me a visceral insight into the experiences of the young craftspeople I was working with, who had to continually balance a lack of opportunities and resources in a quiet border town against the pressing business of getting by and forging livelihoods (see Schielke, 2009: 173-174; for a discussion of the anthropological uses of boredom see Billaud and Halme-Tuomisaari, 2013).

Adeline Masquelier’s work on young men’s experiences of the temporalities of worklessness and boredom in Niger explores how periods of enforced waiting are not passively endured, but rather constitute important opportunities to tactically forge supportive and self-affirming social relations (2013: 475). Focusing on the rituals with which young Nigérien men prepare and drink tea, Masquelier writes:

“...Tea rituals do not kill time so much as they enliven it. In contrast to idle time, teatime constitutes a purposeful temporality; it produces a particular experience of how time unfolds when one is engaged in an activity (rather than being stuck in a moment devoid of relevance)” (2013: 486)

For young weavers who faced challenges accessing educational opportunities and finding decent work, the workshop served as an important anchor, whilst their work in the loom provided a much-needed occupation. Weaving was a legitimate, productive way of spending time which might otherwise be idle, and workshop membership made this work public and visible. In this, the value of being part of the workshop lay partly with the opportunity it offered young craftspeople of managing other people's impressions of them as resourceful and engaged young men (see Goffman, 1956: 7; Felstead et al, 2009: 198-199).

Occasionally I would be invited to step into someone else’s loom to have a go at throwing the shuttle and in time I had a loom carpentered for myself and began work making my own cloths. By November 2012 I had been accepted as a learner member of the workshop and the start of my apprenticeship was marked with the shared offering of drinks and prayers (see plate 3). My loom and the workshop quickly became the primary locus of the research and I soon developed a routine. Following the schedules of my new colleagues, I wove during the morning, breaking for lunch and resuming work as the day grew cooler in the late afternoon. As dusk fell after six,

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I would stop work for the evening and, just as for my fellow weavers, Sundays became a sacrosanct day of rest. In this, as well as functioning as a place where I could work, the workshop constituted “...a nodal point or set of relations” (Argenti, 2013: 80) which socially anchored the project within a community of practice.



Plate 3- Pouring libations and sharing drinks to mark the beginning of my apprenticeship in the Agotime workshop, November 2012. Photograph by author.

In my first months as an apprentice, the focus was on developing basic proficiency in weaving skills by following the craft curriculum. As my fumbling attempts to master the intricate workings of the loom faltered, I relied upon the help of workshop colleagues to periodically intervene and put right mistakes or correct my poor technique. Dependent upon others, it was over the course of many such encounters and through the routines of work that the relationships which would underpin the research were fostered. Thus, whilst I may have chosen the Kpetoe workshop as my field site, my engagement with the young men working there was shaped by their willingness (or not) to become involved in the research and with me. Some were reticent so it quite rightly took time to earn their trust, and the process of accommodation on both sides did not pass without its share of misunderstandings and disappointments. Moreover, time spent helping fix my mistakes was time away from their own looms, and thus came at a cost which had to be balanced against the

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perceived rewards of getting to know me. Although no money exchanged hands in the course of the apprenticeship, offerings of drinks were made to mark the start and end of the training, alongside various gifts on both sides. My role in the workshop and the ensuing shape of the project was then crucially defined by the interplay between how workshop members engaged with the stranger in their midst and my own propensity to seek out the support and company of particular weavers (Coy, 1989 c: 116; Crick, 1992: 183). In this, questions of character as well as the complex matter of our relative social positions and resources, shaped the working relationships I enjoyed in the field.

Three months into the fieldwork, and having completed one small cloth with the guidance of my workshop mentor Gabriel, his cousins Saviour and Bright and their colleagues Francis, Felix and Kwaku, my key relationships in the workshop had been established. Whilst I worked with a number of other workshop members as well as community elders, UNESCO representatives and staff from two local heritage NGOs, this core group of weavers took responsibility for my training in the craft and so became my principal interlocutors in the workshop. Weaving alongside them, their craft skills and the fluidity with which they worked in their looms belied the social and economic challenges they faced managing their livelihoods. Our conversations would often revolve around their aspirations and the routine struggles they faced in securing a decent education and dignified work. Whilst I was keenly aware of the impact exerted by my (relative) affluence and privilege in the ways that interlocutors sought me out and framed their interactions with me, the pressing relevance and sustained nature of these dialogues was soon apparent. On the methodological uses of apprenticeship, Coy writes that “these are roles for individuals who are seeking to learn cultural and technical skills.” (1989 c: 117). In engaging with the concerns of my interlocutors, however, it became clear that my interests increasingly lay with understanding how young people manage precarity. The focus of the project thus shifted from questions of the acquisition of craft skills and subjectivities, towards the strategies young weavers developed in navigating the uncertain terrain of work and learning. Therefore, while the importance of education was a thread that ran through the project, apprenticeship soon became a method, offering an entry into the lives of Agotime’s young weavers, rather than the theoretical focus of the study itself. As Greg Downey has written:

“Ethnographers may face a real challenge explaining what they are doing and then finding some acceptable position in social interaction from which to conduct their research... Apprenticeship settings are ideal contexts in which to gain entry into a community and provide a meaningful position

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for the researcher and research agenda, something that many ethnographic projects struggle to find." (2015: 186)

In his work with African American men in a Chicago boxing gym, Loïc Wacquant makes a similar point, arguing that his position as an apprentice boxer offered him an opening on the lives of his interlocutors that would not likely have been available to him as a sociologist (2005: 448).

Coupled with questions of initial access, apprenticeship in the workshop also provided a set of structuring work routines and a spatial vantage that was particularly useful during the early part of my fieldwork. Learning to navigate the unfamiliar social terrain of life in Kpetoe, returning each day to my loom to work was an invaluable anchor that legitimised my presence amongst Agotime's young weavers and facilitated our developing ties of friendship and mutual understanding. Focused on the workshop's community of practice and my part in it, the home lives of my interlocutors, just like the experiences of weavers outside the workshop, were beyond the scope of my ethnography. Being circumscribed in this way came with its own set of challenges, foremost being my reliance on the re-tellings of events to piece together the broader livelihood strategies of young men I knew primarily as weavers (see Downey et al, 2015: 187). Similarly, working almost solely with young men, the broader, cooperative strategies that households developed in managing uncertainty were something that I could only make sense of through the prism of individual accounts. As noted by Desjarlais, embeddedness within the life of the workshop imposed limits, but, as the basis upon which the research developed, these boundaries were productive:

"The anthropologist becomes part of the system being studied, and most tools of inquiry must conform to the features of this system. Yet in the long run, these constraints- or better, an understanding of them- can occasionally facilitate rather than impede, ethnographic insight" (1992: 24)

As apprenticeship became a point of entry into the lives of workshop weavers, rather than the focus of the ethnography itself, the way that young weavers strategically engaged with apprenticeship as a means of managing uncertainty, rather than in pursuit of a stable occupation identity, became clear. On matters of work and learning, ongoing processes of neoliberal reform have shifted the onus from government and educational institutions towards the individual, who is now deemed responsible for acquiring the skills and attributes needed to gain entry into work. Valerie Walkerdine's research on the changing face of work under conditions of neoliberalism highlights how "... transformations of the labor market demand a constant remaking of oneself [into] someone who must be flexible enough to shift

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from one kind of work to another." (2006: 28). Deleuze characterises this transition in terms of the shift from disciplinary to control societies, writing:

"...*Perpetual training* tends to replace *school*, and continuous control...replace[s] the examination [so that] in societies of control one is never finished with anything..." (1992: 5, emphasis in the original)

Whilst weaving apprenticeships offered training and socialisation into the craft, workshop weavers had to combine and re-combine the learning and practice of craft-skills with other kinds of work as a means of "getting-by". Apprenticeship was thus one of a number of strategies that young people in Agotime employed in a context of endemic uncertainty and crisis, and this constitutes the key contribution the ethnography makes to the anthropology of apprenticeship.

Writing and speaking- collecting data through interviews and note-taking

As part of the routine I developed as a workshop apprentice, as dusk fell each evening, I would head home to write my field notes. In dedicating time each evening to put pen to paper I carved out a space in the day where I could begin to process not only what I had learnt in the loom, but also the challenges of living and working in Kpetoe. Reflecting on the experience of fieldwork, Vincent Crapanzano writes:

"Note taking influences the progress of the field encounter by slowing it down, making it awkward, objectifying it, rendering it episodic and worthy of preservation. The notes extend the field experience in time as they reduce it by giving greater credence to the written word than to live- however, distorting- memory" (2010: 61)

Written notes cannot capture the multifaceted complexity of lived experience, and in this sense the process of writing is reductive by its very nature, "...put[ting] lived experience into a frame, cutting off new associations and hedging in old ones" (Lærke, 2008: 143). I would however argue against the idea that the rendering of fieldwork's dazzling complexity into episodes which can be noted down and reflected upon is, in itself, a bad thing. In "slowing down" the unfolding of fieldwork encounters²¹, note-writing helped me to pick out salient ideas that I later developed in the workshop and allowed me to structure my thoughts and impressions. Indeed, it was the process of writing rather than the notes themselves which was important, and although I have occasionally referred back to them in the writing of this thesis, their main purpose was to give shape to the unfolding of the fieldwork itself. Over the course of my main period of fieldwork in 2012-2013 I amassed twelve notebooks

²¹ Except during formal interviews when I kept a record of possible questions in a book, I seldom wrote in the workshop as I found the act of putting pen to paper both distracting and distancing. Empathically speaking, it is clear that someone sitting to one side note-taking can stultify the course of whatever social action is unfolding.

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which, although far from constituting a cohesive narrative, did stitch together observations from the rich life of the workshop and the village with a record of my journey through fieldwork.

As relationships in the field developed, my interest in matters of work, learning, livelihoods and aspirations crystallised. I had set out to research an ethnography of apprenticeship but engagement with weaving and the workshop community highlighted the complex ways in which craft learning and work were tied up with the broader livelihood strategies and aspirations of young weavers. Weaving was part of complexly patterned lives and it became clear that a proper understanding of the contemporary role of the craft in Kpetoe would only come from looking at how young people strategically combined work in the loom with other occupations and educational opportunities. Apprentice methods were thus supplemented with a series of structured interviews, conducted in English, with a range of community members, including young weavers, established craftspeople, *agbamevo kente* traders, elders and NGO workers concerned with matters of heritage and craft. These discussions allowed me to explore questions of aspiration which were more amenable to talking than the experiential methods which developed out of my weaving apprenticeship. Gabriel, Bright, Francis, Felix and Nene devoted many hours to offering me their life histories and speaking about their experiences of craftwork, learning and hopes for the future. Other interviews were considerably shorter and limited by the fact that the interviewee lived in Accra, Kumasi or Ho and I had to travel to meet with them. Formal interviews were recorded, with the participants permission, and later laboriously transcribed, the process of listening and writing giving me space to reflect on what was being said and how the project was progressing. However, these structured talks made up only a fraction of the many conversations I had during the course of work, and the issues discussed during interviews emerged out of my colleagues' concerns as they spoke about the precarity of their work and their desire for occupational and educational opportunities.

Commitment and ethical engagement in the workshop

As fieldwork progressed and the precariousness of young weavers work became clear, so too did their commitments. They dealt with the uncertainty of their livelihoods with a sense of hope and pride in their craft, and despite the challenges of making a living from long hours in the loom, the workshop was an inviting and cheerful place for craftsmen and visitors alike. Beautiful cloths were produced with

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ingenuity and creativity, and relationships with customers were fostered with warmth and respect. Amongst the weavers themselves, an unwritten, but strictly adhered to, code of conduct regulated behaviour so that confrontations were minimal and disagreements were arbitrated by the workshop community (see Goffman, 1956: 152-153). Weavers, then, were engaged profitably with their work and with each other.

This commitment was extended to my apprenticeship in the workshop, and as I developed friendships with colleagues, I felt compelled to document the hopefulness of their work and the challenges they faced. As I was not paying for my training, commitment to the place, the work of weaving and the telling of workshop members' stories became an important means of recognising their generosity to me. Writing of the participatory and mimetic dynamics of apprenticeship, Dilley states:

"Participation in general and mimesis in particular presuppose a level of commonality and a recognition of mutuality- at least by one party. That is, the recognition of a quality, aspect or gesture to be adopted from another person who embodies it creates a link of identity between them and the object of imitation" (1999: 37)

Aside from the practical considerations of conducting fieldwork in the workshop that are detailed above, this ethical engagement with the young men I worked with was a guiding principle throughout my time in Kpetoe and bound me to the workshop in important ways.

Mutual trust and respect formed the basis of these friendships and commitments (see Silverman, 2003 and Mookherjee, 2008), and as the study turned to questions of hope and aspiration, I increasingly relied upon workshop members' trust as I sought to understand the intimate intricacies of their livelihood strategies. Thus, whilst the ethnography is based upon the life of the workshop and the experiences of a handful of interlocutors in particular, the conversations and insights which underpin the work could only have emerged in the context of ongoing, mutual commitments. The value of these friendships endure, and have been maintained through contact outside of fieldwork and my return to Kpetoe in 2015.

Fieldwork relations and positionality in ethnography

Whilst my primary commitment during fieldwork was to the young men who had opened up their working lives to me, my position in the Agotime workshop was anomalous. I was a woman weaving amongst men and a neophyte working in the midst of experienced weavers, as unlike in the home compounds of weavers where young initiates could be seen working alongside trained masters, the workshop was

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reserved for accomplished makers²². Unsurprisingly, being an initiate amongst master weavers made it difficult to compare my unusual apprenticeship experience with that of other young learners, and during the course of my time in Kpetoe I shared the space with just one other initiate, my young neighbour Emmanuel. It also meant that the important role played by peer relationships in scaffolding learning and mastering a craft was something I missed out on. Instead, relationships with my neighbours and their children gave me an insight into how childhood interactions shape young people's early experiences of work, learning and play.

None of this is to say that what I learnt in Kpetoe was strange or "unrepresentative", but rather, to highlight the social conditions under which I learnt to weave, and to focus on the particular nexus of relations which made writing this ethnography possible. My entry into the field as well as, to some extent, my position within the workshop was importantly defined by my relationships with Agotime's paramount chief, Nene Nuer Keteku III (known locally as Nene) and a small coterie of elders who were involved with the weaving community. The part played by intergenerational relations in structuring young weavers' experience of their work and learning is explored throughout the chapters of this thesis. At a practical level though, throughout the course of fieldwork, relationships with community elders and members of the local elite crucially shaped the scope and nature of my experience. In his work on India, Jan Breman discusses the fundamental role that the researcher's connections with a local elite can play in shaping fieldwork experience and methodology in contexts of marked inequality. Noting that the knowledge which emerges from fieldwork is, by its very nature, partial, Breman explores how researchers become identified with particular local factions, be they powerful or subaltern, and the effect this has on the ways that conflicted relations are negotiated in the course of the work (1985: 31). In a context where the tensions between elders and young craftspeople could be painfully clear, navigating these relations and according the appropriate respect to each of my interlocutors was an important part of the fieldwork, and one that I often felt ill-equipped to manage. Maintaining the confidentiality of my workshop colleagues, relationships with the paramount chief and community elders were nonetheless fostered so as to gain access to the field and understand the generational and power dynamics at work in the crafting community. Thus, fieldwork was crucially enabled by members of Agotime's elite and I was

²² Whilst the space hosted master weavers, its members ranged in age from teenagers to middle-aged men, the eldest weaver being Olu who was a retiree. Most members were, however in their twenties and early thirties.

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drawn into relations of reciprocity with community elders which were at times at odds with my social position within the workshop and allegiance to the young weavers working there. Christopher Cramer et al describe this process, writing of their fieldwork in Ethiopia, that “When research becomes part of the tussle of interests, ideas, and institutions, clearly this may constrain research and shape findings, but it may also reveal that local political economy in sharper contrast.” (2016: 147). My position, then was a conflicted one and I understood why some workshop members were less forthcoming than others about intimate questions of work, power and opportunities in the community.

Shortly after I started my trial period in the workshop in the autumn of 2012, the unequal dynamics at play in these relations were clearly demonstrated and I was summoned to a meeting with the paramount chief at his home in Kpetoe. Whilst on an everyday level the workshop functioned with a considerable degree of autonomy, as a space that belonged to the community, the paramount chief wielded considerable authority over the workshop and its members. If I were to be able to conduct my research there I would have to work with Nene’s agreement and support.

Accompanied by Gabriel and a few of the other young workshop weavers, at the appointed hour we headed off through the village towards the paramount’s compound. At Gabriel’s suggestion I had bought a bottle of gin to offer as a gift and as I made my way nervously to the meeting the weavers tried to assuage my worries, saying that they would be sure to properly explain my “mission” to the chief.

Entering the chief’s gated courtyard a self-possessed older man, who I would later get to know as Nene’s linguist²³ Tsiamiga Ampomah, ushered us quietly into chairs laid out in the courtyard. Nene himself was speaking with other visitors, mediating a dispute, and I was left daunted by the unfamiliar formality of the situation. When our turn came, my colleagues handed over the gift, and with eyes lowered in deference, began to talk to the chief in Ewe. Not understanding what was being said, I too lowered my gaze and waited to be spoken to. Eventually, having listened to all that was said, the paramount chief turned to ask how I had come to Kpetoe. I explained my project briefly and before long the meeting was over and we were outside again on the dusty track that lead back towards the workshop. Talking as we walked, the weavers said that Nene had agreed that I could work with them

²³ In Akan chieftaincy traditions, and among the Adangbe speaking peoples, a linguist serves in the chief’s court, attends public celebrations such as festival durbars and funerals and acts as a spokesman for the chief. The Agotime paramount’s linguist, Tsiamiga Ampomah, was a reserved man who I often met during my visits to Nene’s home and who always accompanied the chief at festival time dressed in fine *agbamevo kente* and carrying his signature linguist’s staff.

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and, given that I was still living in Ho, some forty-five minutes away by *trotro*, he had offered me the use of a small one-room house close by the workshop for the duration of my stay. Not long afterwards, at the start of November, I bought the basics I would need for my new home, hired a taxi to move my things from Ho and set off for Kpetoe.

It was in this way that I first encountered Nene and came to live in Kpetoe. Although I knew from the start that the paramount chief was a crucial gatekeeper who, in extending me considerable hospitality, enabled my research, during the first months of my apprenticeship I saw very little of him. Initially focusing on learning in the workshop, I spent several months developing my weaving technique and fostering relationships with workshop members. However, in time Nene too became an important interlocutor. During meetings at his home in Kpetoe, speaking in English, he told me about his experiences as a young weaver in Agotime during the years following Ghanaian independence, his career as a teacher and later his work establishing the Agotime *Agbamevorza kente* festival during the mid 1990s. These discussions offered an important counterbalance to the perspective of workshop members, they helped me make sense of the generational dynamics at work in Agotime's weaving community and provided an insight onto the changing role that weaving has played in the fortunes of Agotime's youth. The paramount chief's insights into the festival were also invaluable when it came to thinking, and later writing, about questions of heritage and Agotime's festival.

Through these meetings I was able, in the last few months of my main fieldwork, to speak with a number of NGO representatives who had worked on issues of heritage and craftwork in the Volta region and across Ghana. Their input helped contextualise the social and economic dynamics of the Agotime crafting community within a wider context, and made clear the hierarchies of value attached to artisans and their products within cosmopolitan and globalised discourses of heritage and culture (see Herzfeld, 2004).

The process of negotiating, sometimes contested, relationships with weavers, community elders and heritage specialists was a challenge that offered a glimpse of the contested power dynamics which shape young weavers' experiences of work, learning and life.

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Contingency and the unexpected in fieldwork

Several months into my first stint of fieldwork I began to feel unwell. A visit to the clinic in Kpetoe, an assurance I was free from malaria and a prescription for antibiotics did little to help and were followed up with a number of anxious trips to see specialists in Accra. At the end of February 2013 I was hospitalised in the capital. Given antibiotics and rehydrated intravenously, the worst of the acute symptoms abated. I did, however, emerge from the experience weakened and unsure of what was going wrong with my body²⁴. With little choice but to interrupt fieldwork, I returned to the UK for diagnosis and further treatment. Staying in London for three months that spring, I was an outpatient at University College Hospital, before returning to Kpetoe in late May for another six months of work.

Whilst the repercussions of this period on my health continued to be felt long after I returned from Ghana in November 2013, the immediate impact on the project was disruptive. Suspending work for several months was accompanied by all the social and practical upheaval that comes with having to leave a place at short notice, unsure of when you might return. Hasty visits were made to interlocutors to explain why I was going away and, taking the essentials with me in a rucksack, I shuttered my home in Agotime. Francis was entrusted with the key, and although I assured him confidently I would return, I knew that if I could not at least he would be able to help sort out the house.

Despite the challenges posed by an unexpected turn of events, contingency always plays a key role in the unfolding of fieldwork experience, as:

“We...depend on the contingent from the moment we start our research, and this dependency affects the way we do our research. It may produce a particular sense of time or progression: a fragile, at times resigned, positive or negative, expectation verging on the atomistic, infused- as troubling as this may be- with a sense of fate or, less systematically, with chance. It may promote in reaction a strong sense of determination” (Crapanzano, 2010: 60)

It was such a countervailing feeling of determination which propelled me back to Kpetoe in the face of anxieties about how my health might fare, and in this way opened up unexpected opportunities. Extending my stay into the Autumn of 2013 rather than leaving at the end of August, I had a second chance to attend the Agotime *Agbamevoza Kente* festival which took place annually in mid September. This offered a

²⁴ The experience of seeking medical care in Ghana, with all the advantages I enjoyed in terms of resources and the option, ultimately, to travel elsewhere for a diagnosis and treatment, highlighted the serious challenges faced by workshop members who struggled to pay the government insurance premiums which gave them access to basic health provision.

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valuable chance to develop the ethnography around questions of heritage, the politics of recognition and the performative value of history, as well as helping to frame young weavers' experiences in terms of broader issues relating to the changing values attached to craft production and "tradition".

As the process of writing up progressed it became clear that the ethnography could not ignore the fundamental role that religion plays in shaping craftspeople's experiences and subjectivities. Whilst religion is not the focus of this work, the particularly prominent role that Pentecostalism plays not only in the experience of everyday life in southern Ghana, but also people's perceptions of the country led me to return to the workshop in the summer of 2015. I spoke with my former workmates about church and the role of religious communities in structuring livelihoods, as well as visiting Gabriel's church. Furnishing me with data on religion, this trip also offered the opportunity to revisit the workshop. Seeing firsthand what had changed in the eighteen months since I had left and how weavers were managing the downturn in the Ghanaian economy provided insight onto the long-term challenges face by Kpetoe's craftspeople. I also enjoyed learning of my former colleagues' successes and achievements. Hearing of houses which had long been in the making but which were now finished homes, the expansion of someone's trading business and the children who were thriving tempered news of the disappointments and challenges young weavers faced. This trip reinforced the sense that workshop members were always contending with a social and economic terrain in flux, and that a significant part of their work and their hopes for success lay in responding to constantly changing conditions.

Notes on the scope and structure of the thesis

This thesis is concerned with the working and educational lives of young weavers in Kpetoe's community workshop. Composed around six core ethnographic chapters that trace the development of craft subjectivities, skills and problem solving strategies through apprenticeship to experiences of work, the thesis also addresses questions of heritage, tradition, aspiration and religion in asking how weavers navigate the challenges and opportunities of their craft. This work contributes to anthropologies of craft, work, learning and aspiration as well as the literature on young people and studies of heritage. However, with the workshop and its members forming the locus of the research, the ethnography makes no claims to represent the experiences of Agotime weavers generally or provide an overview of apprenticeship practices in

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southern Ghana. The aim was not to produce a survey of weavers' learning and work practices, but rather to explore craftspeople's worlds from the vantage of the workshop. This is important because whilst the material here speaks to broader issues of work, learning and the sustenance of hope in contexts of economic uncertainty and precarity, the context of its production was bound up with the particular experiences of a handful of key interlocutors and my apprenticeship itself was, as discussed above, in many ways, unusual.

The first chapter contextualises the core ethnography which follows by engaging with the literature on heritage and religion in southern Ghana, and tracing how discourses of heritage and tradition variously converge and diverge with Pentecostal, Catholic and "traditional" religious subjectivities. Underpinning this discussion is the idea that heritage, tradition and religious subjectivities all emerge from unsettling experiences of modernity, and this chapter considers the impact of Ghanaian history on the emergence of the workshop, heritage discourses and religious subjectivities. The chapter concludes with an ethnographic look at the role that religion and communities of faith played in the lifeworlds of three young workshop weavers.

The second chapter draws on theories of legitimate peripheral participation and situated learning to look at how practical aptitudes and social skills are developed over the course of a weaving apprenticeship. The methodological implications of a fieldwork apprenticeship are highlighted, the various ways apprenticeship can be defined are discussed, the part apprenticeship plays in constructing notions of knowledge and ignorance is addressed, and a curriculum for craft learning is laid out. The links between apprenticeship practices and the work of the household are also considered, as is the contested social value of apprenticeship in a context where weaving work is often held in low esteem. The chapter also offers an insight into how cloths are materially constructed and an overview of the tools and techniques which form the basis of the craft.

Following on from the material set out in relation to apprenticeship, the third chapter looks at weaving as a form of work which plays a crucial role in craftspeople's livelihood strategies and negotiating their social standing as adult members of the community. The relationship between uncertain economies and precarious work is discussed alongside an analysis of the relationship between work practices, agency and hope. The second half of the chapter focuses on the various social and material strategies weavers employ in managing the precariousness of their

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craftwork and the chapter concludes by asking what the limits of sociality are in a context riven by the depredations of uncertain economies.

Weaving formed just one part of craftspeople's complex livelihood strategies, and chapter four turns to the other occupations young people in the workshop engage with. The importance of contingency and young people's ability to shift between various occupational roles plays in securing their livelihoods is highlighted and the ethnography looks at how subsistence farming buffers craftspeople against the worst vagaries of economic uncertainty. The link between migration, work opportunities and ideas of progress is addressed alongside the ambiguous value of cosmopolitanism and notions of success. Analysis of these uncertainties is extended to consider the social anxieties about under-employed and "dangerous" youth elicited by the increasing prominence of driving work in Kpetoe and across West Africa. The last part of the chapter turns to government jobs and NGO work as prestigious occupations which not only played a crucial role in structuring young people's aspirations, but which were also shot through with their own set of uncertainties.

The penultimate chapter turns to the issue of problem-solving, with the ethnography exploring how, despite craftspeople's inventive use of materials and tools, practical problem-solving goes largely unremarked upon as weavers grapple with the social challenges of their craft. Addressing one of the thesis' core questions, this chapter looks at the relationship between the social strategies and the material fixes that weavers deploy in managing the challenges of their work and learning.

To conclude, the final ethnographic chapter returns to questions of heritage raised at the beginning to ask how local citizenship and history, as well as a politics of recognition that seeks to tie Agotime into broader political and economic currents, are negotiated through Agotime's annual *Agbamevoza Kente* festival. Returning to the historical issues laid out in the first chapter, an analysis of the founding of the festival and the workshop during the 1990s is coupled with a focus on how historical discourses have legitimised the current politicisation of craftwork and heritage in Agotime. The role of digital media and festival performance in constructing contemporary forms of local heritage is considered and the chapter concludes by examining how festival practices have been deployed to political ends and in making claims to resources from the Ghanaian state and NGOs. In this, the chapter sheds light on the disjunctions between the heritage claims made by a local elite and the precarious livelihoods experienced by the weavers who produce the textiles which are supposedly at the heart of the *Agbamevoza* celebration.

Chapter 1

The antinomies of heritage- Tradition, religion and aspiration in the Agotime workshop

When considering how Agotime's weavers contend with the challenges and opportunities of their educational and working lives, and the role that aspiration plays in this process, a key concern is weavers' attitudes to their craft. These were bound up with a series of overlapping and, at times, contradictory discourses surrounding the value of heritage, the moral and social values attached to religious experiences and practices and the issue of aspiration. This opening chapter, then, looks at how heritage and religion relate to one another and mediate young weavers' work as well as their understandings of aspiration and modernity.

Modernity refers to the "...fleeting, the ephemeral, the fragmentary, and the contingent [experience of contemporary life that] not only entails a ruthless break with any or all preceding historical conditions, but is characterised by a never-ending process of internal ruptures and fragmentations within itself" (Harvey, 1989: 11-12). Ethnographically, however, modernity also refers to the experiences of being and becoming a modern subject, and of engaging with the modern world in all its dazzling complexity. Ferguson captures the challenges inherent in thinking and writing about modernity in African contexts-

"...If we consider modernity, as many Africans do, not simply as a shared historical present, but as a social status implying certain institutional and economic conditions of life, it becomes immediately clear that [many] do *not* inhabit a site that is 'as privileged as any other'. Where the anthropologist extends the label 'modern' to the impoverished African as a gesture of respect and an acknowledgement of coeval temporality, African urbanites who believe their lives will not be 'modern' until they have running water and a good hospital may find the gesture an empty one." (2006: 168)

In this way, modernity is constituted (or not) in the daily practices through which weavers experience and position themselves within a rapidly changing world that offers opportunities tempered by perilous challenges. Ideas of modernity relate to the types of learning weavers pursue, the work they have to do, the jobs they seek and the social relations that sustain all of these activities. It is also about their aspirations for something different and better in the future, and the hopeful imaginaries which sustain them in this work. Taking the perspective that heritage and religious practices are products of complex social and cultural work, rather than pre-existing givens (Meyer and de Witte, 2013: 280), this chapter draws the experience of Agotime weavers together with literature that addresses the role of heritage in post-colonial

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contexts, the relationship between religious practices and cultural traditions in West Africa and the ongoing Pentecostal explosion across the region.

Whilst the value attached to ideas of the past vary, discourses of heritage, religion and aspiration are all crucially rooted in conceptions of history, progress and the future which are fundamentally modern. The very idea of tradition is a modern one, although “... ‘modernity’ usually emerges as the technologically and politically superior term, with ‘tradition’...[being] associated with a nobly picturesque ‘backwardness.’ ” (Herzfeld, 2004: 30-31). When thinking about the contested relation between modernity and ideas of heritage and tradition in a place like Agotime, we must remember the extent to which an “...obsession with authenticity has always been organised around the exclusion of those who aspire to claim membership [of postcolonial modernities]²⁵” (Newell, 2012: 253). Heritage discourses and the practices of enculturated Catholicism and the Afrikania Mission, have a positive, if not always profound attachment to history, whereby tradition is seen as a route towards a conscious and proud future, whilst Pentecostalism, also intensely engaged with ideas of the past and traditional practices, attempts to transform and overcome the past. Pentecostal progress is achieved through a continual severing of ties to the past, which are seen to harbour the diabolical and act as a conduit for satan (Meyer, 1998: 327; Kalu, 2008: 171-172). Echoing Harvey's characterisation of modernity as a process of ongoing fragmentation and rupture, the Pentecostal experience is marked by recurrent deliverance rituals that, in order to free believers from the weight of history, encourage them to return “...over and over again...[to their]past” (Meyer, 1998: 338). Aside from the spectacle of deliverance, Pentecostal practice also marks the everyday lives of followers whose hopes for the future and optimism are vested in constant and ongoing preparation in the present (Gilbert, 2014: 379). It is this set of shared positionings towards the future, and what they can tell us about weavers aspirations and hopes, that makes heritage and religion relevant to a study of how weavers approach the challenges and opportunities of their work.

Whilst traditions of cultural heritage and religious practices share an orientation towards the future and emerge from a common process of grappling with unsettling experiences of modernity, there are fundamental differences in how these discourses and practices conceive of persons and their social ties. Broadly speaking,

²⁵ See also Ferguson's 2006 essay “Of Mimicry and Membership: African and the ‘New World Society’” for further discussion of the exclusive nature of modernity.

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heritage practices, with their focus on fostering community, continuity of tradition and “unity in diversity” can be characterised as integrative, seeking to strengthen relationships between families, linguistic and cultural groupings and citizenry at both the local and national level. Ancestral ties are also integral to many traditional forms of religion (Meyer, 1998: 338), where the physical world and that of spirits together constitute one totality²⁶ (Gifford, 2004: 83). Viewing the world in terms of the integrity of social relationships, traditional forms of religion draw a nexus between affliction and social disturbance (Horton, 1967: 55). Thus, binding relationships between the living, the dead and deities are fostered and nurtured through the pouring of libations and proscriptions against certain practices during festival periods (Kalu, 2008: 173-174), and ritual practice works to maintain cordial relations with the interconnected worlds of living men and women, ancestors, deities and the Supreme being (Gifford, 2004: 84). Elements of this stance towards the social fabric of the past can also be found in mainline churches that have pursued policies of inculcation and novel forms of religion such as the Afrikania Mission. From this perspective, persons are largely constituted within dense webs of social ties, both in the present and across generations, into the past.

In Pentecostalist discourse, social relations remain paramount, but these dense webs of connections between kin and ancestors are seen as a conduit for the Satanic (Daswani, 2011: 260), and emphasis is thus placed on an ongoing process of deliverance whereby social ties to both kin and ancestral spirits are continually severed (Meyer, 1998: 338). In its place, new forms of sociality centred upon the church and individual aspiration emerge. Pentecostal personhood is conceived largely in terms of the development of a modern conception of the individual²⁷ (Meyer, 1999: xxi; McClendon and Riedl, 2016: 123-125) as an independent agent with an interior self (Marshall, 2009: 129; Gilbert, 2014: 379). In separating themselves from the deadweight of their family and the past, Pentecostal subjects are free to claim their “destiny” and progress towards the future (Meyer, 1998: 337-338). What is more, in instituting such a break, these novel forms of personhood also “...represent...a

²⁶ Arguably, the proliferation of African Pentecostalisms has been, in part, due to the way in which their world views map onto pre-existing cosmologies (Kalu, 2008: 170). Juliet Gilbert's work on Pentecostal subjectivities among young Nigerian women highlights how, as with traditionalists, “...the spiritual realm is understood to determine the physical realm.” (2014: 379).

²⁷ The individualism espoused by Pentecostal churches in sub-saharan Africa intersects with the heterogenous and decentralised nature of Pentecostal denominations themselves, such that a lack of centralised church governance or strict doctrine amongst the plethora of Pentecostal churches means that pastors deliver theological messages which are varied and “...tailor[ed]...to the preferences, life experiences, needs, and views of the people in the area of their specific churches.” (McClendon and Riedl, 2016: 125).

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revolutionary departure from the forms of social control and the cycle of debt and obligation that constitute these historical forms of subjection [such as ‘wealth in people²⁸’].” (Marshall, 2009: 173). Together, these elements constitute Pentecostalism’s main claims to modernity. For weavers to successfully draw upon all the social and material resources available to them, they must mediate between these two broad positions, balancing the opportunities and limitations of intense sociality against the possibilities and constraints of individual autonomy.

In considering how Agotime weavers mediated between ideas of heritage and religion, the everyday value of weaving heritage in the community must also be highlighted. The practices of weaving were embedded within persuasive heritage discourses that sought to recoup tradition and protect traditional practices from the perceived depredations of modernity and the threat of globalised textile production and mass markets. Weaving was described by all as the “traditional work of the community”, and for those in the workshop, their claims to heritage and the authenticity of their cloth were marketable goods which could be put to profitable use in finding custom and patronage. Bound as it was to the everyday work of getting by and looking to the future, heritage had a pragmatic value for young weavers.

Furthermore, as a space in which particularly skilled local weavers could gather to work, presenting a showcase of Agotime weaving talent, the Kpetoe workshop was also a focus of local heritage tourism, offering a centre where visitors to the area could gather to learn about, and hopefully purchase, locally produced cloths. The production of *agbamevo kente* marked Kpetoe on the cultural map of Ghana, the locale being well-known as a site of cloth production. However, without much in the way of tourist infrastructure and remote from the tourist hot-spots along the coast, the town played host only to small numbers of day-tripping visitors who, with prior knowledge of the craft, sought out the weavers at work. Writing of heritage politics in the Malian city of Djenné, Charlotte Joy discusses how tourists might seek the emotional engagement of “authenticity” by circumventing established tourist circuits in favour of unmediated everyday encounters with local people (2012: 150). Stopping by, tourists temporarily entered a place of work, where the proponents of Agotime’s crafting heritage could be seen not only weaving but also engaging in the social routines of workshop life. These encounters offered visitors an “authentic” (if partial)

²⁸ Capturing the social ambiguity of this concept, Marshall notes that “‘Wealth in people’ implies the centrality of notions of social obligation and debt and the virtues of a redistributive economy that are central to long-standing modes of African accumulation and sociability, and yet such logics also refer to the possibility for power to accumulate persons through their (partial, at least) transformation into objects or commodities.” (2009: 170).

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view onto the lifeworld's of Agotime's weavers, but the "tourist gaze" (Joy, 2012: 148) also transformed the workshop into a kind of living museum, in which weavers and their work were the prime exhibits. Whilst I found this dynamic awkward my colleagues were more sanguine, treating these occasional visitors as a potential source of customers, who nonetheless rarely spent much time or money in the workshop. Thus, despite its relative marginality and the elusive benefits of heritage tourism to young weavers the workshop was at least partially embedded within the practices and discourses of heritage tourism.

Aside from the pragmatic value of claims to heritage, a certain caché was still attached to the work of weaving and Agotime craftspeople took pride in their recognition as "good" weavers. Inherited from the ancestors and passed down from father to son, weaving was a respected, if poorly remunerated, occupation. Opinions on the intrinsic value of Agotime weaving were, nevertheless, divided along generational lines. For many young weavers, busily caught up with the demands of work and learning, weaving was embedded within broader livelihood strategies and derived its value, in large part, from the ways that the craft could support families and their hopes and plans for the future. For community elders, however, the traditions of weaving that they had learnt in their youth, but were no longer dependent upon to make ends meet, appeared to have taken on a rather more intrinsic, immutable value. For these men, Agotime weaving was important for its place within local heritage practices and the talk of community elders tended to focus on preserving the knowledge of how to make certain kinds of distinctively local cloth, regardless of the value these pieces might have to possible customers. This attitude can, in part, be traced to the extensive contact Agotime's paramount chief has had with heritage NGOs, including a number of UNESCO representatives. These relationships, largely fostered after he had retired from the loom himself, have seen him become deeply invested in the ideas of intangible heritage. For the paramount, possessed as he was with a wealth of knowledge about local crafting traditions, this approach translated into a new appreciation of local heritage, NGO involvement catalysed reappraisal of local knowledge in important new ways (Yarrow, 2011: 113; see also Meyer and de Witte, 2013).

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has characterised institutional approaches to intangible heritage as the attempt not only to preserve the products of crafting and heritage traditions, but also to sustain their masters in a living system of cultural production (2004: 53). In this process of re-evaluation, however, the needs of young

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weavers to make a sustainable living from their craft have, for some elders including the paramount, become derided as money-grabbing and inauthentic, with young craftsmen characterised as ignorant and lacking in knowledge. Apart from what this tells us about the uneven distribution of knowledge and power within the community of craftspeople, it is clear weaving's heritage value has, for some elders, trumped its place in the varied livelihood strategies of young craftsmen and highlighted a generational divide. For their part, young weavers often expressed dissatisfaction with elders, who as bearers of tradition and members of the local elite were felt to be stifling, misunderstanding the concerns of the young, and at times, predatory in their relations with workshop members. Despite emerging from experiences of modernity, when ideas of tradition and heritage functioned as impractically high standards against which young craftsmen often fell short, these discourses powerfully excluded craftspeople from the everyday advantages of a "modern" life (Herzfeld, 2004: 20; see also Joy, 2012: 188). Thus, attitudes towards heritage very much depended upon ones' position within local hierarchies and contestation was particularly centred upon the tension between weaving's intrinsic value as a cultural practice and the everyday demands of weavers trying to make a living.

Having outlined some of the tensions between matters of religion and heritage above, the chapter offers a brief history and overview of the structure of the Agotime workshop. The relationship between heritage and religious discourse in southern Ghana is discussed, tracing the emergence of state cultural policy and considering the attitudes of various religious denominations to ideas of heritage and the past. The last section is an ethnography of how ideas of personhood and sociality are shaped in weavers' everyday religious and heritage practices. The perspective taken is that tradition and religious practices are important resources young weavers employ not only in orienting their attitudes to the production and marketing of *Agbamevo Kente* cloths, but also in the critical work of building and maintaining the social networks which underpin work and learning in the workshop. As such, success, in both entrepreneurial and personal realms, is linked to the skill with which weavers position themselves vis-a-vis discourses of tradition and various forms of religion, including Pentecostalism.

A history and structure of the Agotime workshop

Talk of heritage and tradition permeated the ways that weavers, customers, elders and NGO workers alike spoke about *Agbamevo Kente*. On a broader level these discourses have fed into the Ghanaian government's national cultural policy (2004) and a series of international debates across sub-saharan Africa and beyond (UNESCO, 1972, 2003) about the social, economic and cultural value of patrimony and the threatened status of heritage. The development of the Agotime workshop during the late nineties was entangled with the politics of the then ruling NDC (National Democratic Congress) elite and the regional UNESCO headquarters, based in Accra, so that the issue resonated clearly with the weaving community in Kpetoe. Weavers' meaning when they spoke of "tradition", "culture" and "heritage" can be contextualised by a brief history of the workshop and how the trajectory of weaving in Agotime over the past two decades has intersected with the heritage discourses promulgated by Ghanaian politicians and UNESCO.

Like any story that had been told over and again, until its details had become hazy with time, the history of the workshop was an imprecise one. What was agreed upon, though, was that the structure which housed the workshop had been built in a few short months during the late 1990s. In Ghana, where if funds ran out buildings could sit half-finished for many years, this was no mean feat and Bright and Joshua spoke with some pride of the speed with which the project had been realised. The other part that of the story that everyone remembered was that Nana Konadu Agyeman Rawlings- former first lady, wife of Ghanaian political grandee Jerry Rawlings and a well known figure in her own right- had played an instrumental role in bringing the project to fruition. As the longstanding head of the 31st December Women's Movement, which in close alliance with the PNDC (Provisional National Defence Council), and later the NDC government, had fostered a range of development initiatives, Nana was known for her involvement in community development projects (Nugent, 1995: 145). Invited as the guest of honour to one of the first *Agbamevoza* festivals in the mid 1990s, Nana's attendance had been something of a coup for the festival organizing committee, who used the occasion to raise both the profile of Agotime, and funds for the community. Local festivals in Ghana are occasions when the various political agendas of local and national actors intersect and articulate with one another and demands for recognition and resources can be made. Viewed in these terms, Nana's visit was a complete success. The lack of a public

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space where the town's most skilled weavers could gather to work and sell their wares had been highlighted as an impediment to local "development".²⁹ With the Paramount Chief and *Konor* of the Agotime Traditional Area Nene Nuer Keteku III and Mr Samuel Agba, proprietor of the town's first kente shop and the man who would become the new workshop's chairman, on board, Nana pledged a significant sum towards the construction project, cementing her good reputation amongst the weavers. With the funding in place, the workshop was built and opened around the turn of the century. Over time, the establishment of the workshop had became emblematic of NDC support for cultural heritage in the town, a party stronghold that always returned an NDC candidate.³⁰ It was said that when the opposition NPP party, lead by John Kufuor, came to power in 2000, political support for the workshop initiative had dried up. This loss of support reinforced the links between Agotime culture and the NDC elite, with the workshop itself functioning as a physical manifestation of these ties in the social and material landscape of the town.

In the years that followed, the workshop formed an uneasy nexus between young workshop members, senior weavers and a number of heritage-focused collaborations with UNESCO and USAid. Although it was primarily a routine place of work and sociality for many young weavers, for a number of village elders the workshop remained their "property" and was continually fought over and contested. There were ongoing disputes about how the space should be used and the agendas of various community elders were at cross purposes not only with one another, but also with the weavers who used the space. These conflicts between members of the crafting community were stratified largely by generation, with elders having quite different ideas to the youth about how best crafting heritage might serve personal priorities and community traditions. Where a limited degree of consensus existed, it was between the senior weavers' conviction that the distinctive techniques and

²⁹ Use of the term "development" mirrors that of my interlocutors, who used the word variously to refer to infrastructural improvements, personal development and progress, spiritual betterment, or the "development" of the nation.

³⁰ In the December 2012 elections the NDC won more than 90% of the parliamentary seats in the Volta and the Upper West regions, 80% in the Upper East region and 65% in the Northern region. Conversely their rivals, the NPP, won 91% of the seats in Ashanti region and 70% in the Eastern region (Abdulai and Hickey, 2016: 52). These voting patterns highlight how party support is regionally configured and feeds into clientel political relations which have a direct impact on local development projects such as Kpetoe's weaving workshop. For a discussion of the effects of clientelism on Ghana's education service, see Abdulai and Hickey (2016)

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traditions of Agotime weaving should be protected for posterity and young workshop members acceptance that their role was to act as cultural ambassadors for the town.³¹

The structure and running of the workshop evinced some of these contradictions. Rather than operating as a cooperative in which work and materials were shared, the Agotime workshop served as a shared space in which up to thirty skilful weavers could group together and increase the visibility of their craft, whilst maintaining their "independence"³² as artisans. This structure has historical links to the peer groups, banded together according to household compound or neighbourhood, that village elders remember participating in during their youth in the 1950s and 1960s. With a loom and tools of his own, each craftsman was responsible for seeking out his own commissions and maintaining productive relationships with customers, although large commissions were occasionally shared between colleagues. This loose structure left members free to decide how much time to dedicate to the craft. Seasonal fluctuations in the farming cycle and the shifting priorities of alternative work and educational opportunities saw weavers moving in and out of the workshop. Despite this, the workshop was a largely harmonious place. A destination³³ for customers and visitors to Agotime, it also offered young men who might otherwise find it hard to secure work a chance to publicly engage with a respected occupation. It was the shared challenges faced by members, rather than collaboration on the production of cloths, which bound the workshop together.

Contestation, however, centred upon the governance of the workshop and broader questions of authority within the weaving community. Amongst workshop members, a chairman was elected every four years and given the responsibility of collecting the monthly membership dues that paid the workshop's electricity bill, calling monthly meetings of the members, enforcing the rules of the workshop and mediating any low-level disputes. During my time in the field, Joshua, a well-liked, quiet man held this position and fulfilled his responsibilities with equanimity. This role, focused on the everyday running of the place, existed alongside the chairmanship of the workshop by Samuel Agba, community elder. His position was not up for election and had been cemented during the early days of the workshop when he had accompanied Nene Keteku to a UNESCO organised exhibition in

³¹ The tensions at work in these performative practices, particularly the question of exactly what is "preserved" when craftwork becomes an experience to be consumed on the tourist trail, are explored eloquently by Michael Herzfeld (2004: 19).

³² This was the word used by members to describe their relationship to one another in the workshop.

³³ In this sense, the workshop functioned like many West African markets, where traders selling the same commodities group together so as to be visible to potential customers (see Joy, 2012: 176)

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Washington DC. Owner of the longest established *agbamevo kente* store in town, Mr Agba was retired from the craft and thus visited the workshop only occasionally. Workshop members recognised his authority and he was sometimes called upon to mediate disputes and make decisions as to who could join the workshop. In this, he supported Joshua, his fellow chairman. Nonetheless, there were latent tensions between Mr Agba and the workshop. For his part, he questioned young weavers' commitment to the craft, citing their failure to produce certain "old" style Agotime cloths which were no longer fashionable and rarely commissioned by customers. In the workshop, little was said about the elderly chairman apart from occasional discontented murmurings about the prevailing sense that the place was seen to "belong" to him and not to the weavers themselves.

These tensions were overlaid by the uneasy relation between Mr Agba and the Agotime Paramount, Nene Keteku. As a "guardian" of Ewe *kente*⁵⁴ who had also been involved in the workshop from the outset, Nene laid claim to the workshop as property of the community over which he, as chief, had rights. Despite the cordiality of their relationship, these claims of "ownership" were a sticking point between the two men. They were however, united in their view that many young weavers lacked the skill and commitment of their predecessors. Jointly responsible for regulating admission to the workshop, this attitude determined who was allowed to work in the space, with hopeful weavers presenting samples of their work to the elders before being allowed to move their loom into the space. These sometime fraught negotiations highlighted generational cleavages and underlined the divisive role that social and economic inequality played in the crafting community.

A genealogy of heritage discourses in Ghana

The history of the Agotime workshop stands in important relation to the various ways that historically, heritage, culture and tradition have been framed by successive political regimes in Ghana. Notions of tradition have been formed in dialectic relation with the politics of governance and the nation, with the state long "...provid[ing] the hegemonic framework for the articulation of a national cultural heritage..." (de Witte and Meyer, 2012: 44). This perspective is also important to the extent that when considering the invention of heritage traditions in Ghana (see Ranger, 1983), we must ground our analyses in historical contexts so as to account

⁵⁴ Keteku's guardianship was bolstered by his longstanding connections with Ghanaian UNESCO officials.

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for the very real effects of these “inventions” (de Witte, 2004: 136). Ideas of heritage and tradition are never as self-evident and natural as they might seem. Rather, the social and economic politics of tradition have very real effects on the ground and in the lives of those engaged with craft. For the Agotime weavers, these politics were a source both of pride and belonging, but also a sense that heritage was a burden they were not always willing to bear.

The genealogy of cultural politics in Ghana stretches back to the pre-colonial era, with the stunning royal regalia and rituals of the Asante standing as an important early example of how cultural displays have long bolstered political authority (Hess, 2001: 60). As Terence Ranger argued in his work on the invention of tradition in the African colonies, the traditions introduced by European colonisers focused on governance and subordination, rather than production (1983: 228). For much of its history, the direct sphere of European influence in the Gold Coast was limited to coastal enclaves (Nugent, 2008: 933), with African intermediaries acting as traders up country and along the Volta. Annexation of the bulk of the territory that was to become Ghana was not achieved until 1902, with the defeat of the Ashanti uprising and the exile to the Seychelles of Asantehene Prempeh I and Yaa Asantewaa, warrior Queen Mother of Ejisu. Throughout this period the British policy of indirect rule was fundamental to governance in the colony, serving to fundamentally “traditionalise” chiefs and cement along monarchical lines a hitherto heterogeneous array of disparate political formations and practices (Ranger, 1983: 211-212). The policy, which was instituted in all of Britain's West African colonies, put traditions of chieftancy to work supporting the political and economic exigencies of the colonial administration. Thus, the institution of chieftancy, so central to contemporary notions of tradition across sub-saharan Africa, was to a considerable degree born from a history of colonial subordination and control. From this perspective, the loose association drawn in the Agotime workshop between heritage issues and the, often conservative, concerns of a local chiefly elite can be seen as fundamentally rooted in the region's political history.

With the waning of British authority in the Gold Coast in the wake of the Second World War, attempts were made to recast heritage, traditions and an imagined return to indigenous authenticity in the service of the burgeoning independence movement. One of the key struggles of this movement during the 1940s and 1950s was the work of re-imagining national culture as distinct from the structures of colonial administration (Hess, 2001: 61). Kwame Nkrumah's approach

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was to muster support for his nationalist ambitions by marrying, somewhat awkwardly, notions of local, “traditional” culture to a vision of national unity that was both socialist and Pan-Africanist (Tsomondo, 1975: 39). It was with the rejection of the colonial state in this period that heritage and tradition came to represent a kind of radical Ghanaian authenticity, allied with liberation and at odds with the conservative (and docile) view of culture fostered by the British administration.

Nkrumah termed this the “African personality” and this cultural work, drawing upon the Akan notion of *Sankofaism*⁵⁵ in Ghana, found its echoes across sub-saharan Africa in Leopold Senghor’s *negritude* in Senegal and Mobutu’s “African authenticity” in the Congo (de Witte, 2004: 137).

With Ghanaian independence in 1957, shifts in heritage discourses saw the rhetoric of liberation gave way to the language of nation-building. For Nkrumah, pride in a national culture accompanied a process of consciously constructing a potent range of new national symbols- from stamps and currency to the national flag and anthem, monuments and museums, as pivotal parts of his nation-building strategy (Fuller, 2014: 2-3). Many of the symbols of the new nation-state were drawn from Akan chiefly and royal insignia, including *kente* cloth, stools, linguists’ staffs and swords (de Witte and Meyer, 2012: 47). Writing about this process, Hess argues that in forging a post-colonial national culture, the Nkrumah administration objectified and abstracted specific forms of local tradition and heritage (notably those of the Asante) which were then subsumed within a national whole (2001: 60-65). As such, although the particularities of local traditions might have been recognised, their utility within the political project of nation building took precedence. This emphasis on the aesthetics of chieftancy attempted to divorce these traditions from their spiritual and political power (de Witte and Meyer, 2012: 47). This policy was, however, not without its critics, not least among the Asante elite themselves who were fiercely opposed to the appropriation and hollowing out of their traditional symbols by the nascent state (Fuller, 2014: 7). National heritage discourses which have placed Asante cultural symbols in paramount position have also been challenged in Kpetoe through a countervailing trend to claim that, at least in the realm of textiles, weaving traditions originate in Agotime, with the Asantes having “stolen” the

⁵⁵ *Sankofa* refers to the Akan *adinkra* symbol of the backward-looking, forward-walking bird. Indexed to the Twi proverb ‘worefi na wosankofa a, yenkyi’, (“go back and take it”), Sankofaism was premised upon the notion that only in putting the best of past cultural traditions to work in the present can progress be achieved. Sankofa formed the basis of Ghanaian state cultural policy from the post-independence period up until the 1990s, and remains the bedrock of the National Commission on Culture's policies (de Witte and Meyer, 2012: 47; see also National Commission on Culture, 2004)

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technology during one of their failed military incursions east of the Volta in the eighteenth century. This tendency can be viewed as one kind of response to what de Witte and Meyer term the “Akanisation” of Ghanaian culture (2012: 48). The return to multiparty politics and democratic rule in 1992 also put the state cultural policy of *Sankofaism* under ever-increasing pressure. Liberalisation and commercialisation of a public-sphere that was once state-controlled has seen a rapid proliferation of alternative, privately-owned media (see Hasty, 2005) accompanied by the Pentecostal explosion, proponents of which vehemently reject traditional culture on the grounds that it poses a spiritual threat (de Witte and Meyer, 2012: 48-50).

Nonetheless, the idea of “unity in diversity” persisted, finding its way into national cultural policy, and becoming particularly prominent during the tumult of the PNDC period. Katharina Schramm quotes the influential Ghanaian playwright and former PNDC culture secretary, Ben Abdallah, as saying:

“The [aim of ‘unity in diversity’] is not to... kill certain cultures and make one culture dominant and call that Ghanaian culture, no. Not even to involve a new culture, no. But to create a new culture in the sense of creating a framework within which all of these different cultures can operate in a dynamic and beautiful way” (2000: 341)

The notion of “unity in diversity” was eventually enshrined in the Fourth Republican Constitution, which paved the return to democracy and multi-party elections in Ghana (National Commission on Culture, 2004: 8). The phrase itself was catchy, and during my time in the field it was a slogan painted and plastered on cars, hoardings and promotional materials of all kinds. The idea is succinctly expressed in current cultural policy, which suggests that a patchwork of cultural traditions can be put to work in the developmental work of shaping the present and the future:

“Ghana has over 50 ethnic groups whose common values and institutions represent our collective national heritage. Each of these ethnic groups brought together by accident of history, has unique cultural features and traditions that give identity, self-respect and pride to the people. Since independence, the emerging civil society of Ghana has recognised the need to promote unity within this cultural diversity, and Ghana has since enjoyed relative unity, stability and peace...The Fourth Republican Constitution (1992) recognises culture as a necessary tool for national integration and development...” (National Commission on Culture, 2004: 7-8)

If notions of “unity in diversity” are anchored in the historical juncture between the colonial and independence periods, then the view of heritage as something to be preserved can also be traced back to these early days of the Ghanaian state (Hess, 2001: 63). The establishment of the National Museum of Ghana in Accra, as part of the independence celebrations of 1957, was a particularly clear example of the growing tendency during this period to collect, preserve and display cultural artefacts deemed to have historical significance (Hess, 2001: 66). Enmeshed in Nkrumah's

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homogenising nationalist project, inspiration for the National Museum of Ghana was drawn from the collections of the British Museum in London and the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, and its guiding mission was to preserve for posterity the historical, material heritage of the nation (Fuller, 2014: 81). That, at the time the museum was established, the material deemed worthy of preservation extended only to an archaeological collection gathered by British military commander Sir James Willocks and a collection of chiefly paraphernalia donated mostly by Akan chiefs, amply highlights how exclusivity has shaped contemporary notions of heritage in Ghana. With heritage conservation premised on selection and exclusion, living practices, like craftwork, are transformed into static objects of culture that can be abstracted, marketed and consumed. Johannes Fabian's work on anthropology's uses of time highlights how the "museumification" of living peoples and their practices works to re-inscribe and bolster unequal relations of power (1983; see also Herzfeld, 2004: 31)

Heritage and hierarchies of value

This sort of exclusionary dynamic continues to play out at a local level in places like Agotime. Here, the weaving practices of young workshop members were routinely criticised by village elders and NGO workers for not preserving the "authentic" heritage of the place. Through talk of their lack of commitment to the traditions of the craft, young weavers were cast by their elders as the unworthy bearers of Agotime's intangible heritage (Kirshenblatt- Gimblett, 2004: 52). Michael Herzfeld positions these kinds of local dynamics within what he terms "a global hierarchy of value", such that craftspeople, contending with the challenges of precarity, are nonetheless routinely held to exacting standards as the exemplars of tradition (2004:3-5). In Kpetoe, these discourses elided the material and social circumstances of young craft people's working lives, which in pressing them for money, time and resources, routinely worked against their continued attempts to produce "good" cloths. In failing to account for the everyday pressures of weaving for a living, this model of heritage was not only unattainable for my workshop colleagues, but it also ignored the hopes and aspirations that drove young men to engage with craftwork in the first place.

Similarly, notions of knowledge, ignorance and social status were bound up with ideas about heritage preservation. A consultant who had worked on a UNESCO project dealing with Agotime textile spoke in utter dismay of how the

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villagers' "ignorance" of their own heritage was evinced by their lack of concern for the preservation of their old cloths. Claiming to have seen moth-eaten and stained old textiles being used as wrappers and table covers, the researcher's focus on heritage preservation marked a sharp social distinction between a knowledgeable heritage elite and a poorly-educated Agotime citizenry. Thus, ideas about heritage and preservation were politicised in terms of the social positioning and hierarchies of value which were attached to both people and objects. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that a cornerstone of the Ghanaian state's current cultural policy remains overarching support of "national heritage" through the revival and celebration of local festivals and cultural displays (Meyer, 1998: 316), as well as nominal support for "traditional" crafts such as *kente* weaving. For those engaged in politics and cultural policy, the fostering of development, social cohesion and civic pride rested upon positive engagement with heritage and ideas of the past (Meyer, 1998:327), and this attitude permeated from the chiefly elite in Agotime right up to officials working in the UNESCO office in Accra. As such, whilst the politics of heritage may have been shot through with hierarchical power dynamics and inequalities, the official line remained one of inclusion and unity in the service of development.

The structuring of heritage according to long-standing disparities in power and knowledge does not, however, preclude the fact that discourses surrounding culture and tradition are continually reformulated in the light of changing conditions and novel subjectivities. The liberalisation of Ghanaian media following the return to multiparty politics in 1992, the subsequent rapid development in media and digital technologies along with the ever-increasing importance of Pentecostalism in the region have all contributed to new conceptions of what heritage means in a globalising context. Televisual engagement with ideas of heritage, a broad field of print media as well as the increasing use of mobile phones and the internet to share photographs and videos all crucially underpin how young people are engaging with heritage. In the Agotime workshop, smartphones were used to *snap* photographs of cloths which were then widely shared between friends on the instant messaging services WhatsApp and Viber, as well as online on Facebook. These photographs were shared with customers and pictures and videos of festival celebrations were

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posted to social media³⁶, the wide circulation of these images serving both to market weaving traditions and as important modes of everyday communication in the crafting community. Furthermore, whilst Pentecostalism's growing influence over the public sphere in southern Ghana has challenged state led *Sankofaism* (de Witte and Meyer, 2012: 50), its emphasis on the transnational has resonated with increasing use of digital media and the internet to articulate both religious subjectivities (Gifford, 2004: 33) and ideas of heritage (de Witte and Meyer, 2012: 51-52).

The Bremen Missionaries, Afrikania, Archbishop John Sarpong's inculturation project and Pentecostalism- cultural heritage, politics and religion in Ghana.

Historically, religious groups have made various attempts to come to terms with the linguistic and cultural complexity of southern Ghana. This analysis focuses on the approaches offered by the Bremen Missionaries, the neo-traditionalist religion of Afrikania, Archbishop Peter Sarpong's Catholic inculturation project as well as current debates on Pentecostalism and heritage in the region. Some of these approaches can be characterised as the creative adoption and remodelling of heritage in a kind of spiritual *bricolage* that seeks a synthesis between local practices and the demands of modernity (Meyer, 1998: 317). However, these processes were not always integrative ones. In her research on the engagement of Protestant missionaries with Ewe-speaking peoples east of the Volta Birgit Meyer highlights how detailed cultural and linguistic understanding was sought primarily in an attempt to displace pre-existing cultural and religious practices (Meyer, 1999: 60). Nonetheless, despite elements of continuity between mission churches and the Pentecostal movement, particularly on the issue of renewal and evangelisation, the most significant rupture is between the mainline missionary-founded churches and the Pentecostalists who dominate contemporary debates about religion and heritage in southern Ghana.

Just as questions of heritage, authenticity and tradition have been an integral part of the constitution of the Ghanaian nation-state, so too has religion and the history of Christianity and missionary work. The Basel Mission arrived in the Gold Coast in 1828, followed by Methodist missionaries seven years later. East of the Volta, the Norddeutsche Missionsgesellschaft (NMG) began work amongst the Ewe in 1847 (Meyer, 1999: 8). Their activities lead to the development of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, commonly referred to as the E.P. Church, which is the primary

³⁶ A Facebook page dedicated to the Agotime *agbamevoza* was established in the summer of 2014 and it is regularly updated with photo and video of the festival as well as updates on upcoming cultural events in Agotime.

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mainline Protestant church in eastern Ghana and has a significant congregation and several schools in Kpetoe. Establishing churches and schools, predominantly along the coast to begin with before moving into the hinterland, these Protestant missions played a key role in the creation of a local elite who would go on to form the nexus of the country's political leaders and thinkers (Gifford, 1998: 57). It is in large part from this political and intellectual elite that Nkrumah and his Convention People's Party (CPP) emerged in the late 1940s. Gifford makes the point that:

“...such [was] the impact of Protestant missionary work on setting the tone of Ghanaian society that the CPP had a distinctly Protestant revivalist flavour to it, so much that it was quite natural for Nkrumah to express his pan-Africanism and socialism in Christian metaphors ('Lead kindly light...', 'Seek ye first the political kingdom...')” (1998: 58)

Moreover, language and practices of cultural and linguistic translation have been crucially important in southern Ghana's religious scene from the outset, structuring the earliest encounters between the people east of the Volta and Protestant mission churches. From the time of their arrival in the region the NMG missionaries devoted themselves to the mastery of Ewe. Taking Anlo Ewe from coastal communities as the standard form, they developed an Ewe orthography that draws on German spelling and pronunciation as well as an Ewe-German dictionary and grammar (Spieth, 2011: 39-40). The first full translation of the Bible into Ewe was completed by the NMG in 1918 (Meyer, 1999: 59). Engagement with local vernacular marked Protestant missionaries out against their Catholic counterparts and writing on the topic of language in the region, missionary scholar Jakob Spieth extolled the virtues of Ewe saying:

“If we want the Ewes to retain their valuable intellectual individuality, then we must seriously ensure that this language remains, and the up and coming youth of that country develops an insight into the beauty and worth of their mother tongue” (2011: 41)

This linguistic work was accompanied by extensive ethnographic research also conducted by Spieth. First published in 1906 in the German as *Die Ewe-Stämme* (“The Ewe Tribes”), a recent English translation of this weighty tome, entitled “The Ewe People”, sits on display in the parlour of Agotime's Paramount Chief.³⁷ Based on two decades of work in the region, Spieth drew on the word of local informants in writing an encyclopaedic account of social, spiritual and economic life amongst disparate Ewe groups. However, in spite of its comprehensive detail, Spieth's engagement with cultural difference was heavily inflected by his position within the mission's

³⁷ Spieth's work makes specific reference to Agotime as amongst the settlements on the plains, highlighting the close and enduring inter-connections between Agotime and their Ewe neighbours (Spieth, 2011: 26)

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conservative structures, the writing thus "...echo[ing] missionary bias..." (Meyer, 1999: 60). These insufficiencies were compounded by early missionaries' ignorance of the Ewe language, their reliance on translators to communicate sermons as well as the uncertain translation of key terms including *mawu* for God³⁸ (Meyer, 1999: 65). As such, the early contact between Protestant missionaries and the peoples of eastern Ghana was characterised by intense engagements on a cultural and linguistic level that brought forth novel, complex and at times confusing, understandings of what both religion and culture might mean.

In the course of the early 20th century and up to the dawn of Ghana's independence in 1957, a key role was played by the local elites that had been formed through contact with mission churches and education. In the post-independence era religion took on a new significance. Throughout the political upheaval and successive regime changes of the 1960s and 1970s and into the acute crisis years of the 1980s, religious groupings in Ghana formed a fundamental aspect of civil society, variously bolstering and challenging the political establishment (Gifford, 1998: 109). In this context of continual negotiation between the powers of the state and various churches, culture and heritage has been a major bargaining chip on both sides of the debate.

The coup that brought flight lieutenant Jerry Rawlings to power for the second time in December 1981 marked the beginning of what has been termed Ghana's "31st December cultural revolution". At a time when Ghana was reeling from the economic shocks of the 1970s that had crippled countries across sub-saharan Africa, calls for economic and cultural renewal abounded and resonated with the crisis that was gripping the nation. Developing upon Nkrumah's post-independence cultural policy, Rawlings advocated a return to "...the nation's cultural roots..." (de Witte, 2004: 138) and re-emphasised *Sankofa* as the state's cultural policy. Mention of *Sankofa* is still to be found in the fourth republic's cultural policy (National Commission on Culture, 2004: 9) and continues to retain its cache amongst the political elite (Meyer, 1998: 316-317). This attempt at recouping the past in the service of contemporary political exigency was marked by a profound suspicion and antipathy towards all influences deemed "foreign", "imperial" or "Western", particularly forms of Christianity born

³⁸ Meyer highlights the difficulties of both linguistic and cultural translation in her work on Pentecostalism in Peki, two hours drive north of Kpetoe, pointing out that it is most likely that prior to missionary contact, *mawu* referred to a particular Ewe deity, rather than an omnipotent and omniscient God in the Christian sense (1999:65). Nonetheless, *Mawu* continues to be the accepted Ewe term for the Christian God in Kpetoe and across the Ewe-speaking Volta region as well as being widely used as a name for both men and women when prefixed to other Ewe words.

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out of missionary activity (Gyanfosu, 2002: 271; see also Nugent, 1995). The *Sankofa* cultural policy was accompanied by the exposition of a Socialist framework that Rawlings claimed would return dignity and prosperity to a country that, for many, had long seemed characterised by state corruption, greed and faltering developmental projects and aims. Rawlings project, then, was a polemical one of cultural renewal allied with economic and social revival.

It was in this context of political tumult, with the *zeitgeist* calling for total renewal of the social, cultural and economic fabric of the country, that the Afikania Mission emerged in December 1982. The mission was founded by Vincent Kwabena Damuah, an experienced Catholic priest and theological scholar who resigned from the church to establish the mission. Drawing on symbols of tradition, including whisks and herbal medicines, and making claims about the authenticity of African religious culture, Afikania placed great emphasis on a Ghanaian cultural renaissance (de Witte, 2004: 134-135) Because of this, during its early years the movement counted on the support of Rawlings PNDC regime. Indeed, Damuah briefly served as a minister in the PNDC government before setting up the Afikania Mission (Gyanfosu, 2002: 277) and in the wake of the 31st December revolution, Afikania was the only religious group allowed to broadcast on state radio (de Witte, 2004: 138). As such, Afikania was crucially aligned with the socialist politics of the PNDC government and Rawlings' search for legitimacy through a nationalist rhetoric of "African authenticity" (de Witte, 2004: 140). These links are evident in Damuah's earliest pronouncements on the basic premises of the movement:

"...[Afikania is not new but] is the ancient religion of Africa that is now reformed and born again for our benefit. It takes the best of the old Africa and blends it with the best of the new Africa, to form a synthesis for the mutual benefit of mankind" (Damuah, 1982: 5 cited in Gyanfosu 2002: 278)

Damuah's use of language here is telling. Alongside socialist inflected references to "mutual benefit" and the recouping of "ancient" traditions into a reformed spirituality, the founder of Afikania speaks of religion being "born again". This sense of spiritual renewal finds its close echo in the ongoing proliferation of charismatic and Pentecostal movements that seek the religious renewal through the rebirth of Christianity. It is no coincidence that Pentecostalism in West African began gaining traction among a well-educated urban elite at around the same time that Afikania was launched. During this period spanning the late 1970s and early 1980s, when the economic crises that were to become chronic in the region had reached their nadir, calls for reform and renewal on all fronts were legion. In this, Afikania drew on

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much the same public spirit as would go on to fuel the relentless expansion of Pentecostal and charismatic forms of Christianity, with each of these movements seeking change of one sort or another, be it through the recasting of fundamental Christianity for African realities (Ault, 2013) or a search for authenticity in the cultural heritage of Ghana's (imagined) past.

Peter Sarpong, former Archbishop of Kumasi and a major proponent of inculturation in Ghana's Catholic church, provides an interesting counterpoint to the example of the Afrikania Mission when thinking about the relationship between cultural heritage, politics and religion. Starting from the position that "...the word of God must feel at home in all cultures" (Gyanfusu, 1995: 106), over the course of more than five decades in the Catholic church of Ghana, Sarpong worked to marry Asante culture with Catholic evangelising (Mensah, 1994: 3-4). A student of both anthropology and theology, throughout his career as a priest Sarpong has emphasised the importance of relating gospel to the lives, experiences and culture of parishioners (Osei-Bonsu, 1994: 22). He has adapted church music to include Asante drumming and Twi songs, as well as giving services to his congregation in Kumasi in Twi- a practice that was long resisted by the Catholic Church of Ghana in favour of Latin, when Protestant Mission churches had been working in local languages since their earliest encounters in the region (Wiredu, 1994: 10, see also Meyer, 1999). His priestly garb includes fragments of locally woven Asante *kente* stitched in amongst the deep purples, reds and creams of his otherwise Roman-style vestments (Ault, 2013). In that he draws upon and works to establish the dignity of local cultural resources and traditions, Sarpong's inculturation project has its close parallel in the Afrikania Mission.

As an outspoken member of the Catholic church, one-time chairman of the Catholic Bishop's Conference and leader of the church's Justice and Peace commission, Sarpong has drawn fierce criticism from both conservative factions within the Catholic church itself (Wiredu, 1994: 18), and the political elite of the country at large. During the PNDC period and the early years of the Fourth Republic, Sarpong and other prominent Catholic bishops, were involved in a series of critical, and often brave, interventions into matters of state governance and policy (Gifford, 1998: 64). In 1982, the year following the revolution, when Rawlings fervour was at its peak, the Catholic bishop's released a statement stating:

"The condition of ordinary Ghanaians has worsened since the "revolution"... Atrocities of all sorts have been committed against innocent civilians... Wanton killings, senseless beatings, merciless molestation and general harassment continue without the government showing any willingness or ability to do

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anything about them. The sordid lawlessness of our nation reached a climax in the outrageous abduction and subsequent abhorrent, cold-blooded, cowardly murder of three judges and an ex-army officer" (Cited in Gifford, 1998: 64)

For this, Sarpong's work was met with the acute suspicion and hostility of Jerry Rawlings, who is said, during the mid 1980s, to have gone as far as to interrupt a public speech he was giving to the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation to heap personal invective upon the then bishop (Gifford, 1998: 65). Nonetheless, throughout the political tumult of this period, from the 1970s up until his retirement in 2008, Sarpong's efforts at inculcation remained squarely aimed at evangelisation. Defining the aims of evangelisation as the process of striving for holiness in oneself, coupled with efforts to pass it on to others in ways which are socially situated and appropriate (Sarpong, 2002: 15-16), Sarpong's proselytising, evangelising vision resonates with that of the ever growing Pentecostal and charismatic scene in Ghana³⁹ (Meyer, 2004a: 448). With both movements placing a premium on the evangelical elements of faith, it has been argued that the profound impact of charismatic movements on religious discourses in Ghana has been the way that key elements of charismatic and Pentecostal Christian practice and belief have made their way into mainline churches practices and beliefs (Gifford, 1998: 77).

If Pentecostalism is reshaping other kinds of religious subjectivities in Ghana, it is also intersecting in important ways with ideas of heritage and tradition. As noted above, the growth of transnational media networks has effected not only on how heritage is conceived, but has also proven to be a key element in Pentecostalism too, shifting focus from local cultural traditions towards Christianity as a set of "global" practices (Meyer, 1998: 317). Indeed, despite coming to prominence at the tail-end of the 1970s and through the 1980s, Pentecostalism arrived in the Gold Coast in the 1930s via missionaries from the American Assemblies of God Church who were followed several years later by the British Apostolic Church (Daswani, 2011: 259). This emphasis on the transnational nature of Pentecostalism has been accompanied by a focus on traditional culture and heritage as bastions of "heathendom", the diabolical and spiritual and material poverty. In a context of failed structural adjustment and ongoing challenges to development, where sustained economic growth has failed to translate into improved living standards for the vast majority,

³⁹ Whilst it is difficult to accurately estimate the number of Pentecostal followers and census data can be flawed, figures from the 2010 census suggest that Pentecostal and Charismatic forms of Christianity constitute the largest single religious grouping in the country, with over 28% of the total population- almost 7 million people in total- classifying themselves as Pentecostal believers (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012). According to the World Christian Database, of sub-saharan African countries, Ghana is second only to Nigeria in absolute numbers of Pentecostals, coming in fifth in the entire world.

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Pentecostalism has offered both a compelling diagnosis and a remedy for chronic socio-economic inequality (Daswani, 2011: 258-260). Mensah Otabil, founder of the International Central Gospel Church and prominent televangelist captured something of the Pentecostals' attitude to heritage and development when he exhorted his followers to struggle to overcome the "strongholds" that are holding them back from prosperity and success. Defined by the pastor as "tribalism", "idolatry and fetishism", "cultural stagnation" and "village mentality" (Gifford, 2004: 125-132), this reading posits cultural traditions as the root cause of the scourges of ignorance, poverty and underdevelopment. In the weaving workshop and in Kpetoe, mention of local rites and traditional religious practices, including the pouring of libations and the gathering of hunters during festival season, was often accompanied by fearful talk of "backsliding"⁴⁰, with its diabolical connotations. Whilst these traditional practices continued, some were loathe to openly associate themselves with them.

However, none of this is to say that Pentecostalism represents a stark "break with the past". As has been argued by scholars of contemporary African Pentecostalisms, heritage practices and the cosmologies of traditional religion have formed the basis upon which Pentecostal notions of Satan and all-important rituals of deliverance have developed (Meyer, 1998: 322; Kalu, 2008: 169-170). Indeed, it has been argued that from the time of earliest contact with missionaries, indigenous ideas of spirits, deities and witchcraft have been incorporated into Christian notions of the devil (Daswani, 2011: 256), such that "...the "old" and forbidden, from which Christians were required to distance themselves, remained available, albeit in a new form" (Meyer, 2004a: 455). Indeed, given the intense and ever-present diabolical power that Pentecostalism ascribes to tradition, from which the only protection is the on-going deliverance of the born-again (Marshall, 2009: 131), it could be said that the past has a stronger resonance for Pentecostals than those espousing sanitised, objectified views of cultural heritage (Kalu, 2008: 172). What is more, conversion is not a linear, uni-directional process, and committed Christians can, and do, engage with traditional practices as well (see Thomson, 2012)

In Kpetoe the tensions between Pentecostalism and cultural traditions are not always explicit, but rather exist as contradictions that people manage in the course of

⁴⁰ When considering the notion of "backsliding" or "relapsing" into heathendom, Meyer makes the important point that Pentecostal discourses have used temporal strategies to associate tradition with the past, when of course heritage practices themselves have emerged in their current form from the transformations and exchanges of modernity and thus co-exist with the modern (Meyer, 1998: 318)

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everyday interactions. During my return to the field during the summer of 2015 I had the opportunity to attend a weekend of festivities celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the enstoolment of Nene Akoto Sah VII, paramount warlord of Agotime. Celebrations brought together a Pentecostal sermon with the firing of musketry, the offering of “spirited” gifts and the pouring of libations, all practices which are hotly contested by Pentecostals in Kpetoe and across the country for their power to invoke the presence of evil spirits (de Witte and Meyer, 2012: 50). For the crowds gathered under canopies outside the chief's home though, the combination of religious and traditional practices went unremarked, with both elements coming together to constitute the kind of performative *bricolage* that was expected of a festival (see also Dilley, 1987a: 250). In the context of the relationship between Pentecostalism and heritage, the combination of traditional practices with Christian (and also often Muslim) ones is commonplace in festivals and a compelling example of the way that the tensions and disjunctions between different practices and beliefs are mediated in the everyday. Moreover, committed Christians engaged with these events as pleasurable, social spectacles to be shared with friends and family. During the 2013 *Agbamevoza kente* festival, a large group of workshop weavers went together to watch the gathering of hunters that formed a part of the celebrations and planning for the 2016 festivities, Francis wanted to take his young son along too as hoped his child would enjoy the excitement of the display.

Religion and tradition in the everyday lives of Agotime weavers.

The day-to-day lives of weavers provide an insight into how religious subjectivities intersect with the routine practices of the craft and ideas about tradition. The key question is how weavers deploy religious ideas and practices as resources in managing the complex social work of learning and making a living. Historical trajectories, social circumstances and the peculiarities of personality all have a part to play in this process. Moreover, as part of complex strategies that are employed in search of successful work and learning, religious ideas are often aspirational, helping weavers make sense of challenges and orientate themselves towards a “better” future.

In his essay on the nexus between Western scientific traditions and traditional religious beliefs and practices in Africa, Robin Horton posits that traditional religion in Africa draws its integrity, in large part, from the plausible causal relationship it postulates between the world of human sociality, the spirit world and experiences of affliction (1967: 55). Spiritual explanations for worldly experiences of suffering and

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affliction are thus contingent on social context and are sought when common-sense approaches fail to yield results (Horton, 1967: 60-61). Historian Tom McCaskie's study of shrines in contemporary Asante emphasises the pragmatic pluralism that commonly characterises religious practice. One of his interlocutors said:

"You see there are not many Asante people who are Christian pure and simple...They go to church, But life is full of troubles and sometimes the Fetish Man can help more than the preacher can, Formerly this was understood by all but the new churches [Pentecostalists] are intolerant. So people will listen to Otabil [a nationally famous Pentecostalist preacher] on the radio and then go off to [shrines]...This Pentecostalism is *abaso* [a thing that has recently emerged] At present it is a fashion but all of these pastors will have to learn to share souls with the Fetish Men" (2008: 74)

Charles Gore's work on urban healing shrines in Benin City, Nigeria, also charts the complex religious engagements of shrine priests, or *obens*, who, as congregants of various churches, go on to found their own shrines devoted to local deities (2007: 45-46; 88- 98). Those seeking healing through shrines in Benin City contingently drew on the resources of different *obens* whilst also calling on the power of the church and other religious institutions including the Jehovah's Witnesses and Hare Krishna temples (Gore, 2007: 43). Similarly, Newell's Ivoirian ethnography describes churchgoers seeking solutions to their troubles not only from traditional healers but also from *marabouts*, whose explicitly Muslim faith was no deterrent to avowed Christians (2007: 485). Given the overlapping cosmologies of traditional religions and those of African Pentecostalisms and other forms of Christianity (Daswani, 2011: 256), traditional practices constitute one resource, amongst many, that people turn to when making sense of the challenges they face in their everyday lives.

In the case of artisans, this *bricolage* of ritual practice and religion is overlaid with the connection craftwork commonly has to ritual practice (Dilley, 1987a: 245). Unlike the two-fold division of lore and knowledge that characterises Tukulor weavers in Senegal (see Dilley, 1987a, 1989 and 2009), Agotime's workshop weavers did not explicitly transmit a body of ritual practice to initiates, although the mythic origins of the craft were alluded to in terms of ancestral migrations (see Kraamer, 2005: 165-168). Certain rituals were, however, a part of weaving. The start of an apprenticeship was marked by the pouring of schnapps and the offering of prayers. A figure vested with authority was called upon to officiate, and in the workshop the eldest member, Olu, carried out these rituals. Likewise, it was expected that the end of an apprenticeship would be marked with another set of prayers and libations augmented by auspiciously "spraying" the initiate with water and talcum powder. Francis explained these practices, saying that the prayers spoke to a Christian God and the pouring of libations, "spraying" and the use of powder were offerings to

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tradition. Of the accommodation between traditional religion and Christian practices amongst the Krobo, a Dangme-speaking people who live west of the Volta, Marijke Steegstra writes:

"Religion here is often action-oriented. It means performing or doing something else... It is often instrumental, a means to an end. People do things with a certain aim... [and] although the actions are clustered [and] form... a system...people are free to choose and can usually accumulate as many associations in their personal religious live as they deem feasible" (2005: 55)

A similar attitude prevails in the offering of libations for apprentices. Therefore, much like the enstoolment festivities outlined above, any seeming contradiction between traditional rites and Pentecostal prayers made sense from the perspective that these practices, together, sought the continued success and protection of the young weaver.

Aside from the practices associated with apprenticeship, a premium was also placed on the cleanliness of the loom. Before work would commence, weavers swept their looms, dislodging the small mounds of termite dust that had accumulated inside overnight. I often forgot to do this and, neglecting the ritual, I would be sometimes be quietly scolded by Gabriel. Asked why this was so important, he replied that sweeping cleared the loom of any spirits that might disturb work (see Dilley, 1987b: 263). Fears about the power of spirits residing in the loom found their echo in the worries of young women who avoided weaving work on the basis that loom spirits could wreak havoc with their fertility. A public sphere dominated by Pentecostalism has engendered powerful occult discourses that try to explain gross inequalities and affliction through claims to witchcraft (Geschiere, 2013: 186-187; see also Newell, 2007). From this perspective, the enduring power of an unseen realm of spirits that command respect and ritual care makes sense.

These processes of accommodation are also at work in the ways people weigh the demands of their church against their social and affective ties. Work on Ghanaian Pentecostals highlights how religious practice and belief is tied up with the practical concerns and everyday contingencies of particular lives. Daswani writes:

"...while fashioning themselves as Christians Ghanaian Pentecostals must take into account their relationships with others, and appropriately balance what is entailed in making a break with the traditional past with what aspects of this past are allowed to return into the present" (Daswani, 2011: 258)

Discussing religious entanglements with workshop members, it was clear that complex ties between family, friends, neighbours and fellow congregants all played a part in determining how religious subjectivities were fostered and beliefs practised.

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To my initial surprise, differences within families along religious lines were not uncommon. For Francis, loyal membership of the E. P. Church in Kpetoe had its roots in his school days, as a pupil at the local E. P. Junior High School. A member, at that time, of the church brass band, Francis spoke of his ongoing involvement with the church warmly. Following the death of his father when he was a teenager, Francis began to attend church regularly, valuing the guidance and support offered in sermons by church elders. As he honed his weaving skills he began to secure commissions from fellow congregants and estimated that he has made more than twenty cloths for fellow churchgoers. His elder sister also went to the E.P. Church and it was there that he had met Sena, his wife, who in her adolescence had accompanied her foster mother to church services. His ties to the congregation were periodically renewed through communal activities, and during the summer of 2015 Francis had joined fifteen others for a day's labour cutting the bamboo that would be used in the construction of a new chapel to house the growing congregation. Along with their hard work, congregants were asked for donations for the project, cement bags and cash, the value of which was determined by individual means.

Francis's involvement with the church constituted important links that he had carefully fostered with friends and neighbours, and he nurtured these ties with work and care. Talking about the pleasures of socialising and the enjoyment he took from both the music and way of worshipping the church offered, Francis said that his wife Sena, who had grown up elsewhere, had fewer friends in the congregation. For her, managing work as a market-trader and the care of their young son, church was secondary to other commitments and she did not always attend on a Sunday, spending the time instead catching up on household work or resting. Similarly, Francis's mother, with whom he shared a compound, had long eschewed the E.P Church. Instead, until the weekly journey there had proven too strenuous as she grew older, she had been an active member of the Apostolic Revival Society, a small charismatic church nestled along the roadside that ran north towards Ho. Even Francis, who took great pleasure in the sociality of church life and maintained a social network there, admitted that his primary responsibilities towards the care of his young family left him with less time to devote to church activities. Religious practice is thus interwoven with the exigencies of everyday life, commitment emerging not only from the density of social ties within a church community, but also through the gendering of work and the ebb and flow across the life-cycle.

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Francis's experiences exemplify how Ghana's much vaunted "freedom of worship"⁴¹ is played out in the everyday. These claims to "freedom" are polyvalent and unpacking their various meanings is important when considering both how religious subjectivities shaped the everyday lives of Agotime weavers, and vice versa. In contrasting his own religious experience with ideas of traditional religion, Francis emphasised that there was no "freedom" in traditional worship, which, before power or mastery could be attained, demanded sacrifice and devotion to many gods through the base material world of objects and shrines. He highlighted the value of self-discipline in the proper practise of Christian belief, empowerment being achieved through submission and what Ruth Marshall terms "...the relationship that the self elaborates with the self."⁴² (2009: 142; see also Foucault, 1997: 223-251). Gabriel similarly said that not only did the church deliver one from the diabolical ties of family curses, but that regular attendance helped congregants to "develop their mentality". Saba Mahmood's work on piety amongst Muslim women in Egypt draws on Foucault's "technologies of the self" to highlight how routines of ritual practice form a scaffold upon which moral and religious dispositions are carefully cultivated and a devout self is fashioned (2003: 855). In this, freedom is experienced as an unshackling from traditions and empowerment through routine techniques of self-fashioning and discipline.

In terms of the daily challenges Agotime weavers faced in making a living from their work, supporting their families and aspiring for something better, the practice of such disciplinary techniques of the self was not limited to religious life, but also patterned how they viewed their work and learning (Marshall, 2009: 144). The discipline of hard work, commitment through daily practice in the loom and dedication to one's studies were all highly valued, with the freedom that comes with success and prosperity being seen to emerge out of an ethics of submission. As such, discipline in the practice of religion and the course of everyday life was aspirational.

"Freedom" in the context of religious practice also referred to the choice of the individual, within the family but also in the wider community, as to where and how they would worship. Francis exercised this freedom by choosing a different church

⁴¹ Pride was taken in the fact that religious freedoms are constitutionally protected in Ghana. None of this is to say, however, that tensions and occasionally violence were not associated with religious plurality (see de Witte and Meyer, 2012).

⁴² Although Francis was a member of a mainline church, the dominance of Pentecostalism in southern Ghana's public sphere has seen mainline churches- even the Catholic church in its Charismatic Renewal- adopting key elements of the "new" Christianity to stem the haemorrhaging of their membership towards Charismatic churches (Gifford, 2004: 38-39). In this, mainline churches have been effectively "Pentecostalised".

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from his mother, and similar patterns of church attendance were found throughout the workshop. However, it was Gabriel, my neighbour in the workshop and an important mentor throughout my apprenticeship in the craft, who best exemplified this dynamic. During childhood, he had gone with his brothers and sister to the Christian Missionary Fellowship, a Pentecostal church in Kpetoe. Upon graduating from SHS the Christian Missionary Fellowship had promised Gabriel a job working in their headquarters in Accra. However, when he arrived in the capital the church enrolled him in bible school to train as a pastor; he lasted six months before he left, abandoning the church with the feeling that he had been tricked. For a few years Gabriel tagged along with various relatives and friends, visiting a number of different churches but not committing to one. Listening to the radio one day about four years ago, he tuned into the prophet Victor Mensah and what he heard had, in his own words, “spoken” to him.⁴³ Calling Mensah on the phone number that the prophet had shared on air, Gabriel was invited along to the prophet's own church, Mighty Jesus Prayer Ministries and had been a member ever since.

A half hour drive from Kpetoe on the outskirts of Ho, the Mighty Jesus Prayer Ministries is removed from the comings and goings of the town. I joined Gabriel early one Sunday to visit the church. Once inside, Gabriel spoke to few other congregants. Through loudspeakers stacked at the front of the half-built assembly hall, a female prophet, standing in for an absent Mensah, exhorted her followers to “Let the holy spirit meet you at your point of need!”. Ecstatic dancing was soundtracked by the church band and interspersed with preaching and the collection of donations as churchgoers were told that to give was to receive and that they would reap in prosperity what they sowed in tithes. Gabriel made a point of contributing weekly donations to the church coffers as well as paying GH¢5 every month in dues towards a church fund that helped with unexpected costs such as medical bills and funeral costs, explaining that this money functioned as a kind of insurance. Once the four-hour long service had come to an end Gabriel proudly showed me the impressive multi-storey home which Mensah had built for himself next to the church before beating a hasty exit, stopping just briefly to greet a couple of acquaintances as he made his way back to the road.

⁴³ Pentecostal churches are renowned both for their early adoption and extensive use of broadcast media in spreading the gospel (Gifford, 2004: 32; see also Meyer, 2004b, 2006 and 2010) which, along with the technicolour signboards that appear to line every road in the country, serve as powerful advertisements for individual churches and project an image of a lively religious “marketplace” (Daswani, 2011: 261).

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Having expected something approximating the intense sociality of the workshop which I was so used to, the cursory interactions between Mensah's followers surprised me. However, in terms of "freedom", this distinct sort of sociality focused upon the individual's obligations to God and can be seen as an exercise not only in the right to freedom of worship, but also freedom from the demands of community and dense social ties in a place like Kpetoe. Individualism was the driving force here, and Gabriel clearly felt empowered and successful through his personal ties both to Mensah and God (see McClendon and Riedl, 2016).

Aspirations to prosperity through close association with the success of a prophet like Mensah, were also a part of this idea of "freedom". Gabriel's pride in the pastor's fine home suggested not only that the house was an object of aspiration but also that Mensah living in such a house reflected positively on the church as a whole, with congregants' pride being vested in their pastor's lifestyle. The church was, then, a place where Gabriel could rightfully go, away from the clamour of the village, where what was most highly valued were his aspirations and his dedication to God, rather than community entanglements. In their work on Pentecostalism in Kenya, Gwyneth McClendon and Rachel Beatty Riedl argue that an emphasis on individualism and self-fashioning oneself apart from the ties of tradition and community have made charismatic forms of Christianity particularly popular amongst the young who are seeking to:

"...redefine their communal obligations (perhaps because they...feel constrained by the demands placed on them by relatives...or kinship groups)...[and they] are seeking spiritual protection for personal striving in uncertain and unequal environments..." (2016: 143-144)

In this, the appeal of Pentecostalism is bound up with young weavers' experiences of precarity, their search for dignity and wellbeing as well as their ongoing struggles to build sustainable livelihoods in contexts riven by inequality. What is more, considering the fact that witchcraft accusations most commonly emerge from kinship relations and that the diabolical is seen to inhere most strongly in family ties (see Geschiere, 2013a and 2013b), social proximity could not only be suffocating, but also highly perilous, intimacy replete with spiritual dangers.

This issue was all the more compelling considering that at the time I accompanied Gabriel to Mensah's church, he, along with others in the workshop, were struggling with their work in the loom. The ongoing Ebola crisis, which began in 2014, had effected the workshop. Although no cases of the disease had been reported in Ghana, my friends in the workshop were sure that the humanitarian crisis

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ongoing in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea had dented the local tourist trade, with visitors postponing travel to the region. They spoke about how media coverage of events had stoked fears so that travel, even to Ghana, was a risk many tourists were not prepared to take. As someone who had followed reporting of the epidemic from London, I could only agree with them that news of the disease had indeed created palpable, if not also very problematic, fear of contagion. Coupled with a worsening domestic economy, this crisis was felt to have chipped away at the life of the workshop, whose membership had halved in the three years since I first arrived in Kpetoe. Commissions were hard to come by and money was shorter than it had been for a long while. In the summer of 2015 things came to a head when the remaining workshop members, faced with a proportionally higher electricity bill, had the power cut off. Whilst others scraped together the money to have the supply reconnected, Gabriel found himself quarrelling with his colleagues over who should take responsibility for the bill. Spending less time in the loom, he seemed, at least momentarily, marginalised in a community that until recently he had been at the very heart of⁴⁴. Pursuing his faith far from Kpetoe arguably offered Gabriel some respite and a space where, dressed in his smartest Sunday clothes, he was able to think of something other than the pressing challenges of making ends meet. Clutching his Bible, a copy of a self-help book whose cover was emblazoned with the word "success" and the money he would hand over as a donation, the church also offered Gabriel the chance to project an altogether more successful image of himself than he was able to maintain in the hollowed out workshop.

Whilst Gabriel exemplified a type of Pentecostal personhood, the everyday exigencies of other weavers lives resulted in starkly different religious experiences. Although not a baptised member, Bright, Gabriel's paternal cousin, had been associated with the Kpetoe Jehovah's Witnesses since 1996. After his mother left the family when he was a baby and his father died when he was still a young child, Bright was brought up by his paternal grandparents, and his grandfather had trained him in the craft. In childhood he had joined his grandmother at the Kpetoe Apostolic church where she was a member. As a teenager he became more involved in weaving, using the money to help fund his schooling, and he had fostered a friendship with a fellow craftsman from Togo who was working in Kpetoe. Through this friend, Bright gained a small number of weaving contracts and came to learn about the Jehovah's

⁴⁴ The struggle to find work continued, and towards the end of 2015 Gabriel left Kpetoe once more for Accra where he hoped to find secure work. As of the spring of 2016, Gabriel was still looking for a job in the capital.

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Witnesses congregation in Kpetoe. It was here that he had met his wife, with whom he had two children and whose family were longstanding Jehovah's Witnesses.

Speaking about his relationship with his wife's family it was clear that these ties had been mediated, at least in part, through his participation in the church community.

Bright emphasised that apart from the initial connection through his weaver friend, his religious practice was something quite separate to his work in the loom. Indeed, what attracted Bright particularly to the Jehovah's Witnesses, over the various other churches he could have joined in Kpetoe, was that matters of faith were not treated "like a business", and instead the focus was on a sense of community born of their shared approach to Bible study. In this, there was a comfort to be found in the fact that you could travel elsewhere and find a Jehovah's Witness congregation that interpreted the Bible similarly. The church community was, for him, a source of spiritual support, faith and hope that something better could be found. Moreover, in dispensing with pastors and elders, Jehovah's Witnesses challenged the hierarchical ordering of relations that pertained in the crafting community and other churches, including Pentecostal ones. Giving everyone the opportunity to lead Bible study, Bright said that the church enacted their belief that "we are one...[and] somehow more equal".

Despite being drawn to the relatively egalitarian nature of the church, its hopefulness and Jehovah's Witnesses disavowal of the prosperity gospel, Bright did acknowledge that he struggled with the expectation that he would spread the church's message. Not only did he feel shy proselytising, but long hours spent working in the loom left him without the time to go out and engage with non-believers on matters of faith. It was this, rather than the Bible study which he seemed to very much enjoy, that held him back from being baptised as a full member of the Jehovah's Witnesses after almost twenty years involvement in the church community. Bright's story speaks to the relationship between particular personal histories and religious entanglements, as well as how the particularities of personality shape people's engagements with religion. From his own account, it would appear that one of the things that was most appealing to Gabriel in the Pentecostal church- its focus on prosperity and the outward markers of success- was, for his cousin, crudely off-putting. Moreover, Bright's reserved character meant that although he was highly committed to the church, he had yet to achieve full membership and seemed unsure if he ever would.

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None of this is to say that matters of religion are dictated solely by individual choice, but rather that religious subjectivities are crucially mediated by the everyday lives, routines and histories of congregants. What can be said, however, of Gabriel, Francis and Bright's stories is that the church offered them a way of making sense of and navigating the challenges and opportunities they faced in their day-to-day lives. For Francis and Bright, this support came from the tight-knit church community whilst for Gabriel, it took the form of a belief in the power of the individual to overcome hardships and reach prosperity. As such, religion was an important resource that craftsmen used in managing their lives and orientating themselves towards the future.

Conclusion

Ideas of religion and heritage were enmeshed in the fabric of weavers' lives, from their relationships with family and friends to the routines of making a living and shaping craftspeople's attitudes to their work. Church communities were important for the supportive social networks they fostered and the part they played in fashioning weavers' personhood. Ideas of heritage, however contested, conferred value upon weavers' work, marking Kpetoe as a destination on the cultural map of Ghana, and traditional practices formed the basis of community celebrations and the initiation of apprentices. The antinomies of heritage and religion were negotiated contingently in the course of the everyday, and were a resource that craftspeople drew on in forging their livelihoods. In an important sense then, socialisation into the work of weaving and the wider community hinged around how successfully craftspeople managed these negotiations. The next chapter will explore how apprenticeship worked to impart craft knowledge and socialise young people into the weaving community.

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Apprenticeship and learning in the community of craftspeople

The previous chapter argued that, alongside religion, the discourses and practices of tradition are important resources young weavers employ in realising opportunities and negotiating challenges. For young people weighing up the value of Agotime's heritage, the livelihood opportunities offered by weaving traditions were of the upmost importance and this chapter will look at apprenticeship (*ðɔ:srɔ:vi/ ðɔrsɔ:sro* in Agotime Ewe) as a process whereby craft traditions were turned to the work of getting by and forging livelihoods. Indeed, *ðɔ:srɔ:vi/ ðɔrsɔ:sro* does not refer simply to the acquisition of skills, but rather, as Francis put it, to the broader, social processes of "how to be with someone and learn the work that they are doing".

Craft apprenticeship fosters social competence within a community of makers and is marked by an initiate's developing awareness of the possibilities and limitations of materials, coupled with the emergence of specific kinds of bodily practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 29). Argenti writes of the sociality of apprenticeship:

"Knowledge is not a thing, but a relationship that is perpetually renegotiated and reinvented during the process of apprenticeship. The relationship offers the apprentice a means of increasing his (seldom her) participation in a community and of developing a new identity within that community. As such, the apprenticeship relation represents first and foremost a negotiation of relations of power" (2002: 499)

In this, skill is manifest not only in the ease with which an apprentice wields the tools of their trade or handles the materials with which they craft, but also in their social position within a network of peers, masters and customers and their grasp of the normative codes of behaviour which define and regulate their craft (Coy, 1989b: 2). Knowledge, then, is produced in the interstices of social and sensory worlds (Jaarsma et al, 2011: 440), a dynamic captured eloquently by educator and philosopher Paulo Freire:

"Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world and with each other" (1970:72)

Where transmission of craft knowledge proceeds not only through formalised apprenticeships but also in large part through the everyday routines of work, learning and play, the insights offered by Freire's critical pedagogy are particularly important. Freire puts forth a dialogic model of education, writing:

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"The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teaches. [Together] they become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow" (1970: 80)

This is not to say that hierarchical relations did not inhere in practices of apprenticeship and learning in Kpetoe; unequal power relations inside and out of the workshop translated into the uneven distribution of knowledge and ignorance⁴⁵. Nonetheless, learning to weave was a collaborative project of restless invention, creativity and cultural improvisation (see Ingold and Hallam, 2007), which took place as much between peers and beyond the bounds of the master-apprentice relationship as it did within the confines of apprenticeship. African Art historian Sidney Littlefield Kasfir's research on wood carving highlights the importance of "enculturated" learning, beyond the confines of apprenticeship, that proceeds through opportunistic observation and participation in craft practices (2013: 361). Argenti's study of wood-carvers in Cameroon's Grassfields further underlines how complex craft skills can develop beyond the scope of apprentice-master relations, with apprenticeship a "...discourse of legitimization [to] claims to status and power" (2002: 520) rather than the sole means of constituting craft knowledge.

The process by which initiates learnt to weave was thus constituted through multiple, overlapping communities of practice, in which enskilmement progressed as apprentices and learner weavers crossed boundaries, developed and shared techniques in peer groups, as well as learnt from a range of more established craftspeople (see Fuller et al, 2005; Kresse and Marchand, 2009: 3). Craftspeople moved between different communities of practice, within Kpetoe and elsewhere, working at home, in the compounds of neighbours and friends, participating in the Agotime workshop as well as weaving workshops and compounds in Accra and the Ashanti region, as well as along the coast in Nigeria. Some had jobs in other cities, and drew on these social networks to market their cloths the process of crossing the boundaries between these various communities of practice effected how initiates learnt, the process by which novel techniques and innovations were incorporated into the crafting curriculum (see Kresse and Marchand, 2009: 7), and how weavers found customers. Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger's concept of legitimate peripheral

⁴⁵ Dilley considers the impact that constructions of ignorance have on the social relations that shape learning and the dissemination of knowledge, writing "ignorance is... a function of social positioning [and] the dynamics of claims to knowledge and the counter-attributions of ignorance... illustrate the way in which definitions of expertise, and the social relations that produce it, cast a shadow of not-knowing on others who are denied the possibility of knowing..." (2010: 173; see also Kirsch and Dilley, 2015). Socially mediated conceptions of ignorance thus compel us to look at claims of ignorance as concerted political acts rather than a series of disparate, personal shortcomings.

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participation offers an “analytical viewpoint on learning” (1991: 40) that accounts for these crossed boundaries and encompasses the complex shifting social and material entanglements of both apprenticeship and “enculturated” learning. Legitimate peripheral participation is thus best understood as a process of socially situated practice whereby learning proceeds without teaching, through a "...'decentred' community of practice" (Dilley, 2009: 56; see also Dilley, 1999: 40-41; Lave and Wenger, 1991: 35). Writing about the dynamics of legitimate peripheral participation amongst Liberian tailoring initiates, Lave captures an ethos similar to that of Agotime's weaving community:

"Apprentices were peripheral participants with legitimate access to the arena of mature practice. They could observe both the processes of garment construction and the products that resulted. Master tailors and apprentices in the shops embodied all levels of skill in ways that made it possible for learner to infer directions in which they were going to move and the changing steps that would be involved over months and years. Tangible products were abundant, made with varying degrees of conceptual and physical skill by apprentices with different amounts of experience. All these factors enriched the learners' possibilities for understanding what made up the process of apprenticeship- as well as for understanding apprenticeship. That is, knowledge could be obtained directly by the learner and did not depend on the initiative of a teacher" (2013: 68)

Although learning happened in the interstices between different communities of practice and boundary crossing was an important part of becoming a skilled weaver, the workshop community was also constituted through practices of enclosure. As discussed above, admission to the workshop was regulated and had to be negotiated with community elders as well as in routine interactions with weavers in the workshop. These social relations were marked both by mutual support and exclusion, and joking relationships between young men defined the dynamics of learning and work (see Marchand, 2003; Marchand, 2009a: 48-57). Although the specific content of boisterous volleys of workshop banter were often lost on me as a non-Ewe speaker, it was clear that jokes were used to negotiate licence, authority and hierarchy in the workshop, and that they were important in shaping the workshop community. Unlike the interethnic Bozo/Dogon banter Marchand describes on Djenné's building sites, joking relationships in the Kpetoe workshop centred upon the close ties of kin and friendship, with weavers on the periphery of tight-knit social groups the subject of jokes. These joking relationships were fluid, and shifted in response to changes in the workshop membership, as young men moved in and out of the space as they pursued work and learning opportunities. Whilst banter was a means of negotiating social boundaries, humour was also a source of social pleasure and a defiant refusal that the struggles young craftspeople faced should define their existence (see Schepers-Hughes, 2008: 49). In this, the weaving workshop was one of

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the happiest places I have ever worked in. Fictive kinship also forged ties and drew the boundaries which held the workshop community together. Peers greeted one another as “brothers” and “sisters”, and friendly respect was accorded to “aunties” and “uncles”, whilst those who proved to be a nuisance were derided as “he” or “that man”.

Bringing my own apprenticeship in the Kpetoe workshop together with the experiences of workshop weavers, the following ethnography details the stages which an initiate passes through in the course of their apprenticeship and links the practical, embodied processes of craft work to key elements of sociality and selfhood amongst weavers in the crafting community. Exploring the relationship that exists between the crafting of objects and the production of artisans themselves (Herzfeld, 2004: 38), a focus on the apprenticeship curriculum allows us to consider the tools and techniques which are involved in the production of cloth and trace how, through the practice of key tasks, initiates move from peripheral to full participation within a crafting community (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 34-37). Enskilment, however, does not proceed in a linear fashion (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 36; Lave, 2011: 68), and craft learning, in constant dialectic with the changing material and social circumstances of artisanal work, develops through solutions to situated problems and challenges. As such “...skill cultivation is inherently diverse and centrifugal: each novice becom[ing] capable in his or her own way, albeit in an environment of social interaction and with shared models for which to strive.” (Downey et al, 2015: 185). Skill is thus liable to decay as well as grow, as processes of ageing, injury and illness change how, and ultimately if, artisans can practise their craft⁴⁶ (Marchand, 2014: 183).

Moreover, the processes and practices of apprenticeship have much to tell us about how social networks are configured, how problem-solving skills develop, the part vocational identity plays in the life-ways of weavers and how all these factors relate to Agotime weavers' livelihood strategies. In the workshop, apprenticeship was one element in the complex strategies young craftspeople in Agotime adopted as they navigated the shifting terrain of work and learning. The ethnography presented here, then, is crucially bound together with that of the following two chapters which address weaving as a form of work and the other kinds of work craftspeople engage with in forging livelihoods.

⁴⁶ In the workshop, ageing was widely seen to rob weavers of the “power” they needed to work and injury gravely threatened their ability to make a living either in the loom or elsewhere.

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Although not the focus of this study, schooling and formal education also have a bearing on craft apprenticeship . The point has long been made that many West African craftspeople have work and educational aspirations beyond their trade (Peil, 1968: 77-78; Peil, 1970: 137; Peil, 1979: 16-22). In the workshop education was imbued with a transformational quality, with development aspirations commonly expressed in terms of learning (see Robertson, 1984: 640). Close links were routinely drawn between education and processes of social and economic development, at both policy level and in the lived experiences of people (see Mains, 2012: 71-77; Katz, 2012: 234-235). In conversation with workshop colleagues discussions about learning were often framed in terms of personal development and the mental and physical disciplining of oneself in preparation for imagined and better futures⁴⁷. In this, schooling was bound up with aspiration and weaving was a form of work that many boys and young men in Agotime engaged with to earn the money they needed for school fees and equipment. In an important sense, the process of engaging with craft learning and formal education were ones of self-fashioning, through which young people not only prepared themselves for the challenges of making a living, but also fostered their aspirations and hopes.

Whilst craftspeople's attitude to learning remains imbued with a versatile and inventive hopefulness, this optimism is not unbounded. Whilst secondary and further education is a pre-requisite for aspirational, sought after government jobs, going to school and pursuing further education in a saturated, faltering labour market was no guarantee of finding secure, professional work. The relationship between education and social mobility was therefore complicated, with schooling often failing to deliver improved work opportunities (see Langevang, 2009: 2044; Froerer, 2012). This issue was compounded by the changing values attached to young people's vocational and craft skills within globalising economies of knowledge and the sense that young people's work opportunities had been curtailed at the very moment when education had begun to broaden their horizons (see Katz, 2012; Mains, 2012). Additionally, young weavers were well aware that they would augment the value of their work if they could expand the market for their cloths, beyond the local middle-classes who form their customer base, to affluent tourists or overseas buyers. Without the social leverage and infrastructure needed to reach these potential customers however, their

⁴⁷ Gilbert uses ideas of "destiny" to capture the way in which the everyday challenges of present realities are mediated with aspirational and hopeful expectations of the future amongst her young Nigerian interlocutors (2014: 28). Although talk of destiny was largely absent in the weaving workshop, similar dynamics of aspirational self-fashioning were at play in Agotime.

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frustration was palpable (see Boateng, 2011: 145). In this, the ever-quickenng pace of globalisation has entrenched existing inequalities (Honwana, 2012: 90), leaving artisans to contend with increasingly "...precarious, fractured and marginalised existence[s]" (Scrase, 2003: 449; see also Herzfeld, 2004). In a market flooded with cheap textile imports,⁴⁸ amid longstanding claims of declining quality (Lamb, 1975:158-159) and where ties to tradition could be burdensome (see Lave and Wenger, 1991: 62), engagement with craft apprenticeship could be seen as an impediment to young people aspiring for more than a life in the loom.

A workshop in the neighbourhood and learning in the compound

Apprenticeship was a series of learning and work practices embedded within the social routines and spaces of the household and the neighbourhood (see Dilley, 1999: 41). The sensory and social experience of learning to weave was tied to the home compound and the workshop, and these socio-spatial relations supported the development of skills and access to patrons that craftwork depended upon (see Gerschultz, 2013).

To walk into the workshop was to enter a rich sensory landscape, abuzz with the movement of people, animals and things, where interwoven with the routines of the craft were the habits, practices and exchanges of everyday life. With space enough for up to thirty looms, open trellis walls and a corrugated iron roof that amplified the patter of rain, the Kpetoe workshop could be a noisy place. In the surrounding scrubland crowing cockerels pecked at the dirt and goats cried out, scavenging for scraps of food to eat in the open drainage gullies that ran down from the road. Until its owner, a former workshop member, left to work in Kumasi, an old boombox would blast the radio from early morning until after dark. Now, the latest hip-life and azonto tunes are played through tinny mobile phone speakers, which intermittently beep amidst the din. When there was money to cover the electricity bill, four fans whirred overhead, stirring the hot, heavy air just enough to cool those sitting directly below. The click-clack of bobbins snapping against the wooden sides of thrown shuttles syncopated with the dull thud of heddles pressed open and closed by agile-footed weavers. The shrieks of small boys and girls - the children, siblings and young neighbours of workshop weavers- could be heard as they careered around

⁴⁸ In the context of the deep-seated inequalities engendered by globalisation and neoliberal capitalism, the commodification of culture results in a transfer of power away from local producers, towards "...those with superior capital and mobility within global markets" (Boateng, 2011: 151). Where cheap printed imports undercut the local weaving of *kente* cloths, the wide circulation of products which draw on *kente* designs brings no material benefit to weavers.

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the space, small feet padding about on the dusty concrete floor. Layered on top of all of this were the voices of the adults, their laughing shouts, quiet murmurings and singing voices as they went about their work, weavers weaving, traders hawking and visitors stopping by. It was at their looms that weavers greeted guests and visitors and it was to their looms that the craftsmen retired in the heat of the middle of the day, making up makeshift beds of worn old foam cushions and lying down to nap, legs balanced upon the loom crossbar. It was gathered around the edge of the workspace, on an assortment of plastic chairs, worn wooden benches and squat work stools that the men would meet monthly to discuss the workshop, and it was on these same benches, pushed up against the walls that they talked and laughed together, showing round a new gadget or sharing a copy of a newspaper someone had brought in. It was here too that colleagues shared food and kept an eye on children whose mothers were busy selling at market. For members' fathers the space may once have been where they too had a loom and for wives, sisters, brothers, mothers, cousins, aunts and uncles the workshop was also familiar, a place inhabited by a crafting community that reaches out beyond its four walls and into the village and the world beyond. More often than not a "blackout" would shut the electricity off for at least part of the day, and the fans would wind slowly down until they were still. Then, the rumble of tyres along the nearby asphalt road and the crunch of gravel when a car pulled up outside could be heard. Noise from the neighbouring drinking spot, general store and chemical sellers filtered through too, along with the shouted greetings of passersby. From the households that backed onto the workshop could be heard the pounding of fufu and the swish of a woven fan of palm fronds as a woman lit a charcoal brazier in preparation for a meal. Listening to the patter of conversation blend with the lilt of music and the cries of a child, you could hear that whilst this is certainly a place of work, it was also a place of life and sociality. With the sprawl of the village spread out around it, the workshop, its people, the sounds and bustle of it all, are embedded within the life of the community.

Whilst I was apprenticed in the workshop, craft learning most commonly begins at home in the compound. Here boys learn from their male kin and older friends and wandering through the town, one comes across looms grouped together under the shade of a tree or beneath "sheds" fashioned from palm fronds (see Posnansky, 1992: 122). These weavers worked together alongside relatives and neighbours and some former workshop members had forgone the bustle of the workshop and chosen to move their looms back home. Such arrangements have long

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characterised the work of weaving in Agotime, with the Paramount Chief, Nene Keteku III, describing how as a teenage weaver in the early 1960s he joined with age-mates to form a group of craftspeople in the village who made cloth together in the open. Together they helped each other develop new techniques and taught one another novel designs. Nene worked like this alongside friends for several years.

In his study of *aso òkè* weaving amongst Yoruba-speakers in south-western Nigeria, Duncan Clarke emphasises the importance of the social and spatial relations of the patrilineal compound in the passing on of weaving skills (1998: 85-106). Patrilineal ties were also important in the transmission of craft skills in Kpetoe. Gabriel, Bright and Saviour were patrilineal cousins and all three had learnt the craft at home from patrilineal kin. These ties continued to hold strong and although their looms were no longer in family compounds, the patrilineal ties that characterised learning and work had found their way into the workshop. The ties between home compounds and the weaving workshop were underlined by the fact that, in English, weavers referred to the assembled workshop and associated elders, including the workshop chairman and paramount chief, collectively as “the house”. Talk of the public workshop in domestic terms emphasised the importance of household production as a model for the social and spatial organisation of craftwork in the community.

Childhood fostering practices were also often intimately bound up with the life of the family compound, apprenticeship and learning to work (Coy, 1989 c: 119; see also Einarsdóttir, 2006; Alber, 2012). Several workshop members recalled having lived away from their parents for formative periods during childhood and the experience of living with extended family appears to have been the catalyst for their interest and involvement in the craft. For Bright, going to live with his paternal family following the death of his father when he was a child meant that his first forays into the world of work and craft learning came helping his grandfather prepare materials for weaving. With the opportunity to closely observe a skilled weaver working at home, he soon picked up the basics of the craft.

Alongside a concern for the way in which a child is educated, these sorts of cooperative fostering arrangements also worked to embed children within social networks that were much wider than the immediate, “nuclear” family. Based upon existing relationships between the child’s natal family and foster parents, fostering served to sustain a number of important broader kinship and intergenerational ties (Einarsdóttir, 2006: 190; 194). In their work on Hausa and Yoruba childrearing

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practices, Edward Adeyanju and Frank Salamone argue that powerful social ideals of reciprocity, diligence and respect are inculcated and strengthened through child fostering with distant relatives or business associates (2014: 22-27). In this context, inter-family fostering arrangements are used to extend the social ties of a child (2014:24). Under conditions of economic precarity diffuse ties and the considerable social value placed upon sharing within the wider kinship network also functions as a social buffering strategy (Babatunde, 2011). In her work with the marginalised *matutos* of Brazil's north-eastern province, Nancy Scheper-Hughes highlights the role played by fosterage arrangements in the working of a dual ethic of reciprocity and dependency among neighbours, family and friends:

"[Fosterage] patterns extend outward the definition of family, household, and kin obligations by turning distant relations into closer kin and making kin of friends or mere acquaintances. Both institutions stress already limited material and emotional resources, spreading them ever more thinly among a larger network of people. The rescue of vulnerable sick, neglected or abandoned children by other poor women, sometimes relatives, sometimes strangers, who then raise them for a period of time, is understood as an unremarkable and wholly expected act of kindness and mercy...it is also very common" (1992: 104)

Apprenticeship training and the strong, broad-based social networks that underpinned the working lives of Kpetoe's weavers and the crafting community more broadly were thus cultivated through childhood experiences of fostering.

The curriculum for craft learning

Lave and Wenger's notion of a "learning curriculum" composed of socially situated opportunities for an initiate to legitimately participate in a community of practice (1991: 97-98) is useful for thinking how weavers learnt their craft. It allows us to trace craftspeople's trajectories of enskilmement⁴⁹ by examining how initiates' social ties to the crafting community relate to their increasing familiarity with tools and materials and the development of craft skill. In looking to the material stuff of weaving we see how crafting techniques sensually entwine body and object, a dynamic Howard Risatti describes as:

"...the process of the hand carrying out techniques (turning, weaving, throwing, chasing, knitting etc.) [through which] the craft object is formed and comes into being. In other words, the craft object's manifestation as a physical form is directly in and through the hand of the maker; it is through technique that the hand actually *informs* the craft object...[Moreover] because craft objects are by their very nature intended to be physiologically functional, they are objects made for the body and bodily "action"; therefore they must accommodate the body and be somatically oriented" (2007: 159-160, emphasis in the original)

⁴⁹ Enskilmement does not proceed in a linear fashion, but is better characterised as a process of growth which is as liable to decay as it is to develop (see Ingold, 2013: 17-31; Ingold and Hallam, 2014)

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In a craft that is predicated upon bodily strength and vitality, the practice of which is often exhausting, eliciting aches and pains⁵⁰ as well as hunger, the sensual and material aspects of making relate to the constitutive ties between people and the things they make. Following research which focuses on the materiality of apprenticeship relations (see Jaarsma et al, 2011: 442), this discussion works against the supposed tendency of anthropology to separate technical activity from sociality, “...a separation that has blinded us to the fact that one of the outstanding features of human technical practices lies in their embeddedness in the current of sociality” (Ingold, 2000: 195). In this, the development of technical, practical craft skills was entwined with young weavers’ emerging sense of personhood and the formation of sociality in the crafting community more broadly.

Like Senegalese Tukulor weavers (Dilley, 2009: 56) and the Liberian tailors who Jean Lave worked with (2013: 71), the curriculum followed by learner-weavers and laid out here does not follow the stages by which a cloth is made (see also Lave and Wenger, 1991: 96). This is in large part because the process of laying the warp threads that are needed before work can start in the loom is a complex task requiring more skill than any beginner is capable of (see Kraamer, 2005: 91; Clarke, 1998: 106). Indeed, some weavers never master the art of laying the warp. Instead, craft tasks were graded according to level of difficulty, with mastery of easier steps leading initiates to undertake progressively more demanding tasks over the course of the apprenticeship. This meant that although an apprentice may have significant weaving skill in the loom they were not necessarily able to complete all stages of production, including laying the warp, independently. This dependence on others in the course of the work was considered an impediment by those who had mastered all stages of cloth production, and functioned as a marker of status in the workshop (see Dilley, 2009: 57).

Play, socially situated learning and apprenticeship

The practice of craft skills began young and was rooted in childhood play, unfolding as opportunities arose in the course of the work of the household (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 93). The intimate relationship between play and household work was evident in small children’s games, where it was clear that the everyday routines of work offered children behavioural templates that they creatively adopted and adapted. The

⁵⁰ Soumya Venkatesan’s work on the marginalisation of female mat weavers in Southern India underlines the relationship between physical pain and the stigma that is often attached to craft work (2010: 167). Agotime weavers too would complain of bodies wracked with considerable pain.

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neighbourhood was a space that children shared with adults and the household work of cooking, cleaning, farming and weaving was integrated with play so that children were provided with a continuous stream of models of adult working and social behaviour (Lancy, 1996: 86). On the relationship between apprenticeship and innovation in African workshops, Kasfir notes how childhood games and the observation of the adult world are implicated in social enculturation into craftwork (2013: 360-361). The toddler daughters of my neighbours in Kpetoe would play together in the afternoons once their day at kindergarten was over. Away from the rough and tumble of the boys' football matches and the sophistication of the older girls who gathered on porches to talk and dance, their games revolved around make-believe home scenes. In the absence of toys, discarded tin cans doubled up as cooking pots, which, with a scrap of fabric, could be bound to their back like an infant. The girls experimented in "cooking" stews made from sand and water, stirring and pounding the mixtures with a stick in imitation of what they had seen adult women at home do. Similarly, they practised walking with tins balanced on their heads, trying out a skill that was a requisite for much of the work they would soon be expected to help out with. Their experiments were playful approximations of actions they had observed adults, older siblings and neighbours doing countless times before and, without direct instruction or training from adult members of the household, these games fundamentally shaped how small children developed the skills they would need for life in the community. Playful games and role play were bound together with work activities so that "...separating work from play was not straightforward [but] in the course of these engagements [children] moved fluidly in and out of numerous overlapping communities of practice and acquired the knowledge and skills necessary to keep [their] communities going." (Katz, 2012: 235). The practical skills practised in the course of these games were bound up with a process of developing social skills and practising different kinds of social relations, many of which were highly gendered (Lancy, 1996: 90-91). In the literature on childhood socialisation and education across West Africa, the seemingly self-evident principle of children learning through observation and practise, rather than didactic instruction recurs again and again (Fortes, 1938: 35; Gay and Cole, 1967: 20; Lancy, 1996: 82). With this in mind, the toddler girls' play can be seen as broadly representative of children's experiences of enskilment across the region, where the learning of practical skills is embedded within the everyday life of the home and the community.

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Furthermore, considering how small children used the materials and objects at hand to construct their imaginary world, this early make-believe play is closely related to the *bricolage* techniques that adult weavers used to find material solutions to problems that arose in the course of their work. The manipulation of various left-over odds and ends which might otherwise be discarded, but which in circumstances of material scarcity are saved and imaginatively put to new purpose, is a skill which has its origins in earliest childhood and is developed, at least initially, through play. In her work on child development in rural Sudan Cindi Katz notes how children "...us[e] all manner of found objects and waste as their props and handmade toys." (2012: 234). Similarly, Bame Nsamenang has suggested that the fact that children across West Africa are not provided with toys, and are encouraged instead to build and make their own playthings instead, can be linked to the region's rich and varied craft traditions (as cited in Lancy, 1996: 89).

Small children's imitative role-play was also crucially bound up with an immersive and profound fascination in the tactile and sensory worlds of their bodies and the environment. Mud was squelched between sticky hands, sand was sifted from one tin to another and children would splash each other with water, squealing when the cool spray landed on them. Plants growing wild between the houses would be uprooted and closely inspected with fascination whilst the ducks and chickens that roamed the neighbourhood were often gleefully chased about. Despite being embedded within the adult world of work and showing an increasing awareness of the demands of work, young children in Kpetoe, like their counterparts across the world, possessed a fascination with their environment that was both inherently playful and irreducible to the strictures and routines of the working world.

Thus, childhood play and socialisation into the life of the household and the wider community formed the basis of many children's first contact with weaving (see Kasfir, 2013: 360) and the acquisition of craft skills developed through observing (see Kraamer, 2005: 225) and participating in work activity. How children observe and imitate working practices brings together their approximate attempts at manipulating materials and tools with their increasing awareness of the social relations and hierarchies at play in the world of work (Lancy, 1980: 271). In this respect it is important to note that the periods that preceded active practical involvement in crafting tasks tended to be characterised by experienced makers effectively ignoring prospective learner weavers (see Dilley, 1999: 41). Explanations of the different practices involved in making a cloth were not forthcoming and were considered

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largely redundant as children were immersed in the everyday currents of work (see Portisch, 2009: 479). What is more, initiates were discouraged from asking questions (see Kraamer, 2005: 230) and my direct questions in the workshop were often met with curt and perfunctory answers. The process of learning through watching was, then, marked by quietly instilled discipline whereby weavers tolerated the presence of interested children if they remained quiet and unobtrusive. Apart from the youngest children who were given scope to play more freely, children who were noisy or caused a disturbance in the workshop were scolded and sent away. As a holistic process of socialisation into work, community and the coming responsibilities of adulthood, apprentice-style learning began young and was a disciplinary process (see Argenti, 2002: 508; Dilley, 2009: 63) initially embedded within the life of the household (see Portisch, 2006: 101-102; Lave and Wenger, 1991: 32).

However, as children grow older and made the choice to become further involved in the craft, the socially situated learning of early childhood took on a different dimension. Whilst there was a degree of egalitarianism in the generally accepted notion that anyone with a willingness to learn and sufficient practice could master the basics of the craft (see also Kasfir, 2013: 362), the social distinctions and hierarchies that patterned children's play came into sharper focus as they began to engage with adult weavers. Parental desires for a child to learn the craft (or not) were implicated in children's trajectories into the craft, alongside the adult social networks which played a crucial role in organising apprenticeships, as the families of potential initiates sought training for their children through relatives and friends in the community (Kraamer, 2006: 226). That these negotiations were mediated according to crosscutting social hierarchies was clear during the summer of 2013 when Emmanuel, my young neighbour, came to weave in the workshop. Fostered with a teacher at the local senior secondary school, Emmanuel was under the direction of Gabriel. Explaining his relationship to the boy, Gabriel said that Emmanuel's foster father had taught him at school, and thus he was instructing the boy as a favour to the older man. In this way, Gabriel was deferring to the authority of his elder. In his interactions with Emmanuel himself though, Gabriel was in a position of authority and in between his weaving practice the boy was called upon to run errands for his new master.

Apprenticeship was thus also an institution that was delimited by agreements between the master (or in my case, masters), their new student and the initiate's family. As in Ashanti, where the good faith of prospective apprentices must be

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vouched for by a relative or friend (Lamb, 1975: 158), a master weaver will gauge the attitude and aptitude of an initiate before an apprenticeship commences, and the young weaver and their family will settle upon a teacher with a reputation for having an even-tempered personality (see Kraamer, 2005: 226-227). When apprenticeship relations are established within the family between father and son or uncle and nephew, these negotiations are, of course, patterned according to the particular intimate hierarchies and tensions of kinship ties.⁵¹

This agreement, either formally made in writing or tacit, was most often marked by the offering of drinks from the apprentice and their family to the master. Before I was formally accepted into the workshop as an apprentice I offered two bottles of gin and one of whiskey to “the house”. One of these was used to pour libations and then shared amongst the workshop members (see plate 4), whilst the other two were gifts to the paramount chief and the workshop chairman (see Boateng, 2011: 40-41). Olu, the eldest weaver in the workshop, was called upon to officiate and he offered prayers in Ewe before splashing the spirits onto the dusty concrete of the workshop floor as a blessing for my future endeavours in the workshop and the craft. The assembled company were each offered a tot of whiskey from a glass that was passed around, and the ceremony was concluded with a call that I show respect for the help and guidance that the house would offer me in the course of my apprenticeship. These words and the pouring of libations thus constituted the apprenticeship contract which bound me to the workshop over the course of my fieldwork and from which I was formally released a year later. Whilst today the offering of libations in the Agotime workshop are limited to marking the start and end of an apprenticeship, it is interesting to note that ethnography from across the Togolese border in Notsé carried out during the 1980s suggests that craftsmen there would also pour libations and call upon ancestral weavers before beginning a new cloth (Posnansky, 1992: 122). Considering the contested role of libations in Pentecostalism (de Witte and Meyer, 2012: 50), one could see these practices as the vestiges of protective rites that were once more extensive.

⁵¹ Like other Adangme groups, Agotime is patrilineal (Huber, 1958: 162) and thus when craft learning took place within the family, if a boy's father could not teach him then the father's brother or the grandfather on the father's side of the family would most often take on the job of training the young weaver.



Plate 4- Sharing drinks and pouring libations in the workshop, November 2012.
Photography by author.

Apprenticeship, authority and the social relations of knowledge and ignorance

Whilst the crafting curriculum set out below provided a basis for learning to weave in Agotime, not all initiates were engaged in contractually delimited apprenticeship, with many learning solely through practise at home or in the loom of a friend. It is important to recognise that some of these young weavers mastered the basics of the craft in order to produce saleable cloth and support themselves through school, without dedicating themselves more fully to the work. For others, further refinement of their skills was a challenge as, finding themselves on the periphery of the crafting community, they lacked the social networks that underpinned the further development of weaving skills. In either case, these young men were largely relegated to producing cloth that was generally considered poor quality and, although a part of the crafting community⁵², they lacked the authority to progress towards mastery of weaving.

This is not to say that such transitions were impossible. A number of workshop weavers, including Francis, developed not only competency in the craft but also quite considerable skill without entering into formal arrangements. This issue thus prompts

⁵² Clarke notes how an *afo òkè* weaving community is importantly constituted through the ad hoc contracting of apprentices and learner weavers (1998: 97). These young men were often contracted by more established and successful weavers to produce cloth which could then be sold on to customers.

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questions about the purpose apprenticeship agreements serve in delineating social relations and authority within the craft. For Tsiamiga Ampomah, linguist to the Agotime Paramount Nene Keteku, contracts between initiates and master weavers worked to legitimise processes of learning. Echoing other community elders including the Paramount himself and the workshop chairman Mr Samuel Agba, Ampomah asserted that young weavers who practised weaving outside of the master-apprentice relationship were in effect “stealing” craft knowledge, bringing the craft’s good reputation and their own moral standing into question. Whilst it is often the way that community elders bemoan the loss of legitimacy and the growth of ignorance amongst the youth (see Last, 1992: 400) in this, the linguist was also emphasising the important fact that good cloths were not solely a product of skilful making, but were also fundamentally constituted through the social relations of their production.

This point has been well made in the literature, with Lisa Aronson’s work on Ivorian and Nigerian weavers underlining how apprenticeship works to institute exclusion, thereby protecting the prerogatives of a community of artisans (1989: 149). In this, apprenticeship is not primarily a means of reproducing technical skills, but rather a way in which the transmission of technical know-how can be socially stratified and tightly controlled. This view of apprenticeship follows the logic that specialist skills lose their caché if they are too readily available. Argenti’s ethnography of carving practices amongst the palatine elite and un-apprenticed youths of the Cameroonian Grassfields develops this argument, highlighting how apprenticeship legitimises elite claims to authority, but also how generational hierarchies legitimated by apprenticeship are made material in the contrasting styles and approaches to carving held by elite carvers and youths (2002: 519-520).

In drawing the link between the social conditions of craft learning and the material production of different kinds of crafted objects, Argenti’s work resonates with some of the tensions surrounding issues of apprenticeship and legitimacy in the Agotime weaving community. Having been drawn into awkward discussions with village elders about the supposed ignorance of young weavers I knew to be skilful, I wondered if some young people eschewed contractually delimited apprenticeship and the trappings of elite legitimisation as a means of staking their own claims to independence. Being repeatedly cast as ignorant and inadequate by their elders, these young men tried to reshape their exclusion into forms of work, learning and sociality that better suited them (see Honwana, 2013: 136), forego ing the strictures of

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generationally ordered master-apprentice relations for learning from age-mates⁵³ (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 91-93). Francis spoke warmly about the school friend who had introduced him to weaving when they were teenagers, as did my young neighbour Emmanuel, who enjoyed learning with his class mate⁵⁴.

What is more, whilst the antagonisms between young weavers and elders in the crafting community over issues of ignorance and knowledge were often quite clearly defined, more latent tensions were to be found in how others viewed the learning and work of Agotime weaving. A young man whose family lived in Kpetoe but who was a student at the University of Cape Coast explained that the challenges faced by Agotime's weavers could surely be traced back to their failures in school, their wilful ignorance and a lack of resolve to improve their own situation. An NGO worker who had conducted research in Kpetoe for UNESCO said, in hushed tones, that a big part of the problems faced by the town's craftspeople was their own ignorance.

Echoing similar characterisations of Senegalese Haalpulaar weavers as lacking intelligence (Dilley, 2004: 69), these uncomfortable exchanges painted a picture of ignorant young men who knew neither the true value of their work nor much else. Thus, as well as being a product of generationally ordered hierarchies, knowledge was also the prerogative of a privileged and "well-educated" elite, who positioned themselves as experts with greater understanding of Agotime craft than the weavers themselves. The devaluation of craft learning worked to bind skill in the loom to an image of the weaver as ignorant, backward and lacking key attributes of the civilised and educated (Herzfeld, 2004: 14). A far cry from my own experience of workshop members, this imputed ignorance seemed nonetheless to have been internalised by many weavers themselves, whose determination to engage in formal learning was borne from their sense that the loom could not offer the skills and connections they needed to secure much sought after salaried work. I was left with the impression that many would have foregone learning in the workshop if only school certificates and higher education could indeed offer routes out of the social and economic precarity of weaving⁵⁵.

⁵³ Peer-groups were important alternate communities of practice for young weavers who were learning from friends as well as, or instead of, master craftspeople. The generationally ordered hierarchies of respect and esteem meant that young weavers would not contradict their elders or engage in direct exchanges of ideas or practice. This is unlike the mutually constitutive dynamics of boundary-crossing described in Fuller et al's research on workplace learning among British school teachers (2005: 61-63)

⁵⁴ Hadju et al's work on young people's learning and livelihoods in southern Africa points to similar generational dynamics, suggesting that peer-learning, as opposed to young people being taught by adults, is an important way of developing skills across the continent (2011).

⁵⁵ Daniel Mains' work on youth experiences of unemployment in urban Ethiopia considers how, in contexts where "progress" and the attainment of adulthood are often blocked, young men negotiate

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Ignorance then was not a lack of knowledge, but rather a product of ones social position within local and broader hierarchies, which determined access to apprenticeships and other learning opportunities (Dilley, 2010: 182). It was also a space in which, of necessity, young aspiring craftspeople negotiated alternatives to contractually delimited apprenticeship through their friendship and social networks. In this sense, at least, “ignorance” could be in some ways positive and generative of peer-to-peer social relations (Kirsch and Dilley, 2015: 15).

Getting a feel for materials and beginning to “spin”

By the age of six or seven, most children had begun making a contribution to the work of the household. Gabriel, Bright and Joshua all remember starting out in the craft around this age by helping their fathers, uncles and grandfathers prepare the bobbins of thread needed to throw the weft. As in other West African weaving traditions including Yoruba *awo òkè* (Clarke, 1998: 104-106), the preparation of weft threads was usually delegated to young initiates, although the task was once the prerogative of female members of the household (Kraamer, 2005: 257). The process of learning to weave was thus bound up with an initiates’ earliest memories of adults and their work, whilst also having its basis in a child’s increasing participation in those activities (Portisch, 2009: 477). To draw on Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, the tools and materials associated with weaving are “... not simply neutral *objects* which stand before us for our contemplation [but rather] each one of them symbolises or recalls a particular way of behaving...” (2004: 48, emphasis in the original). It is through this longstanding- in many cases life-long- association with the craft, often beginning in childhood, that weavers develop a “feel” for their tools and materials. Marchand describes this process as a skilful “...combination of engaged observation, imitation and repetitive practice” (2009b: 74). Upon eventually reaching mastery:

“...the craft has been practised so many times since childhood that it is engraved in the nerves and muscles of his body...and can be performed in the illusion of effortlessness. It is a habitus, the ability to spontaneously produce a set of practices that while performed by the individual body are part of a social process as well” (Elyachar, 2005: 116).

Thus, my own attempts at “spinning”⁵⁶ began several months before I was formally apprenticed, when after a couple of weeks watching others spin I was called

their sense of personhood and aspirations through education and other everyday practices (Mains, 2012: 67-86)

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on to prepare yarns for Koenya. It was expected that, as a visitor in the workshop without my own work to busy myself with, I would lend a hand helping to others. Spinning involved the use of a bobbin winder, or “spinning machine” as it was called in the workshop (*katromɔ* in Agotime Ewe), small empty weft bobbins (*vumeyre* in Agotime Ewe) whittled from hollowed out sections of bamboo, as well as either two or four large plastic bobbins of industrially produced and dyed rayon or cotton thread. Workshop members shared the use of four bobbin winders, and each weaver had his own stash of empty weft bobbins. These pieces of equipment, along with the other tools of the trade, were for sale at the *Israel Kente Store* in the centre of Kpetoe, bobbins costing just a few pesewas and bobbin winders considerably more, priced at GH₵15 and up.

Perched on a low wooden stool close to the ground, one began by fixing an empty weft bobbin onto the bobbin winder and securing it in place with small pieces of palm reed, pulled from a broom, snapped into small segments and wedged between the bobbin and the winder’s metal pin. The empty bobbin securely in place, the next step was to collect the requisite number of large plastic bobbins and place them together on the ground next to the winder⁵⁷. Gathering together each of the ends of yarn from the large plastic bobbins, these were then moistened with spittle⁵⁸ and twined together before being threaded through the centre of a spare small wooden bobbin. This could be a tricky job and it was often easiest achieved by placing the empty spare bobbin between your lips and sucking inwards until the yarn passed through and into your mouth, making sure beforehand that termites were not nesting in the shadowy hollow of the tubular bobbin. The wetted yarn was then plastered onto the outside of the bobbin wedged on the winder, and with one hand rhythmically turning the winder’s crank and the other carefully holding the threaded bobbin against the bobbin attached to the winder, yarn of the necessary ply was spun from the large plastic bobbins onto the smaller wooden weft bobbins. To ensure the yarn was evenly distributed across the length of the weft bobbins (see plate 5) the

⁵⁶ The English word “spinning” was used to refer both to preparing bobbins of weft thread and the process of spinning raw materials into yarn and Kraamer notes that the Ewe verb for spinning and winding is the same (*fo* or *etro*) (2005: 91).

⁵⁷ Small weft bobbins were spun with one ply, two ply and four ply yarn depending on which part of the weft they would form. Juxtaposing thicker four ply yarn and two ply yarn, along with the use of the heddles, was used to create textiles with richly textured surfaces.

⁵⁸ Merrick Posnansky notes that weavers in the Ewe-speaking town of Notsé tested how well dyed threads were by tasting them: “Tasteless threads were well dyed: threads with dye that had not set well, and thus would not be fast, were somewhat rancid in taste” (1992: 121). Such practices were not current in Kpetoe at the time of my fieldwork, most likely because most weaving in the workshop used industrially dyed yarns. However, this highlights the sensual and bodily engagements that bound weavers to their tools, materials and cloths.

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hand-held bobbin was carefully passed up and down the length of the weft bobbin whilst the winder was cranked. The trick was to spin weft bobbins that were uniform in shape and upon which the yarn was tightly and neatly packed, or else the weft threads would tangle in the course of weaving and need to be laboriously unpicked. If cotton yarn was being prepared, a skein holder machine (*tuanyi* in Agotime Ewe) was also used alongside the above equipment (see plate 6). Thick skeins of dyed cotton yarns were pegged out on the rotating machine and, from there, neatly wound onto smaller weft bobbins using the spinning machine.



Plate 5- Weft bobbins ready for weaving, October 2012. Photograph by author.

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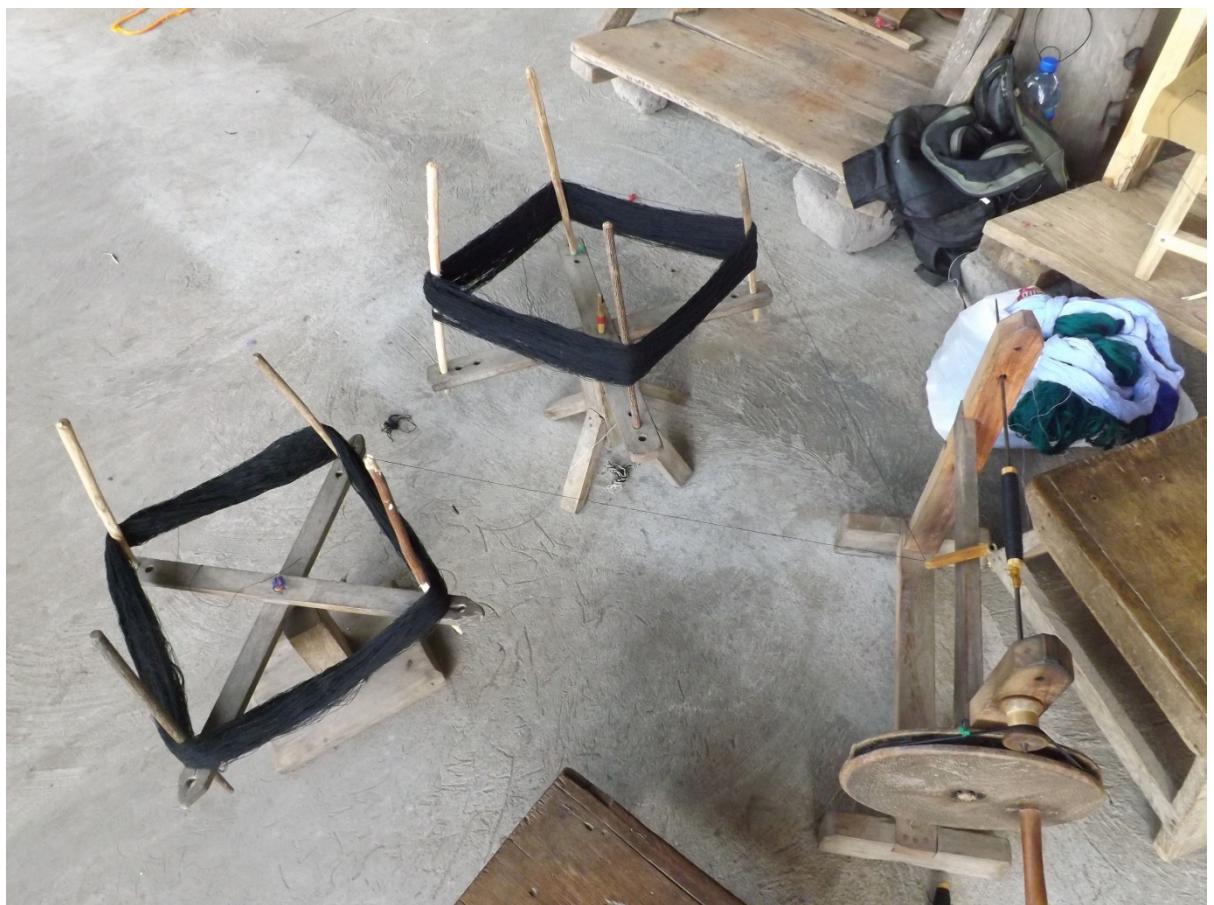


Plate 6- Skein holder machine with cotton yarn and bobbin winder, October 2012.
Photograph by author.

The preparation of weft bobbins was a task commonly delegated to initiates, and thus an entry into the craft, for several reasons. Primarily, as a skill that could be quite quickly picked up and then gradually refined, it constituted a form of legitimate peripheral participation within the crafting community and provided an entry into the practical work of weaving for those unfamiliar with the intricacies of the craft (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 35-37). What is more, the cotton and rayon yarns used to produce *agbamevo kente* were expensive, and had to be bought with cash from one of three or so supply stores in the town. Rayon cost GH₵1.75⁵⁹ for a large cone-shaped bobbin and cotton was bought in knots, which cost between GH₵2 and GH₵4 depending on availability. Small cloths comprised of ten strips called for yarn costing upwards of GH₵40 and double this could be spent on yarn for larger pieces. Although the ability to spin well only came with considerable practice, clumsy learners who produced poorly spun weft bobbins only risked wasting small lengths of

⁵⁹ At the start of fieldwork in the Autumn of 2012, the exchange rate was approximately GH₵3 to the pound. By the time I left Kpetoe in November 2013 the rate had fallen to almost GH₵4 to the pound and the ongoing economic uncertainty has seen the rate worsen further still. The deterioration in the value of the currency has increased the cost of living and the price of materials.

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yarn, rather than destroying whole cloths that the weaver had already invested significant time and money into making.

Spinning was also a highly tactile process that called upon weavers to attune themselves to the tension and elasticity of different types of yarn, as well as the possibilities and limitations of the tools at hand. The practice of skilfully winding weft threads was achieved in an ongoing negotiation of balance, posture and tension between body, tool and material. Through practising spinning, learner-weavers got a feel for the properties of yarn as well as the material possibilities of both tools and their own bodies. Thus, the production of skill through this body-material-tool composite might best be described in “ecological” terms:

“[As] a property not of the individual human body as a biophysical entity, a thing-in-itself, but of the total field of relations constituted by the presence of the organism-person, indissolubly body and mind, in a richly structured environment. Granted that the foundations of skill lie in the irreducible condition of the practitioner’s embeddedness in an environment, it follows...that skilled practice is not just the application of mechanical force to exterior objects, but entails qualities of care, judgement and dexterity. Critically, this implies that whatever practitioners do *to* things is grounded in an attentive, perceptual involvement *with* them, or in other words, that they watch and feel as they work” (Ingold, 2000: 353, emphasis in the original)

The use of a hand-held bobbin to evenly distribute the yarn on the weft bobbin was thus particularly important, as the narrow tube of bamboo functioned effectively as an extension of the spinners hand through which they were able to feel the weft bobbin’s texture, shape and density (see Portisch, 2009: 478). It can be argued that, by extending the sensate capacities of the body, these small wooden tools could be momentarily incorporated into the weavers “body schema” (Marchand, 2012: 268-269), making possible craft operations that would be much harder, if not impossible, with just the use of the hand or arm. Given that in the course of a weaver’s craft curriculum, spinning was an initiate’s first experience of tool use, it formed the foundations upon which initiates familiarised themselves with the intricacies of the loom and came to incorporate more complex loom technology into their sensory body schema.

Sitting in the loom and starting to weave

Although a learner weaver may not formally enter the loom (*agbatî* in Agotime Ewe) until they had found a mentor willing to teach them and passed through the first stages of apprenticeship, it was not uncommon for children and teenagers to use the loom of an older relative or friend in their absence (see Kraamer, 2005: 225). The process of becoming familiar with the loom often began in early childhood, and when visiting the workshop Francis’s toddler son was keen to explore his father’s tools.

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One afternoon after nursery he stopped by and whilst the adults were speaking the little boy clambered up onto his father's loom and picked up one of the wooden shuttles resting there. Leaning over the cloth that was held in tension in the loom, he went to pass the shuttle through the exposed warp threads from top to bottom.

Taking another shuttle, he struck the warp again and this time the shuttle fell to the ground. Turning round at the clattering of the shuttles, Francis laughed, exclaiming proudly "He wants to weave!" before pulling out his phone to *snap* a photograph. At this the boy smiled and looked up, pleased to be momentarily the centre of adult attention. Before long though, his tired face crumpled and he started to cry. With this, playing at the loom was over and Francis scooped his son up and took him home for lunch and a nap.

Planted looms, fixed into the ground, were preferred by learner weavers at home in the compound as they could be constructed cheaply, cut from lengths of wood from trees felled in the nearby bush. A portable loom and weaving stool, built by specialist carpenters and suitable for use in the workshop, cost at least GH¢50. Along with the cost of the other tools, including the heddle pulleys (*egle* in Agotime Ewe), the beater (*efɔ̄*) and a set of carved wooden shuttles (*evu*), a weaver could spend more than GH¢80 setting up a loom, and this expense meant some young weavers, including Koenya, borrowed a loom and tools from friends and relatives who were momentarily absent from the workshop.

Upon "entering"⁶⁰ the loom for the first time an apprentice weaver drew together their extant familiarity of the loom with the necessary balance and physical agility to orient themselves. Sitting down to work called on weavers to situate themselves on the small, low wooden stool used for weaving whilst also positioning both legs appropriately to operate the loom's heddles (see fig.4 and 5). The kind of movement needed to enter the loom depended on whether the equipment was carpentered and portable and thus raised off the ground or hewn from branches and planted into the ground (see plate 7). It took practice to perfect the manoeuvres needed to lift myself into the loom and then sit down, folding my body into position as I went. Once seated in the loom, the cloth beam (*kuble*) was pushed down into place, resting in the weaver's lap. Next, the weaver slid the heddle pedals (*afɔ̄temeka*) into position between the big toe and the second toe so that the ring of coconut shell attached to the end of both pedals was nestled against the bottom of the feet. It was at

⁶⁰ Workshop weavers referred to the process of sitting down to work at the loom as "entering" the loom, neatly capturing the spatial arrangement whereby, except for the weaver's back, the craftsperson's body is surrounded by the loom frame.

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this point that the weaver could start to weave, picking up the shuttle containing the weft bobbin so that the carved, boat-shaped piece of wood faced upwards across the palm of the right hand and held in place between thumb and index finger. With time and daily use the heddle peddles become worn against the feet and the weaver's weft shuttle grew smooth in the hand, whilst the weaver grew attuned to the pliability and "give" of the wooden struts that made up their often creaking and rickety looms.

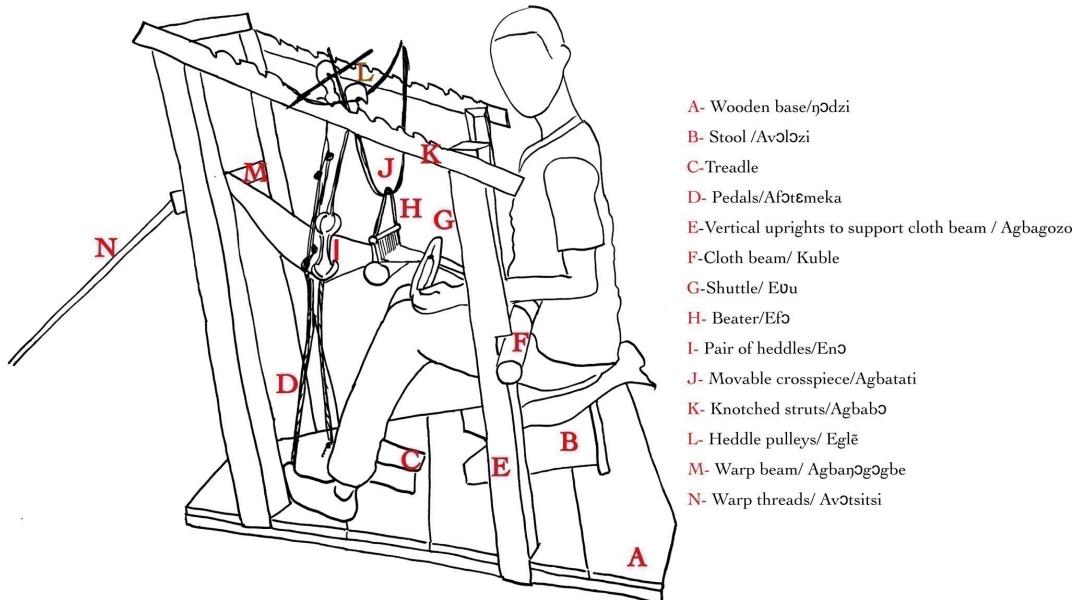


Figure 4- Loom parts and tools as seen from the side.

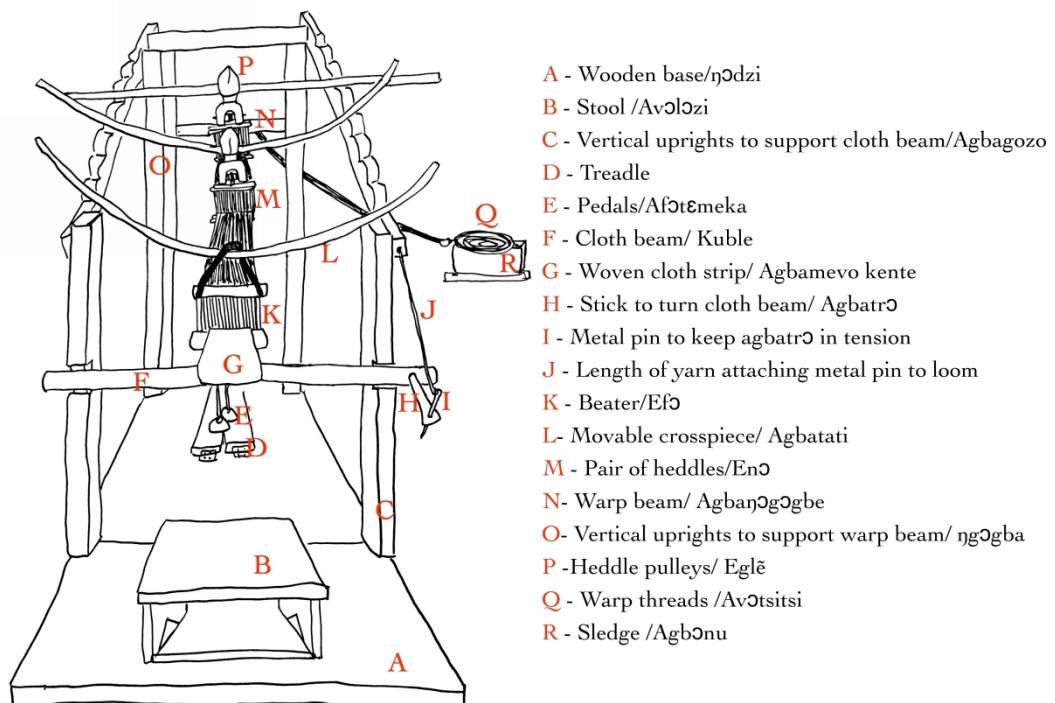


Figure 5- Loom parts and tools as seen from behind.

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Plate 7- Loom planted into the ground, Kpetoe October 2013. Photography by author.

The bodily actions a weaver must perform in order to position themselves in the loom before starting work highlight the fact that a craftsperson's body is not only surrounded by the loom's frame, but is in intimate contact with the loom apparatus at several key points. Sat on the loom stool, the heddle peddles pressed up against their feet, the cloth beam in their lap and pressed against their stomach as he works and the shuttles resting in their palm, the weaver's body intimately interfaces with his tools. Just as these tools are shaped by the human hand- indeed almost all are hand carpentered or hewn from wood by either weavers themselves or specialist makers in the town- so too must the weaver's body, in the process of learning to weave, bend and flex to accommodate them. This process of bodily accommodation and sensate response to the things involved in weaving a cloth is best characterised as the craftsperson learning from their tools and materials (Portisch, 2010: 67). In this, the weaver's body and his tools intimately co-produce one another in the process of work, such that the craftsperson's "...relationship with things is not a distant one: each speaks to [their] body and to the way [they] live" (Merleau-Ponty, 2004: 49).

Such intimate awareness of the material capacities of one's loom is necessary not only in handling tools correctly but it also helps weavers to accurately judge and momentarily adjust and readjust their actions in the course of making a cloth. These

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successive movements and the ability to determine the degree of force needed to tamp down the weft threads with the beater or the pressure which the foot must apply to the heddles to open the warp shed sufficiently are indexed in the cloth itself. Failure to open the warp shed wide enough resulted in visible mistakes in the weft and if a weaver pulled too tightly on the weft shuttle or did not throw the shuttle with enough force the edges of the cloth became either bunched up or lacked definition. Uneven use of the beater so that one part of the weft is tamped down with greater force than another, could, in the course of a whole strip, lead to skewed patterns and pieces that were rhombi shaped rather than rectangular. When it came to sewing these strips together the tailor doing the work would have to compensate for this unevenness or else the edges of the cloth would remain skewed. The weight of the fabric was also closely related to the weaver's technique, with prized "strong" cloth, heavy and stiff in texture, resulting from even and weighty use of the beater so that weft threads were tightly packed across the surface of the cloth. However, using the beater with too much force could easily tear⁶¹ one or several of the warp threads, leaving the weaver to conduct lengthy repairs to the weft before work could continue.

In all of this, consistency was highly valued and judgements about the quality of the cloth were made constantly in the course of production, with weavers looking at, but also feeling, the cloth whilst it was still taut in the loom. As has been argued by Anna Portisch in relation to domestic textile production amongst Kazakh women, that apprentices learnt to assess the quality of their own work, and that of others, through their fingertips and a tactile engagement with the cloth (2010: 70-72). Thus, good cloths with neat edges and an even surface texture were not just a sign that a maker was capable of repetitively carrying out the motions involved in weaving. Rather, skilful weaving meant that apprentices were developing the ability to judge their own work and with this knowledge were learning to attune themselves to the emergent processes of the craft and the shifting possibilities and limitations of their tools and materials.

⁶¹ Warp threads that had been left on the loom for long periods of time were liable to fray. Gabriel and Bright attributed this to the depredations of insects.

Making mistakes and problem solving towards proficiency

Like many initiates, the first textile I tackled in the loom was a rayon warp faced plain weave cloth⁶², in which the main design element was in the arrangement and juxtaposition of different coloured warp threads. Focusing on these kinds of cloths, which involve just one set of heddles and perhaps only two shuttles, allowed apprentices to practise opening and shutting the warp shed, throwing the shuttles and using the beater effectively. What little instruction offered came in the form of demonstrations from more experienced weavers, who would occasionally step in momentarily to rectify small problems or show how a technique was achieved in the loom, rather than giving verbal explanations⁶³ (see Clarke, 1998: 99-100; Portisch, 2010: 68; Venkatesan, 2010: 168).

In the course of my own apprenticeship, the first months in the loom were dedicated to making strips of pink and blue chequered cloth that were then sewn together to make a cloth called *Takpekpe le Aŋlogā* (“meeting in Anloga” in English- see plate 8; see also Lamb, 1975: 168; Kraamer, 2005: 119). A balanced plain weave cloth, *Takpekpe le Aŋlogā* involved just one set of heddles, the *nogā* or “big heddles” which has a sufficient number of leases so that each warp element can be threaded individually (Kraamer, 2005: 583). I took the opportunity of a prolonged period working on one project to practise throwing the shuttle, beating the weft and measuring the cloth as I went. As I progressed and my confidence with the tools grew, not only did the process of weaving become more fluid, but my developing proficiency was indexed in the cloth itself, as later strips felt heavier in the hand, with neater, straighter edges. Nonetheless, when it came time to lay out the strips ready to stitch them together into a full cloth, a number of slight miscalculations on my part meant that several of the pieces were too long and stuck out unevenly. Without a word of rebuke Gabriel matter-of-factly folded the pieces so that at first glance the cloth edge looked straight and even. The tailor⁶⁴ was then able to remedy my

⁶² Rayon is widely used yarn in the workshop today, although it was seldom used in the textile traditions of Ewe-speaking Ghana before the 1960s (Kraamer, 2005: 81).

⁶³ Tom Martin’s work on learning and communication amongst bike mechanics highlights the paucity of language to capture the complexity of mechanical and manual operations (2016: 77-80). Thus, whilst written or verbal accounts of the workings of a loom would leave most people baffled, action and the process of trying for oneself are effective modes of learning in the workshop.

⁶⁴ Although there is some suggestion that sewing was once part of the crafting curriculum (Kraamer, 2005: 104), the work of tailoring *agbamevo kente* strips into full cloths is now a craft in its own right. Tailors in Kpetoe specialised in sewing *kente* and some were particularly skilled in stitching particular types of cloth. As well as working around the weaver’s mistakes, the tailor also had to have a keen eye for the overall design of the cloth so as to stitch the pieces in the correct order.

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mistakes with some smart stitching. However, noticing for the first time the effect that such small, cumulative mistakes had on the overall symmetry and visual balance of the cloth, the importance of precision and attention to length and spacing in the course of the weaving was impressed upon me. What is more, in seeing how both Gabriel and the tailor deftly manipulated the cloth so as to minimise the visual impact of my miscalculation on the final piece, I began to get a feel for the ways in which mistakes and practical problem-solving were entwined in the process of learning to weave.



Plate 8- Gabriel and Francis laying out *Takpekpe le Aplögä* in the workshop, October 2012. Photograph by author.

Despite the relative expense of materials, experienced weavers were not directive with their apprentices, but rather let initiates get on and make their own

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mistakes before stepping in to help problem-solve those difficulties which arose. Considering that the supervision of apprentices is an additional responsibility that master weavers take on alongside the main business of making a living from the craft, extensive supervision of initiates is neither desirable nor feasible (see also Clarke, 1998: 92-94). Rather, it was in the process of practising weaving, identifying mistakes and working together with workshop colleagues to find practical work-arounds that initiates came to grasp the complex workings of their loom and its various parts. Experiencing the physical jolt through the loom as some component gave way or got stuck, the flow of work was broken and a young weaver was prompted to stop and examine exactly what had gone wrong. In the early days I called on the judgement of Gabriel, Francis, Bright or Kwaku who, as experienced makers, were able to identify mistakes and repair broken tools or damaged yarns without speaking a word (see Clarke, 1998: 100). Despite the lack of talk, these encounters between master and initiate were intensely social and collaborative and worked to strengthen ties of respect and inter-dependence between apprentices and their elders in the crafting community. The relationships fostered in the course of learning outlived the course of the apprenticeship itself and weavers would call on both the advice of their mentors and that of peers long after they had become masters themselves (see also Prentice, 2016: 176).

These relations highlight the ways in which skill is not the property of individual weavers, but rather emerges from the social interstices of the crafting community and out of the relations between people and their tools (Ingold, 2001: 21). Furthermore, this approach to problem solving, although open to offers of help from others, also crucially inculcated a growing self-reliance in initiates. Seeing how others approached the various technical challenges of their work and being given the space to make mistakes and attempt repairs, young weavers were provided with the social and practical skills to develop proficiency and work towards independent making. Examining how initiates develop artisanal skill through their engagement with communities of practice and through close attention to their own movements, Ingold writes:

“...the novice’s observation of accomplished practitioners is not detached from, but grounded in, his own active, perceptual engagement with his surroundings. And the key to imitation lies in the intimate coordination of the movement of the novice’s attention to others with his own bodily movement in the world. Through repeated practical trials, and guided by his observations, he gradually gets the “feel” of things for himself- that is, he learns to fine-tune his own movement so as to achieve the rhythmic fluency of the accomplished practitioner” (2001: 21-22)

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In this way, over time I myself came to rely less on the judgement of others and instead called upon a growing feeling for the mechanics of the loom and the tensile properties of the yarn to guide my own attempts at practical problem-solving. In her work on Trinidadian dressmakers and their affective problem solving strategies, Rebecca Prentice highlights how self-reliance emerges from maker's socialisation within a particular community of practice (2016: 175). Similarly, Agotime weavers were keen to emphasise the importance that independence had within the crafting community, with "good" work vested not only in one's ability to self-sufficiently master the challenges of weaving, but in approaching these tasks with creativity and verve. Engagement with the materiality of mistakes shaped initiates emerging problem solving strategies such that learning progressed not only through moments of skilful craft practice but also in the miscalculations and mistakes of making (Marchand, 2016: 11). Bound together, the pleasures of fluid, skilful work along with the social, practical and creative challenges of mistakes and problem-solving, marked out an initiate's path towards proficiency both in the loom and the workshop.

Buying yarn, preparing materials and weaving with cotton

Once initiates had achieved a degree of proficiency in handling rayon yarn they were introduced to cotton thread which, because it was more liable to rip and fray in the loom, was harder to work with. For Emmanuel, who was under Gabriel's tutelage during the summer of 2013, the prospect of a bulk order of cotton strips from a customer meant that he began his weaving career handling cotton yarn. Dyed various muted shades of red, green and blue, interspersed with white and black threads, cotton yarns were bought in large, knotted skeins and starched to make them "hard" and strengthen the yarn against breakage. Once starched and spun onto bobbins, cotton was used almost exclusively to make the strips of cloth that were sewn into the smart *batakali* smocks that, considered typical of northern Ghana, had been popularised by former president Jerry Rawlings and were worn on special occasions (see plate 9). *Batakali* strips were warp-faced and thus used just one set of heddles, the *nogā*, or "big heddles".

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Plate 9- Francis and Clemens wearing cotton *batakali* that Francis had woven for the Agbamevoza festival, Kpetoe September 2013. Photograph by author.

A few months into my apprenticeship, having finished my first rayon cloth, I was set the task of weaving strips for a *batakali*. In preparation Gabriel and I went out one day in search of yarn. There was a shortage of cotton in town and we walked from shop to shop looking for our supplies. As we went, Gabriel kept mental note of the various coloured lengths we had found and those we still needed to buy. Through long experience of laying the warp, preparing bobbins for the weft threads and weaving the cloth, master weavers developed a feeling for how much yarn they needed for a particular project and, with relative accuracy, were able to make the complicated calculations needed to work out how many skeins or cones of thread they must buy before beginning work (Clarke, 1998: 94). Having developed proficiency in a range of other craft tasks during my time in the workshop, this skill was one that I myself never mastered. Moreover, the fluidity of this situated mathematical problem-solving was all the more remarkable considering that when faced with numerical problems, divorced from everyday activity, certain weavers struggled with the basics of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. However when thinking and talking about yarn and craft work, more complex mathematical operations came with ease and fluidity.

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The point is not that weavers were incapable of abstract thought. Such a suggestion in reference to artisans who, without paper plans or drawings, were able to conceptualise complicated patterns and realise ambitious designs with precision and flair, is untrue and, frankly, insulting. Rather, as argued in Wendy Millroy's ethnography of "mathematizing"⁶⁵ amongst South African carpenters, weavers' mathematical problem solving was tied up with the materiality of their craft so that rather than working in the language of school or textbook mathematics, they used their tools and materials as an alternative lexicon with which to approach mathematical challenges (Millroy, 1992:185). Planning and practice were similarly entwined in the skilful making of *Djennenké* masons, who:

"... did not walk onto building sites and pace-off plans according to pre-determined templates...Rather, design solutions and spatial configurations [arose] in the process of building or drawing, and [were] made manifest through an active hands-on engagement in creative production... creativity was in direct dialogue with tools and materials, not pen and paper... Indeed, a mason's activities of designing and building are inseparable and unfold together..." (Marchand, 2009a: 96)

In this way, a weaver's feeling for the properties of materials and tools- how far certain lengths of yarn would go, how much might be lost to breakage and repairs, what quantities of cotton would be needed to thread certain sets of heddles etc- was both practical and conceptual, the abstract and the material bound together in the course of the work.

Having gathered the requisite number skeins of cotton, I was invited to Gabriel's home so that we could prepare the yarns together. Whilst this work and the task of dyeing yarns are closely associated with women (Kraamer, 2005: 83), in the spirit of "independence" outlined above a number of young workshop weavers were well acquainted with the process and able to prepare their own threads. In the outside yard we heated a large aluminium pot of water over a charcoal brazier, keeping the flames lit with a fan woven from palm fronds. Once the water was boiling Gabriel lifted the pot from the brazier and left it to cool shortly on the dusty ground before a chunk of starch was crumbled in. Stirring well so that the starch was fully dissolved, the hanks of cotton coloured black, green, blue and white were untwisted and dropped into the solution. With a wooden spoon we took turns manipulating the yarn in the mix so that all the fibres were well coated in the thick liquid. Having left the cotton to soak awhile, we dredged each hank up out of the soupy starch and wrung out the excess water, before hanging them to dry along a clothes line in the baking sun (see plate 10). Once the yarn was dried the cotton was

⁶⁵ "Mathematizing" seeks to capture the processual and creative part of doing and using maths in everyday activities (Millroy, 1991: 3).

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stiff. Gabriel then took the skeins in hand and twisted them so that the excess starch flaked off, falling to the ground. The yarn was now ready and Gabriel began the tricky task of laying the warp with a pattern of stripes whilst I set to work preparing bobbins. Spinning the thread, its rougher, less even texture burned my finger tips as it passed through my hand and onto the bobbin. Gabriel passed me a small piece of plastic cut from an empty water sachet and told me to wrap it round the yarn to protect my hands. I also felt how, when pulled too tightly in tension, the cotton frayed, snapped and needed to be tied together again. This feeling for the yarn's properties was further developed when it came time to weave, a process I nonetheless found frustrating as snapped warp threads interrupted the flow of work.



Plate 10- Skeins of starched cotton hanging out to dry, Kpetoe October 2013.
Photograph by author.

Weft-faced designs, innovation and developing a sense of style

With sufficient practice in rudimentary craft skills and having achieved proficiency in the production of neat, evenly woven strips of both warp-faced and plain weave cloth, an apprentice will begin working on cloths that also feature weft-faced designs. These textiles involve multiple shuttles alongside two sets of heddles, the *nogā* and the *novi*, which when operated alternately create juxtaposed bands of warp-faced and weft-faced weaving (Kraamer, 2005: 593). The weft-faced geometric designs that pattern the cloth are achieved by using these two sets of heddles in conjunction with

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handpicking certain configurations of the warp before throwing the shuttle. This work requires significant attention and spatial awareness, thus making the strips with weft-faced designs commensurately harder to weave than plain cloth (see plate 11).



Plate 11- Weaving geometric weft-faced designs, June 2013. Photograph by author.

Initially a more experienced weaver will show an initiate how to pick out the design, slowly modelling the technique whilst the learner watches from the side of the loom. There is often more than one way to approach any particular design and as I began to work on weft-faced patterns several of my colleagues would gather around

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my loom to debate which approach was best, before leaving me to choose a method. These interactions brought together technical skill and sociality, as members of the crafting community shared knowledge and offered guidance to one another. What is more, because initiates only learn those patterns which are in fashion at the time of the apprenticeship (Kraamer, 2005: 105; 228), skilled master weavers would occasionally be called on to produce patterns they had no prior experience of making. The advice of other weavers in these circumstances was invaluable and this help, along with a little experimentation and subtle improvisation on the part of the weaver himself, was often enough to meet the challenges of new patterns. This process of subtle variation in the process of replication has been described as "drift":

"...even in cultures that hold style uniformity in high regard, the concept of drift has to be taken into account. Since replications are never total copies, replications of replications tend to drift away from the original model. Sometimes drift is caused by an artist attempting to improve [some element of the work]- the so-called improvement is then incorporated...by the apprentices of that master. At other times it comes about because a patron requests a variation that is then accepted by other patrons as preferable to the original" (Kasfir, 2013: 371)

In the course of mastering patterns I was left largely to my own devices to master what was, at least to begin with, a laborious process that only became more fluid with significant practice. I gradually discovered my own workarounds in the loom, whilst any mistakes in handpicking the number or configuration of warp elements or using the heddles in the wrong sequence forced me to painstakingly retrace my steps, unweaving the problematic sections before starting over. To mitigate against these time-consuming mistakes, I slowed down the pace of my work and re-attuned my attention to take in the particularities of the pattern as well as the neatness of the strip's edges and the evenness of the cloth.

The process of learning to "design" cloth was thus one of attention coupled with careful experimentation and subtle improvisation. Becoming adept at the construction and replication of weft-faced patterns was the first step towards creativity, where innovation was a process of gradual change in the design of cloths and novel patterns were generally composed by combining various elements from extant designs. As has been well argued by Clarke in relation to Nigerian *aṣo ẹkè*, design creativity was thus framed in terms of cumulative and incremental variations over a long period, with weavers introducing small variations into their design repertoire to satisfy customers' demands for novel and fashionable cloths (1998: 67-68).

In an important sense then, innovation was seen to rest upon the collective creativity of the weaving community as a whole which, crucially, included ancestors

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alongside current weavers. When asked about the origins of older patterns that were not associated with a particular (living) weaver, Gabriel, Francis, Bright and their workshop colleagues tended to ascribe it to their "forefathers". What is more, in speaking about their trajectories into craftwork more generally it was common for workshop members to anchor their narratives in talk of ancestral inheritance (see Boateng, 2011: 42; Marchand, 2009b: 88) and I came to understand that this referred as much to ideas of craft heritage, conceived of as a body of knowledge and practices bound up with locality and history, as it did to the past creativity of individual artisans. In this, the passage of time transformed creative work from the property of individual artisans into something that could be more generally claimed as belonging to the "community" (Boateng, 2011: 40), and apprenticeship served to inculcate initiates as much in the shared heritage of the work as in the creative practice of weaving.

The names ascribed to certain cloths were where explicit claims to ownership were made, with naming practices working to configure local ideas about creativity. In her study of the relation between intellectual property and copyright regimes and the production and marketing of Asante kente and adinkra cloth, Boatema Boateng emphasises the link between the right to name a cloth and the creative act of designing textiles (2011: 38-39). As in Asante textile production, weavers who came up with new patterns were accorded the honour of naming them, with the convention being that they were called after the customer who had commissioned the cloth or given names which were either proverbial or descriptive in nature. Assigning a name to a cloth was thus a marker of one's creativity and skill, and weavers who had created and named new cloths were renowned and held in high regard throughout the crafting community. These naming practices were a means of circumscribing the politics of authorship (see Marchand, 2009b: 82). Thus, the names of certain patterns were sometimes disputed, with the contention surrounding the name representing tensions in the workshop and beyond about who could legitimately lay claim to and use the cloth.

That cloths were named after patrons highlighted how textiles were also co-produced in the relationship between artisan and customer. Although most cloths made by workshop weavers were priced between GH¢200-500, particularly complex designs employing rare techniques could fetch far more. *Agbamevo kente* were, then expensive, prestige textiles, reserved for occasional wear, and middle class customers would carefully commission new pieces to celebrate the outdooring of a new baby,

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marriages and funerals, as well as to wear to festival celebrations. Less affluent families had one or two prized woven cloths that were kept to mark special occasions. Novel pieces in unusual colours were the preferred choice for festival wear, and workshop members would experiment making strips with eye-catching pattern combinations so as to attract fashion-conscious customers on the lookout for a distinctive outfit. The outdooring of a baby called for *kente* wrappers woven in pale blue and white interspersed with spangly lurex thread, whilst red, black and dark brown cloths were reserved for funeral celebrations. The social contexts of consumption were thus implicated in the production of cloths and weavers learnt to mediate between the constraints of the craft and the desires of customers for particular kinds of fashionable cloth (see Prentice, 2016: 175-177).

Whilst creativity was socially mediated, one Agotime weaver was recognised as being possessed of particular brilliance. Gator Gbogbo had mastered the art of “drawing” in the cloth and weaving figurative designs across the whole surface of a narrow strip textile (see Kraamer, 2005: 145). A well known figure in Agotime weaving who was not a member of the workshop itself, Gabriel described Gator’s talents as innate, unusual and the product of something “in his mind” that others did not possess and which was not amenable to teaching. Gator’s brilliance, however, seemed to be a bit of an anomaly and no other weaver in the workshop was singled out as singularly skilful by his peers, the emphasis instead falling on how craftspeople’s skills developed socially through collaboration and engagement with tools and materials.

The juxtaposition of different coloured yarns was a focal point for creativity in cloth design. Customers brought along fabric samples or photographs so that a weaver could duplicate existing pieces, or they would tell the weaver the colours they liked and leave the craftsman to pick out and arrange the different kinds of yarn himself. Knowing the occasion that the cloth was to be used for (wedding, funeral, baby’s outdooring etc), the weaver was expected to come up with a “balanced”⁶⁶ design that stylishly juxtaposed bright colours against darker ones. Over the course of an apprenticeship, initiates were expected to develop both a feeling for which colours complimented one another and also a sense of which colours were appropriate for certain occasions.

⁶⁶ Workshop weavers used the word “balance” to describe the distribution of colours across a cloth, with the implicit suggestion that, to the trained eye, balance was clear.

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Instruction in style was never explained or much discussed. Rather, when coming up with new designs young weavers would occasionally be told by their elders that one colour did not complement another and prompted to substitute it out of the pattern. This sense of how colours fitted together meant that although master weavers tended to follow the instructions of customers, if they felt the colours in a cloth would be unbalanced- overpowering the cloth with too many dark hues or undermining the design with shades which were too light and did not offer enough visual contrast- they often advised substitutions. This is not to say that there was a uniform “style” in the workshop; different weavers had varying colour and design preferences and with time I came to be able to pick out a cloth that Gabriel or Francis had made against those woven by others. Similarly, as an initiate became increasingly adept at matching pattern and colour, they developed stylistic preferences of their own. These individual particularities, in turn, distinguished their work from those of other weavers, with customers often selecting a weaver on the basis of his “style”. As Prentice points out in relation to dressmaking, an artisan’s distinctive style emerges from technical proficiency in core competencies which, when mastered, provide the maker with the tools to work with creativity and flair (2016: 176-177). Thus, as an apprenticeship proceeded, an initiate not only picked up a distinctive aesthetic, but also had to combine this work with mastering the art of tactfully negotiating questions of style and colour with customers.

Laying the warp and becoming an independent maker

Whilst an apprentice may spend significant periods mastering an array of designs and practising making different kinds of warp and weft-faced cloth, the last significant practical challenge remaining to a young weaver was mastering the art of laying the warp. Striped warps featuring bands of alternating colour are an important part of many textile designs, and the laying of the warp was a complex task that called for both attention and mathematical skills. Over the course of the year I spent in the workshop, I helped Gabriel lay the warp on several occasions but remained unable to carry out this task independently, and it was common for apprentices to be accomplished at weaving designs and yet still unable to lay the warp (see Kraamer, 2005: 597; Dilley, 2009: 57).

Before starting to lay the warp, a weaver would carefully calculate the thread count to ensure they have enough yarn to carry out the job. The warp count depends on the width of the strips being woven, and thus were different in the case of very

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narrow or particularly wide strips⁶⁷. Strips were usually 110 two-ply warp elements wide, and when working on strips that were significantly wider than the average a weaver would also have to take into account how the warp would be threaded through the heddles, ensuring that the warp being laid was not too wide for the heddles they would have to use.

Once the weaver had worked out the thread count and planned the arrangement of warp colours needed, he started by gathering the requisite number of cones or bobbins of yarn and fastening the ends of the thread to one set of warp pegs (*soti* in Agotime Ewe). Then, using either a bobbin carrier (*kplōho* in Agotime Ewe) loaded up with six or eight bobbins of thread or gathering the threads in hand, he began laying the warp, pacing between the two sets of warp pegs. These threads, sitting in tension just above the ground, were then hooked round the opposite set of warp pegs and pulled taut before the weaver trailed the threads back to the starting set of pegs (see plate 12). Care was taken not to snap any of the warp elements and the weaver made sure to keep a count of the threads as he went, ensuring that enough of each colour was laid before moving onto the next. Whilst single-coloured warps could be laid relatively quickly, those involving complex striping took quite some time to prepare as the weaver had to switch often between colours. Once sufficient threads had been laid out, one end of the warp was unfastened from the pegs and carefully wound around a pliable wooden circular frame. To keep the whole thing in tension the weaver would pull back gently on the frame as he wound the bundle of threads up. Having completed these steps the weaver was left with a carefully wound bundle of warp (*avɔsisi* in Agotime Ewe- see plate 13). The last task was to carefully thread each of the warp elements through a pair of heddles, first the *nogā* or “big heddle” which sat closest to the weaver in the loom and then the *novi* or “small heddle” which sat further back in the loom. This painstaking work could take an experienced weaver several hours and was a job I always dreaded because it was fiddly and mistakes were easily made. Once the heddles were in place, they constitute a shedding device which could be alternately opened and closed using peddles operated by the weaver’s feet (Picton and Mack, 1989: 46; see fig. 6). The warp threads were then fastened at one end to the weighted wooden sledge which, sitting in front of the loom, held the warp taut whilst the weaver worked. With the other end

⁶⁷ *Titriku* cloth, a heavy weft-faced plain weave textile with a chequer-board pattern, was often woven in thin strips patterned with solid squares of colour (see Kraamer, 2005: 424)

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fixed inside the loom through the heddles, the weaver was ready to start throwing the weft of a new cloth.



Plate 12- Gabriel fastening the warp threads to the *soti*, June 2013. Photograph by author.

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Plate 13- Bundle of prepared warp threads, November 2012. Photograph by author.

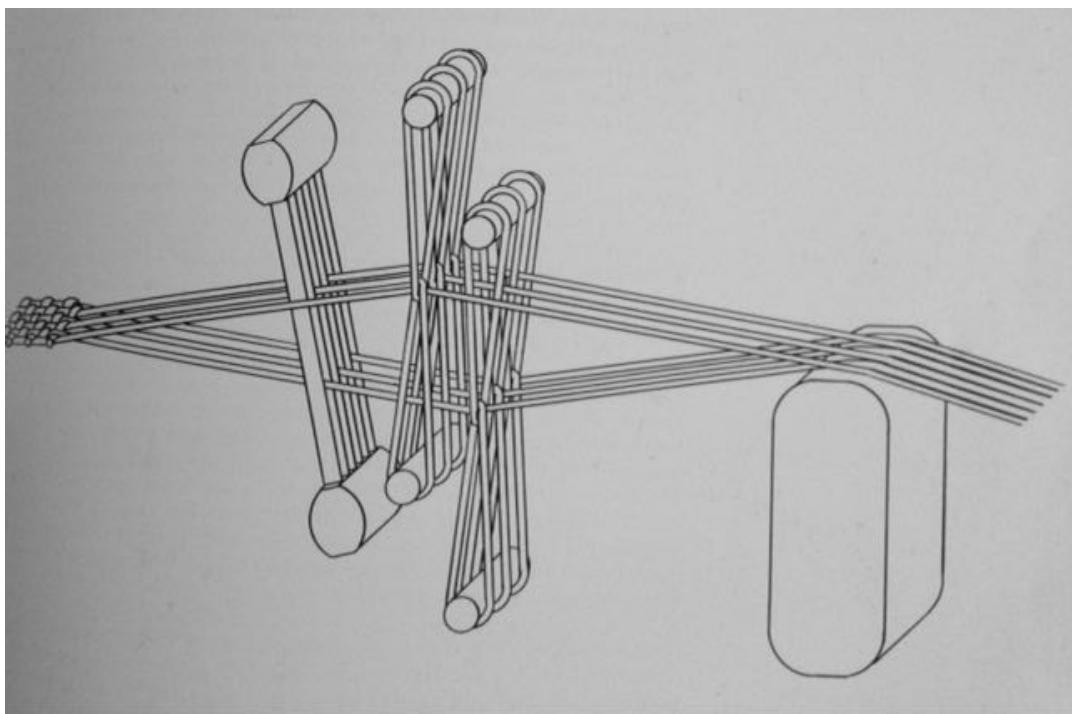


Figure 6- Section showing, from right to left, the warp passing over the warp beam and laced through two sets of heddles and the beater which is used to press down the weft threads. Taken from J. Picton and J. Mack, 1989, *African Textiles*, London: British Museum Press.

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Having mastered this final stage, a weaver would have developed a wide repertoire of practical and social skills over the course of several years, and would be able to negotiate with customers, plan a cloth, prepare the necessary materials and weave independently. At this point preparations began for the small ceremony that marked the end of the apprenticeship. Drinks had to be bought, libations poured and it was expected that the apprentice would provide food for those gathered to celebrate (see Clarke, 1998: 97; Argenti, 2002: 505-506).

To mark the end of my time in the workshop in November 2013, Francis's wife Sena helped me cook a meal of chicken, salad and jollof rice (see plate 14) and workshop members, along with a few friends from the town, gathered to eat, drink and celebrate together (see plate 15). Just as at the start of my apprenticeship, Olu offered some prayers in Ewe and I was dusted in auspicious white powder before the old man "sprayed"⁶⁸ me with water. Having received the good wishes of my colleagues I was now an independent weaver, free to practise the craft independently. As I sat, surrounded by the hubbub of the party, several colleagues asked if now that I was "free" whether I would be taking my loom along with me when I left the next day on my journey back to London. With sadness, I said no, but the question itself signalled the satisfying culmination of many months learning, and marked my transformation from an apprentice into a weaver in my own right.



Plate 14- Sena preparing food to celebrate the end of my apprenticeship, November 2013. Photograph by author.

⁶⁸ The "spraying" of water or other liquid from the mouth is a common sign of blessing and auspiciousness used in various masquerades across the region, with anthropological reference to the practice dating back to Frazer's *The Golden Bough*.



Plate 15- Workshop members gather to mark the end of my apprenticeship, November 2013. Photograph by author.

Conclusion

The process of apprenticeship was one which combined the material challenges of learning to craft with the development of cross-cutting forms of sociality within the community of craftspeople. These social entanglements were between different communities of practice including peers who might collaborate and learn together, customers who acted as patrons and elders who sought to control the dissemination of craft authority and licence. Learning progressed through initiates' engagement with one another, their mentors and weaving as a form of embedded learning within the life of the home and the wider community. It was a sensory experience in which ongoing practice of basic skills not only worked to attune apprentices to the possibilities and constraints of materials and tools, but also served to position learners within the social hierarchy of the crafting community. In following a crafting curriculum, learner weavers moved from peripheral participation in the crafting community towards full engagement with the work of weaving and the social world of the workshop.

A weaving apprenticeship prepared initiates for some of the challenges of making a living from the craft and with proficiency in the loom and increasing participation in the life of the workshop came greater contact with customers and the honing of the social skills and attitudes needed to successfully sell cloth. However, as

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noted by Clarke in reference to Yoruba weaving (1998: 100), the newly independent weaver relies on his former master for the bulk of his work and having achieved his "freedom", must begin the long work of developing his reputation and relationship with customers. It is to an analysis of this work that the following chapter is dedicated.

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The work of weaving- What work means, sociality and the business of making and selling cloth in the crafting community

The previous chapter developed an understanding of socialisation and craft learning as embedded within the social worlds of the community of craftspeople, where play, learning and work are bound together in the everyday lives of children and young people. In focusing on sociality and the sensory experiences of childhood play and apprenticeship, the process of learning in Agotime's community of craftspeople has been positioned in terms of communities of practice and the worlds of work.

Developing these arguments, this chapter will turn to the work of weaving itself and look at what work means in the community of craftspeople as well as discussing how weavers develop the social skills and networks that they need to manage crafting livelihoods. The business of establishing oneself as a reputable artisan, finding customers, managing contract weavers and selling cloth will be discussed. These activities are, however, often crucially bound up with other forms of work, and livelihoods are forged through the interactions between crafting and other kinds of opportunities and occupations. Thus, the following chapter focuses on how the search for employment, aspiration for certain kinds of jobs and engagement in work outside the crafting community structures the experience of Kpetoe's weavers.

Together, these two chapters work towards a multifaceted view of craftspeople's livelihoods, in which weaving in the loom is situated alongside the other kinds of work that young craftspeople engage with. A key theme in the discussion across both chapters is that, similar to how weavers approach education, work practices are strategically oriented, with craftspeople calling upon the full range of social and material resources at their disposal in their attempts at "getting by". In this context, weaving was one skill in a tool-box of many that craftspeople used in supporting themselves and their families.

Work, "waithood" and becoming adult in a time of economic precarity

Bound up with the ways that young people built livelihoods for themselves and their families was the crucial role that work played in the process of becoming adult (see Christiansen, Utas and Vigh, 2006). For young craftspeople, work was not solely a means of "getting by". Rather, and perhaps more importantly, work played a vital role in defining personhood and marking the transitions towards independence and social adulthood. In his analysis of the uncertainties inherent to the experience of

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what he terms “liquid modernity⁶⁹”, Zygmunt Bauman writes of work and worklessness:

“Rather than being a condition of being ‘un-employed’ (the term implying a departure from the norm which is ‘to be employed’, a temporary affliction that can and shall be cured), being out of a job feels increasingly like a state of ‘redundancy’ - being rejected, branded as superfluous, useless, unemployable and doomed to remain ‘economically *inactive*’. Being out of a job implies being disposable, perhaps even disposed of already and once and for all, assigned to the waste of ‘economic progress’...” (2007: 69-70, emphasis in the original)

Work is tied to young people’s inclusion in the social order; without decent work, young men struggle to gain the recognition and resources that are markers of maturity and which underpin them forming and supporting their own families (Honwana, 2013: 24). Globalisation and the world-wide ascent of neoliberal regimes premised upon competition, flexible labour and the stripping away of state social provisions have had a fragmentary effect on social orders across the world (Standing, 2011: 7). Whilst the effects of these fundamental shifts in economic and social structures are varied and highly context-dependent, a growing and heterogeneous population across the globe shares increasingly uncertain prospects, facing conditions in which “...their labour is instrumental (to live), opportunistic (taking what comes) and precarious (insecure)” (Standing, 2011: 14). In his writing on the dynamics driving these processes, economist Guy Standing has christened this emerging class the precariat, whose existence is characterised by chronic economic, social and work related insecurity (2011: 10). Although there are disjunctures between Standing’s definition of the precariat and the experience of young workshop weavers⁷⁰, his analysis provides a useful basis for thinking about some of the changes that craftwork in Kpetoe is undergoing and for drawing links between the experiences of young weavers and those elsewhere who are contending with precarity.

In her research on livelihoods in South African townships, Sarah Mosoetsa makes the important point that in the course of South Africa’s entry into global economic markets, the household has increasingly become the focus of economic activity and survival, with “...a greater reliance on family networks...and a turn

⁶⁹ Bauman’s sociology of “liquid modernity” was written with the industrialised, developed world in mind. However, in contexts ravaged by the depredations of structural adjustment and in which most people rely upon their own ingenuity and social networks to navigate the uncertain terrain of informal economies, his work is relevant.

⁷⁰ Standing argues that neoliberalism has undermined the integrity of occupational communities, resulting in members of the precariat “...lack[ing]...an occupational identity or narrative to give life.” (2014: 22). Despite their precarious position, young weavers arguably retain a distinct sense of occupational identity, with their work engendering “...an ethos of dignified behaviour that places social values above opportunistic money-making...[and] a sense of trust, with ‘gentlemanly’, convivial values that place the occupation’s long-term interests high on the set of priorities.” (Standing, 2009: 147).

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towards self-provisioning" (2011: 53). South Africa's industrial development and experiences of apartheid and the post-apartheid period are very different from colonial and post-colonial development in the Ghanaian context. However, I would argue that in thinking about the ways that young people in Kpetoe experience work, her observations are pertinent and point to a shared, emerging neoliberal consensus in which risk is individualised and people are forced to fall back on personal networks and connections in managing their livelihoods.

Research on experiences of "waithood"⁷¹ amongst African youth also provides a helpful framework for discussing this issue and looking at the role young people's agency and strategising plays in contexts where:

"The existing markers of adulthood- getting a job or some form of livelihood; leaving their parents' house and building their own home; getting married; having children; and providing for the family- are no longer readily attainable under the socio-economic and political conditions [of economic precarity and high unemployment] that prevail in most countries" (Honwana, 2013: 23)

Waithood is thus inextricably bound up with the experience of protracted economic crisis and the attendant hollowing out of opportunities for young people across sub-saharan Africa (Sommers, 2012: 5). In this sense, young weavers' everyday struggles for work are set against a backdrop of ongoing and intractable economic restructuring and systemic flux that has characterised African economies for more than three decades and which has engendered widespread precarity across the region. The effects of these processes have been particularly detrimental to the young (see Ferguson, 2006; Katz, 2004; Piot 2010; Sommers, 2012; Honwana 2013).

However, in attempting to mitigate the effects of rapid social change and economic uncertainty and build dignified, meaningful lives for themselves and their families, Agotime weavers, like young people across the continent and beyond, occupy these spaces of waithood with creativity and ingenuity, fostering diverse means of coping as they variously harness craft work along with other opportunities (Honwana, 2013: 165-166). A key argument then, is that waithood engenders certain kinds of working practices which favour creativity, sociality and flexibility in the face of challenges which often seem insurmountable. Whilst craftspeople undoubtedly face difficulties in forging livelihoods and many encounter setbacks as they seek decent work, this

⁷¹ A neologism coined by researchers looking at experiences of youth in the Middle East and North Africa, Alcinda Honwana defines waithood as "...a neither here-nor-there position in which young people are expected to be independent from their parents but are not yet recognised as social adults. No longer just a brief transitional stage in the life course, waithood is becoming a permanent condition, as many young people remain stuck in this in-between situation. Indeed, waithood is becoming a new but socially attenuated form of adulthood" (2013: 20).

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ethnography hopes to dignify those struggles by highlighting the skill and determination with which Agotime weavers meet these considerable challenges.

Social ties, “informality” and the work of weaving.

Keith Hart’s article on the work and economic strategies of Frafra migrants in Accra provided a groundbreaking analysis of the various ways that people managed their livelihoods beyond the purview of wage employment and state support. Published in 1973, his work presaged the economic restructuring which swept the continent in the 1980s and 1990s and which, in forcing government to cut state social and health provisions and shed jobs, pushed increasing numbers of people into positions of economic precarity. Figures from 2008 show that across the continent “informal” economic activity accounts for 42% of GNP and 72% of non-agricultural employment, percentages that are higher than in any other region in the world (Meagher: 2010a: 14).

Although Hart’s research opened up a number of important fields in the study of African anthropology and economics, the language of informality is problematic. It entrenches a dualistic notion of informal economies set apart from formal structures, when in fact the processes of globalisation have seen a blurring of divisions between formalised and informal institutions (Meagher, 2010a: 11-13). Such talk also suggests that those engaged in “informal” work are somehow marginal, existing on the periphery of the “formal” sector. Whilst it is clear that this kind of work is very precarious, to the extent that it is fundamental to the livelihoods of so many and is at the core not only of how African economies work, but indeed, how globalisation functions, it is far from marginal. Instead, precarity is increasingly mainstream, constituting the conditions which a great many must contend with as they seek to build decent livelihoods.

A focus on “informality” also risks eliding the everyday social practices that constitute the economy and work, and the attendant pleasures of craftwork. The workshop was a fun place to be, full of music, laughter and beautiful cloths which young weavers invested with care and creativity. Friendships were forged through collaboration and mutual support in the practice of the craft and the workshop was a space where young men could legitimately gather to meet and spend time together in public, beyond the confines of home but outside the stigmatised space of the streets (see Smith, 2014: 36). In Mali *grins*, or boys houses, play a similar role, facilitating young men’s sociality, agency and aspirations beyond the purview of their elders

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(Joy, 2011: 392- 394; Jónsson, 2012: 115-117). The importance of claims to public space in young people's search for recognition are highlighted by Mamadou Diouf, writing that:

"Logics of exclusion based on tradition, like those of the post colony's treatment of the young, render public space as an adult territory off limits to youth at the same that it denies them a private space" (1996: 225-226; see also Masquelier, 2013)

Having access to a shared space thus helped constitute a community of young craftspeople in Agotime and rendered their work recognisable and dignified. Therefore, the focus here is on questions of sociality and social ties and how these are forged and maintained in the space of the workshop and beyond, rather than discussing weavers' work strategies in terms of informality.

A note on temporality and the complex patterning of livelihoods

Considering the interrelationships and interdependencies between work, learning and play set out in the previous chapter, it is important to emphasise that these processes are not linear ones and that work in the community of craftspeople does not neatly "follow on" from childhood play and education. Although this thesis is organised according to the gradual development of skills and aptitudes that takes place as a young person moves from childhood, through apprenticeship and into work, the lives of craftspeople and their families are patterned by a continual movement in and around the various complex and overlapping social worlds of work and education. Adults become apprentices and people embark on courses of study at schools, polytechnics and universities throughout their twenties and thirties, whilst children as young as six often make valuable contributions to household economies through domestic chores, street-hawking and other kinds of work. There is no "normal" or "natural" process of development (Christiansen, Utas and Vigh: 2006: 16), but rather a series of interlocking strategies and opportunities young people employ in navigating the challenges they face. Just as it is impossible to demarcate the thresholds between childhood, youth and adulthood when these categories are strategically deployed and manipulated according to social context (Christiansen, Utas and Vigh, 2006: 14; Honwana, 2013: 11), so too are the worlds of work and learning inextricably bound together. This is not to say that the temporal dimensions of work and learning are not important. Rather, in looking at how young people's experiences of work shifts over time as they move in and out of multiple occupations, we are better able to understand how craftspeople not only orient themselves in

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relation to opportunities, but also how they cope with the challenges and mitigate the limitations of their precarious positions. Temporal perspectives are also crucial when looking at how work simultaneously occupies the present whilst orientating weavers' actions and attitudes towards imagined and hoped-for futures. As such, this chapter and the next engages with the complexities of work, considering the opportunities and limitations of weaving whilst also looking at work as a series of hopeful, aspirational practices and discourses which serve not only to materially support craftspeople, but through which they also manage the emotional and social challenges of everyday life.

The conflicted value of weaving- uncertain work and livelihood strategies

The livelihood strategies of young weavers, within and beyond the craft, to a great extent hinged upon the diverse values attached to weaving. Whilst weaving could offer young men a means of supporting themselves and formed an important part of many livelihood strategies, the work was also bound up with economic and social uncertainty. Recognising the conflicted value of craftwork is important both in that it helps us understand the work of weaving itself and contextualises the multifaceted livelihood strategies that weavers develop.

As adolescent apprentices, many young weavers' engagement with the craft was tied to their desire for a degree of economic independence and an income of their own. Whilst some initiates started working to earn pocket money, for others, entry into the craft was precipitated by the death of a parent or other significant change in family circumstances that compelled them to begin supporting themselves financially. Bright and Francis recalled the death of their fathers during childhood as a key point in their trajectories towards weaving work, whilst Gabriel's father was involved in a car crash which left him unable to weave when he was an adolescent, propelling Gabriel to take up weaving so as to contribute to the household finances. For others, including Bless whose father had lost his job as a teacher, parental redundancy and a drop in household income compelled them to take up weaving. As a form of work that could be undertaken at home, fitted around school work and, given that looms were often built or borrowed, required a relatively low initial outlay on tools, weaving was the preferred occupation of large number of teenage school boys in Kpetoe. In this, adolescents saw weaving as a stepping stone on their way to independence. As a means of supporting themselves through school, weaving worked to fulfil their youthful aspirations for education.

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As boys graduated from high school, pursued further and higher education and moved into the world of work, the flexibility of weaving meant that they could return to the loom during holidays or at weekends to help raise money for fees or living expenses. Selorm, a social studies student at the University of Ghana, did just this, travelling to Agotime during the semester breaks so he could weave in the workshop and sell cloth to a small network of customers, both in Accra and the Volta Region, that he had built up over several years. In this, weaving's place in most young men's livelihood strategies was as a "stop-gap" occupation that they might fall back on in their search for other kinds of work or educational opportunities.

To rely on weaving alone was, however, universally considered a risky long-term strategy (see Kraamer, 2005: 205-206) which Selorm described like this:

"Depending solely on weaving, it's really, really very serious for you to take care of your family. My daddy was weaving when he had us, and he was not able to support us." (2013)

Whilst workshop members took pride in the fact that they worked "for themselves" and independence was highly valued, the difficulties they faced as individual craftspeople, trying to make ends meet were routinely lamented. Despite the cheery atmosphere of the workshop, quiet grumblings about the routine struggles which workshop members had to contend with patterned a good bit of the everyday talk in the loom. Working independently, craftspeople had to manage the challenges of finding and managing a steady supply of weaving contracts and balancing the increasing cost of materials and living expenses against the relatively fixed price of between GH₵200- 500 that customers were willing to pay for most cloths. A weaver putting in time each day at the loom might complete, on average, one patterned strip a day or one full cloth per month, although plain weave cloths and the cotton used to make *batakali* were produced much faster, and priced commensurately cheaper. This meant that profits were slim, as yarn cost between GH₵40-80 per cloth and most, if not all, of the rest of a cloth's price went to cover living expenses⁷².

The heightened economic instability of the past few years have seen the cost of living increase as inflation rose and the value of the Ghanaian Cedi plummeted, becoming the single worst performing currency on world markets in 2014 (Yeebo, 2014). At the start of fieldwork in September 2012, inflation stood at an average of 9.4%; by the summer of 2016 it was 19%, with non-food inflation for transport,

⁷² In January 2013, Gabriel and Francis explained that if a customer paid GH₵300 for a cloth made up of 26 pieces, GH₵50 would be put aside for materials, with any remaining counted as profit, whilst the rest would go on the weaver's living costs.

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housing, school fees, water rates and power reaching above 25% (Ghana Statistical Service, 2016: 2). Price hikes were made across the board, and steep increases in the cost of electricity led to the workshop being unable to afford power during 2015 and 2016 (see also Laary, 2016). What is more, commissions were largely seasonal, coming mostly in the run-up to festivals and the Christmas period, whilst work was sporadic and hard to come by at other times of the year. This compounded the material difficulties craftspeople in Kpetoe faced finding enough well paid weaving work to support themselves and their families. Against a backdrop of entrenched economic uncertainty, the issue was not that in and of itself weaving was particularly insecure or burdensome, but that it only constituted a viable livelihood when combined with other work strategies and occupations.

Alongside the economic precarity of life as an Agotime weaver, craftspeople had also to contend with the social and emotional impact of their economically uncertain occupation. The anxiety of finding enough work was ever present, leaving workshop members always on the lookout for any opportunity to make a useful contact or secure a contract. For those who were parents these worries translated into chronic concern about whether their work would provide enough to adequately provide for their children. Workshop members' own tales of fostering and being taken out of school in the wake of family crises, attested to vivid memories of childhood experiences precipitated by lack of resources; all hoped that they would be able to spare their own families such upheaval.

Work, waithood and intimacy: masculinity and the gendered dimensions of insecure work

Beyond anxieties about material survival, the precarity engendered by relying on weaving also had a significant impact on young weavers intimate relations and sense of social status. Speaking about his relationship with Sena, the woman with whom he lived and had a child, Francis would refer to her sometimes as his "wife", and at others as his "girlfriend". One morning, in a pause between work, talk turned to relationships. With characteristic frankness, Francis asked about my partner, a man he knew and was fond of. Would we marry? What were our plans together? Momentarily disarmed by his openness- chat in the workshop was wide ranging but the intricacies of intimate relations were rarely touched upon- I returned the question. Turning shy, he spoke about his hopes that one day they could wed in what he described as a "proper" ceremony. Having given her gifts of hand-woven cloth and

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household goods, he said that their relationship had been formalised in a “traditional” sense, but that they still lacked the recognition of a church ceremony. Jane Soothill notes that there is not necessarily a contradiction between customary marriage rites and church marriages, with Ghanaian born-agains seeing traditional practices as marking the engagement stage of marriage (2007: 196-197), and this was a view that held in the workshop. Church attendance thus not only played an important part in many young people’s social lives, it also structured their aspirations. The desire for a church wedding, complete with all the markers of material and social prestige that came with new clothes, the exchange of gifts and a large celebration with family and friends, was an important instance in which young people sought validation and social acceptance as adults through the structures given them by the church. That access to such validation was blocked due to lack of material resources was commonly attributed to the poor work and economic opportunities available to young people. Needing money to provide hospitality for the many guests who would expect an invitation from the couple, Francis and Sena had held off, waiting as they slowly collected the things they would need for the wedding as and when they had cash to spare. Francis was not alone in this predicament, and even those who had benefitted from higher education faced similar challenges. Speaking about the impact of insecure craftwork, Selorm said:

“I always tell people, and myself, that I can’t rely on weaving to get married and have children because it would be difficult to [provide] a good education for your children and take good care of them” (2013)

Although the question of relationships being legitimised by elaborate church weddings is primarily bound up with the complex social effects of the rising tide of Pentecostal Christianity in Ghana, the salient point is that through a combination of factors, including the precarity of their work, young weavers’ access to social recognition for their relationships was blocked. They were not alone in this and Honwana's study of waithood across sub-saharan Africa highlights how economic uncertainty and high levels of youth unemployment have resulted in delayed marriages and young people facing steep challenges establishing independent households within which they might raise children (2012: 104-108). Indeed, possessed of a marketable craft skill, Agotime's weavers were better off than their peers who relied solely on farming. Nonetheless, without being “properly” married young people's relationships were not fully legitimised and they lacked one of the key social markers which distinguished youths from adult men. What is more,

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considering how exchange of gifts works to constitute relationships and emotional intimacy⁷³, young men's struggles to access the material goods characteristic of a "proper" wedding also undermined and altered the fabric of the relationships themselves. Outlining the multiple dimensions of waithood, Honwana highlights the changing face of intimacy in contexts where marriage, the establishment of one's own home, and the support of children are increasingly difficult:

"Sexuality, courtship, and marriage have undergone profound changes that are inextricably linked to dynamic social, economic and cultural conditions. Amid the current crisis in the transition to adulthood, conventional relationships and identities are being altered as young people engage in practices that are shaped by their socioeconomic conditions" (2013: 89)

Whilst young women faced challenges of their own navigating this shifting terrain⁷⁴, when conventional notions of adult masculinity⁷⁵ were bound up with marriage and heading up a family, young men were particularly vulnerable to protracted waithood and almost total exclusion from the attainment of social adulthood. Economic precarity was thus equated with youth, and elder members of the community of craftspeople decried workshop members as wilful "boys". Speaking of Agotime's young weavers, Tsiamiga Ampomah said:

"It is only the youth, they are money conscious and disobedient to their [elders]... You know, in matter of fact, some of them don't even have a child, they don't even marry because they don't want to respect their [elders]. So, you tell them to do this, they don't do it! The old guys, when you tell them 'do this for me', they take time and do it..." (2013)

It is no surprise then that men in their late twenties and thirties, some of whom did have children of their own, worked to positively occupy these spaces of youthful waithood. Routinely referring to themselves as "youths", they subverted the negative

⁷³ Gilbert's work on the relationship between women's livelihoods and Pentecostalism in southern Nigeria explores how the exchange of gifts and money shaped gendered expectations of sexual relationships, with young women defining a "good" husband on the basis of his ability to offer material support (2014: 237-239). Charles Piot's work on gift exchange in northern Togo highlights the crucial role that reciprocity plays in constituting enduring social ties and engendering hierarchies (1991: 411-412; 1999: 52-75).

⁷⁴ Experiences of waithood are distinctly gendered and there is a clear relationship between the precariousness of young men's transition to adulthood and that of young women. Young men's inability to marry leaves their female partners engaging in prolonged relationships outside of marriage which can result in children being born before a couple is able to marry and this was the case for at least one workshop weaver who had to marry his teenage girlfriend when she became pregnant. Some evidence suggests that young women's attainment of adulthood is more tightly bound up with child-bearing than with marriage (see Clark, 1999b) and Gilbert's ethnography provides a thoughtful analysis of young women's strategies for negotiating waithood as well as their position in relation to sex and relationships (2014: 233-246).

⁷⁵ The challenge posed by precarity to ideas of masculinity are not confined to Kpetoe or other African contexts, undermining how young men attain adulthood in Europe and North America too (Standing, 2011: 63-65)

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associations of the word to air grievances towards, and make impatient claims of, their "elders⁷⁶".

For weavers who were married the challenges of work continued to impinge on their family relationships. Bright was in his thirties and had a seven year old son and a six year old daughter. He was married to a woman who taught in a nearby town and her teaching salary supplemented his craft income. Although they lived in rented accommodation in Kpetoe, the couple had begun building a new home for their family not far from the workshop. When construction was complete, the house would be big enough that Bright and his wife might bolster their finances by renting out a few rooms. On the face of it he was in an enviable position. In conversation, though, his wry sense of humour was often tempered with complaints about his work and the struggles he faced trying to meet his commitments to his young family through weaving. Working at his loom one afternoon Bright explained his situation:

"My wife, she complains all the time that the weaving, it's not helping us. Because, you know how the business is! It takes more time but the income is less so she complains often and I'm left thinking about the next step I should take. She doesn't know what else I should do but she complains. A man as a head of a family, I have responsibilities and I'm not able to meet them due to the work that I'm doing. So, I have to think of doing another thing. That is my problem now" (2013)

Without the capital to start a business and being unable to return to education because of his obligations to support his own children through school, Bright was at an impasse, unsure of what his next move should be. I wondered if his sense that he was failing to provide for his family was also heightened by the fact that it was his wife, and not him, who brought a steady income into their household through her salaried job. The topic was a sensitive one though, so I kept my thoughts to myself as he went on speaking about the exhausting work of weaving. Without work that enabled him to provide enough or the right kinds of support to his family, Bright, like many young male weavers felt thwarted, and his frustration often turned to criticism of the craft itself.

The literature on wealth in people provides an entry into thinking about the impact precarious and lowly paid work had on the family ties and relationships of young men in the weaving workshop. Comparing bridewealth and dowries in Africa and Europe, Jack Goody provided an early conceptualisation of "wealth in people", writing:

⁷⁶ Intergenerational conflict was generally couched in this way, with the terms "youth" and "elder" being shorthand, respectively, for positions of relative subordination and power. Generational antagonisms and their relation to social and economic precarity are explored further by Langevang in her work with young people in Accra (2009: 2045).

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"...Difference between rich and poor...tended to be based upon the strength of one's arm or the number of one's sons, rather than upon the inheritance of landed property. Broadly speaking, poverty was related to labor rather than capital" (1971: 596; see also J. Goody, 1969 & 1973)

Caroline Bledsoe's work during the 1970s on Kpelle marriage in Liberia draws clear links between control of resources and dense social networks, that, to an important extent, continue to hold true in contemporary Kpetoe:

"...the control of women is central to the Kpelle system of stratification, as well as that of many other African societies [which are] based primarily on the production of economic surpluses to attract dependents...Labor and allegiance are critical to people's economic subsistence as well as to their political and economic advancement. *Wealth and security rest on the control of others*" (1980: 48, emphasis added)

Mains' ethnography of unemployed men in Ethiopia picks up on some of these themes, drawing a link between issues of work and wealth in people. Arguing that the value placed on work is not necessarily related to the process of production, but rather associated with the ways young men establish their social position, Mains makes the important point that "good" work symbolises entry into a field of rewarding social relations, characterised by reciprocity, support, respect and social recognition as an adult man (2012: 144). Young Agotime weavers too valued decent work not only in material terms but also for the opening it gave them onto the pleasures of recognition and meaningful, fulfilling social relationships.

"We manage"- craftwork, agency and hope

Thinking about the precarious economic and social position many young Kpetoe weavers occupy, it is, however, important to acknowledge that craftspeople in Agotime were not obligated, through caste relations or other strictures, to engage with this kind of work. Unlike Mande *nyamakalaw* leatherworkers, potters, blacksmiths and bards whose vocational identity runs through caste lines of descent (Frank, 1998: 1-5; see also Conrad and Frank, 1995) or female Labbai mat makers in Southern India whose vocational marginalisation was patterned by caste and the ways that women weavers were confined to the home (Venkatesan, 2010: 163), Kpetoe weavers faced no such constraints. The decision to become involved, or not, with the craft was thus best characterised as a strategic decision young people made based upon the vocational choices available at any given time. Gabriel, Francis, Bright, Felix, Bless, Joshua and others spoke about their decision, as teenagers, to pursue weaving work in terms of the opportunities the craft might offer, their constant refrain being that they began weaving "to see what it could do for me". Their continued engagement with weaving work was not unconditional, but rather

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contingent upon the shifting range of possibilities available to individuals at particular points in time, as well as their aspirations.

Thus, to the extent then that we can talk about “choice” in conditions where work is scarce, Kpetoe weavers did have a choice. Speaking of the relationship between weaving and work in the village, Gabriel laughingly said that despite weaving being the “work of the community”, learning to weave was not compulsory and that only those who showed willing were encouraged to take up the craft. This view was echoed by many others, particularly those with children of their own. Asked whether he would like his children to take up weaving, Bright wavered momentarily before replying:

“As it's the work of the community, I may say that it's something that...I don't know how to put it...Because, so far as you are born in the community, you will by all means feel to know how to weave. But, if you yourself, you are not interested, or you have another mind [to take up some other kind of occupation], that is fine.” (2013)

Francis spoke with similar ambiguity about his own young son, conceding that should the child show an interest in the craft he would mentor him in the work, but that the boy's occupational destiny was not set by being the child of a weaver. Instead, whilst negotiating the challenges of his own working life, Francis also optimistically plotted out alternative vocational trajectories for his son, hoping that he might one day join the ranks of the Ghanaian police force or the army, saying that this kind of work offered the security of a salaried job alongside the respect reserved for uniformed officials. In this we see that although vocational choices might be limited, weavers used what agency they had to negotiate their situation as best they could.

The flexibility of the craft itself, as a form of work which was most often undertaken at home and which required a relatively limited investment in tools or materials, played a crucial role in young weavers’ strategies. Globalising economies have fundamentally altered the conditions of craft production (see Herzfeld, 2004), and globalisation’s gains and losses have been unevenly distributed, with market integration functioning alongside exclusion and disconnection (see Ferguson, 2006: 41; Graw and Schielke, 2012: 15). In Kpetoe these inequities were exemplified by local entrepreneurs, such as Israel Kporku who is discussed below, who had the social and economic resources to access profitable new markets for *agbamevo kente* cloths and grew prosperous in the process, whilst a great many skilled weavers struggled to make ends meet. Thus, the opportunities and challenges of craftwork and globalisation overlaid existing social hierarchies and disparities in economic

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power, a topic that Joy explores in relation to the tensions surrounding heritage practices and a “heritage elite” in the Malian city of Djenné (2012: 174).

However crafts like weaving endure because they can be undertaken in a flexible way, with weavers combining craftwork with other kinds of occupations. Timothy Scrase writes:

“Craft production...may in fact be a 'weapon of the weak', an activity which frequently operates at the margins of the mainstream economy and the state. Importantly, it helps maintain family, household and community relations, providing the producers with a sense of symbolic power and maintaining a localised cultural identity” (2003: 450)

For Agotime’s weavers, there was pleasure to be taken in the skilful production of beautiful, prestige textiles that would be worn with pride in celebration of local heritage and to mark key life events. There was also dignity in the hard work craftspeople put in at the loom and a sense of achievement to be felt in being able to care and provide for one’s family in difficult times. This pride was manifest in the triumphs of the everyday, in being able to send children to school, building a secure family home and having the means to celebrate important events with relatives and friends. Achievements were made in the face of significant challenges, and the hard work that went into these successes engendered new forms of self-worth and social value for individual weavers and in the community more widely (see Long and Moore, 2013: 12-13). Religious studies scholar Paul Gifford has implicated the increasing importance of Pentecostalist discourses in Ghana with novel understandings of self-belief and a “new work-ethic” (2004: 196), and this link was evident in the fact that Gabriel kept a battered copy of a self-help book alongside his bible, and he took both with him each Sunday when he went to church.

The flexibility of weaving, however, was also bound up with insecurity and craftspeople’s hopes and sense of optimism played an important role in managing the emotional and social challenges of uncertainty. The fact that an atmosphere of hopeful possibility sustained the hard, often unrelenting work, of getting by through the craft was reflected in the way workshop weavers spoke about their work. A common response to questions about how someone was getting on was a laughing “We manage!”. A remark that superficially might sound flippant, the phrase highlighted young craftspeople’s agency and optimism, along with the constraints they faced as they navigated the challenges of the everyday (see Gaibazzi, 2012: 131-132).

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The vernacular of “managing” in the Agotime workshop⁷⁷ mirrored the strategies, practices and forms of sociality young people across West Africa have put to work in navigating precarity. In Francophone West Africa, the process of “managing” is translated as *se débrouiller*⁷⁸. Considering how young people in the Northern Cameroonian city of Ngaoundéré cope with the challenges of everyday life, Trond Waage writes:

“ ‘Je me débrouille’ is a stock phrase commonly used by young people...when they explain how they cope with the unforeseen everyday life situations and challenges in the urban environment. Young people usually voice the expression with a smile, which highlights the significance to young adults in contemporary Cameroon of the qualities of resilience, flexibility, creativity, and sociability as essential for coping with these challenging demands. ‘Je me débrouille’ similarly indicates a speaker’s openness to new suggestions and possibilities for employment or earning a living...” (2006: 62)

In his work on crisis, youth and the opening up of new economic spaces in Cameroon, Nantang Jua also draws on the notion of *débrouillardise*⁷⁹, linking it with practices of *bricolage* to capture how, in conditions of material scarcity, uncertain economies are sustained through the relentless inventiveness of young people whose survival depends on their creativity and optimism. Jua notes that:

“[Despite] evidence of the disarticulation of African economies and their subsequent meltdown, attributable to Africa's fragmentary incorporation into neo-liberal capitalism...Cameroonian youth exude optimism and call themselves the 'unlimited generation'...[and their] emphasis is on devising strategies for multiple livelihoods.” (2010: 129-143)

In Lusophone Guinea-Bissau, similar ideas are captured in the term *dubriagem*, which connotes dynamism, young people’s attention towards shifting social terrain and “...refers to the praxis of immediate survival as well as to gaining a perspective on changing social possibilities and possible trajectories” (Vigh, 2006: 52). The process of “managing” is thus a multifaceted one which draws together the everyday business of survival with the longer-term work of plotting possible future trajectories and realising aspirations. Success in “managing” calls for young people to couple material know-how with the ability to skilfully navigate ever-changing social landscapes.

Based upon individuals’ capacity to agilely negotiate shifting social and economic terrain and make the most of limited opportunities and resources, processes of “managing” could also be tied to practices which were morally dubious and whose

⁷⁷ In her work on the educational and livelihood trajectories of young people in Accra, geographer Thilde Langevang’s notes the use of the term as a common greeting amongst the generation born since the economic crises and structural adjustment of the late 1970s and early 1980s.

⁷⁸ Meaning “to cope” or “to manage”, the French *se débrouiller* - unlike its English counterpart- also implies “to disentangle” or “to unravel”, hinting at the complex ways in which the challenges faced by young people are knotted and bound together.

⁷⁹ Translates as “resourcefulness” or “management”.

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legality was uncertain (see MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga, 2000: 82-95; Jua, 2010: 136-138; Meagher, 2010a: 158-163). As Bayart highlights in relation to African politics, "...the strategies adopted by the great majority of the population for survival are identical to the ones adopted by the leaders to accumulate wealth and power...[with] corruption and predatoriness [being] not found exclusively amongst the powerful [but becoming a] mode of social and political behaviour shared by a plurality of actors on more or less a great scale" (2009: 237-238). As the ethnography below, on contracting arrangements and entrepreneurialism in the *kente* trade shows, exploitation and dishonesty featured in the ways weaving work was organised, and predatory relations had a distinct sociality of their own (see Geschiere, 2013b: 61). We now turn to what "managing" means in the context of weaving, focusing on the diverse roles that both positive and negative forms of sociality play in the business of making and selling cloth.

Making a living through the craft: negotiating relationships with customers.

Whilst craft apprenticeship gave young weavers the practical skills they needed to weave cloth, making a living through the craft was also a matter of learning how to market and sell textiles. In the course of learning the basics of the craft young weavers spent long periods working alongside their masters, picking up the social skills needed to manage relationships with customers and patrons. Apprentices learn appropriate comportment and respectful communication with customers. If initiates maintain a good relationship with their master they can hope to inherit customers from their former teacher once they have learnt the craft, thus easing the transition from apprentice to independent weaver. When craft learning takes place in the context of the family, kinship ties further facilitate the "sharing" of customers (see MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga, 2000: 110). Weavers take care to wear smart clothes when meeting with customers and those buying cloth are treated with deference and referred to as "Sir" or "Aunty"⁸⁰. Practising respect in this way is particularly important considering that the main market for Agotime cloths lies amongst the Ghanaian middle class, civil servants and business people who would be considered the social elders of many young weavers.

When making decisions about who to admit to "the house", workshop members also took into account prospective weavers behaviour; those who were troublesome

⁸⁰ "Aunty" is a term of respect used to refer to adult women, connoting maturity but also engendering fictive kinship ties of warmth and affection. "Aunty" is more respectful than "Sister", which is also commonly used and implies a more egalitarian relationship.

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were barred from joining for fear not only that they might disrupt the working atmosphere of the place, but also, crucially, in case they harassed or “disturbed” customers. During my visit to Kpetoe in the summer of 2015 I witnessed these rules being firmly enforced when a man from the town arrived in the workshop one morning with his tools and materials and asked to be allowed to set up a loom there. The newcomer was known for being volatile and despite the workshop being half-empty, members were not at all happy about his arrival. A heated discussion between Felix, Francis, Gabriel and the man quickly boiled over into an argument and the newcomer stormed away, only to return the following day to try again. Eventually Joshua and Mr Agba, the workshop chairmen, were called and after a final standoff the weaver packed his things and left. For a place where the atmosphere could be boisterous, but where friendliness prevailed, the raised voices were jarring. In hushed tones that afternoon Francis spoke about the uncomfortable scenes that had unfolded, emphasising his concerns that should the man be allowed to set up a loom in the workshop, his confrontational behaviour might put off prospective customers. In a business that relies on personal contacts to find and keep customers, friendliness and respect were weavers’ stock-in-trade, and the warm atmosphere in the workshop was a collective achievement that no one was prepared to jeopardise.

Whilst all customers were treated with courtesy and respect, some weavers developed longstanding friendships with particular customers, and friendship thus played an important part in how weavers managed their crafting livelihoods and their access to social and material resources. In contexts characterised by economic uncertainty, the forging of social networks is a means of keeping one's options open (Meagher, 2010a: 130). As such, affability and the ability to foster productive ties with a broad range of people were assets when it came to managing the work of weaving.

Francis perfectly embodied these characteristics. A gentle, calm and generous man, he was not only well-liked but made a particular effort to cultivate ties of friendship with those he met in the course of his work. Although reserved in his manner, he had a curious mind and enjoyed meeting and speaking to new people. I would often spend long periods in the workshop talking with him about one thing or another and he was particularly interested in finding out about my life in London. This warmth and curiosity was appealing and had won him friends amongst his customers, work acquaintances and neighbours. During a visit to the workshop in June 2015 I met a customer who had become a good friend of Francis. Parking his

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car outside the workshop, the man walked in, smartly dressed in a white shirt and trousers, and the pair greeted each other warmly, shaking hands and clapping one another on the back. Francis broke off his work and pulled up a chair for his visitor so the two of them might sit in the shady cool of the workshop and talk a while. After a time the man got up to leave, they exchanged handshakes once more and Francis returned to his work.

The next morning Francis showed me a smartphone he had been given the day before. Having recently upgraded his mobile phone, the friend had no need for the old handset and had passed it along. Francis was especially pleased with the gift because his own had recently stopped working and he had been making do for several weeks, borrowing other people's mobiles and using an old, basic handset to make calls and send SMS. In a context where digital cameras and internet-connected computers were hard to come by, smartphones were weavers primary way of connecting to the internet⁸¹ and thus played a vital role in managing the work of weaving. The internet messaging apps WhatsApp and Viber were used to keep in contact with customers and allowed weavers to send photos of their cloths to clients' smartphones without the expense of multimedia messaging charges. Mobile money services, such as those offered by the South African based mobile network operator MTN, were also an increasingly popular way of sending money that allowed customers who lived far from Kpetoe, in Accra or elsewhere, to pay weavers⁸² without travelling to the village. Without a working smartphone, the business of staying in contact with customers was tricky and Francis had recently lost out on work when customers had been unable to contact him.

Discussing the present and his friend's visit, Francis recounted a trip he had once made with the man across the border to Togo. An affluent businessman, the friend owned a number of cars and had lent Francis, who has a driving licence and had worked as a driver himself, one of his vehicles whilst they were away. Francis enjoyed the time he spent behind the wheel as well as the feeling of being seen with the car⁸³, and spoke warmly of his friend's generosity. At a time when Francis himself

⁸¹ Although Kpetoe had an internet café and there were a great number of other cafés in Ho, including a large air-conditioned one attached to the regional Vodafone headquarters, smartphones were the main way most people connected to the internet. This was not least because regular electricity black-outs rendered computers useless and power surges could damage equipment.

⁸² Mobile money services were little used during my initial fieldwork in 2012-2013, but had taken off in Ghana by the summer of 2015, offering money transfer services to people who often had limited access to formal banking.

⁸³ Francis had taken pictures of the car as a memento of the trip, which he showed me with some pride. It was quite common during special occasions or festivities for young men to pose for

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did not have the means to own a car (or indeed was unsure how he would even replace his broken phone), this friendship offered him access to material and symbolic resources⁸⁴. The offering and acceptance of gifts in this way also encoded the relationship's latent hierarchies and positioned Francis and his friend in a set of patrimonial relations, whereby sociality and friendship were mediated through the exchange of goods (see Piot, 1999: 62; MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga, 2000: 120-121).

Aside from the personal intimacy and pleasure that imbued these kinds of friendships, these relations also offered weavers the opportunity to make valuable contacts with people who might become future customers or be of use in some other way. Word-of-mouth and personal recommendations were a primary means of getting contracts and mapping out work opportunities, so friendships functioned on an instrumental⁸⁵ level as well as an emotional one. As has been noted in relation to young Ivoirian men's economic strategies, success, access to resources and opportunities were founded upon broad-based social networks composed of peer and patron relationships which were maintained through regular acts of exchange (Newell, 2012: 73-74).

Church networks, and the ongoing sociality of being involved in a congregation were another way some weavers sold their cloths.⁸⁶ Longstanding participation in a church community fostered a range of cross-cutting social ties, whereby weavers had contact with those outside their social milieu, including elders and more affluent members of the community. Moreover, shared religious practice could also offer weavers and their customers a basis of mutual trust with which to work. Through his involvement in a church choir, the chairman of the workshop, Joshua, had negotiated a contract for a set of green and cream coloured cloths for choristers to wear when

photographs next to motorbikes and cars that were not theirs but were aspirational objects nonetheless.

⁸⁴ In their ethnography of transnational Congolese traders, Janet MacGaffey and Rémy Bazenguissa-Ganga make the important point that the social ties which crucially regulate this kind of work often rely on indeterminate forms of reciprocity, whereby material goods "...may be reciprocated with non-material returns, such as esteem and social approval." (2000: 109)

⁸⁵ This is not to say that these connections were any less "authentic" than relationships which appeared to be based on equality and emotional warmth. Indeed, in the course of fieldwork and through my own relations with various workshop members I learnt that the ideal of friendship based on altruism and emotional intimacy is particular and stands alongside a range of other ways of relating. Piot discusses the dynamics of different kinds of friendships between an anthropologist and their interlocutors in his Togolese ethnography (1999: 58-61)

⁸⁶ It is important to note that not all weavers drew on these networks in their work. As discussed in the opening chapter on religion and heritage, Bright kept his involvement with the Jehovah's Witnesses separate from his work in the loom and said that one of the things which appealed to him about his church was the fact that he did not feel compelled to give alms and his work life was quite distinct from his religious one.

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performing together. Unable to complete this large job on his own, he had shared the work out amongst his friends in the workshop.

When thinking about how weavers developed a market for their cloths it is important to acknowledge the role that mobility played in establishing contact with new customers and selling textiles. Although Kpetoe was an important centre of textile production in the Volta region, Ghana is perhaps better known for Asante *kente* such as that woven in the *kente* stool of Bonwire⁸⁷ and Adanwomase. Kumasi is Ghana's second city and an important centre of trade and cultural production. As such, it was widely accepted amongst workshop weavers that the Ashante region offered opportunities for skilled weavers and there was a sustained history of contact between Asante weaving centres and Agotime craftspeople. Upon returning to Kpetoe in the summer of 2015, the economic downturn which had halved the workshop's membership had prompted at least one weaver to move to the Ashanti region in search of work. Eric had been a longstanding, popular and highly skilled member of the Agotime workshop who had migrated to Ashanti in the hope that his new home would offer greater opportunities for finding customers and selling his cloths. There had been little news of him in Kpetoe since he had left but I wondered how he was getting on and hoped he had acclimatised to his new surroundings. Migration is not a recent strategy and Kraamer's historical study of Ewe *kente* notes the important role that migration has played in the life-histories of weavers who, faced with challenging economic circumstances and limited material security, have long opted to move elsewhere in search of work opportunities within the craft. She suggests that the decision to move is informed by young weavers' habitus (2005: 205-206) and these patterns of migration are thrown into even starker relief when considering the other kinds of work that weavers are involved with.

Nonetheless, not all relationships between weavers and their customers were close and an uncertain or difficult relationship with a customer could have a serious effect on a weaver's work. Questions of trust were key to how craftspeople and customers related to one another and negotiations over money and payment could become particular sticking points. When taking orders for cloth from a customer weavers could limit their risk and mitigate against the chance that they would go unpaid by taking a deposit of half or a third of the total cost upfront, with the balance being paid upon completion of the cloth by a set date. A portion of this money was

⁸⁷ Master weavers at Bonwire, a village outside of Kumasi, have historically woven the textiles worn by the Asantehene and the village has developed into an important centre of *kente* production.

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put aside to pay for materials, whilst the rest went towards living costs. However, with most young craftspeople having limited resources to buffer them against contingencies, periods of illness or unexpected expenses meant that these arrangements occasionally unravelled⁸⁸. Should a weaver fail to complete a cloth in time, particularly if the piece was for an occasion, they risked not only disappointing the customer but also tarnishing their carefully built-up reputation.

With weavers getting most of their contracts through word-of-mouth, managing these relationships well was a source of constant concern and called for careful communication. One strategy that could be used to buy time in such cases was to claim illness. Deployed infrequently, this tactic drew on affective ties between craftspeople and their customers and could be seen as a legitimate part of “managing”, rather than straightforward dishonesty. Another, more common approach, was to use some saved money to contract the work out to another weaver and then explain the situation to the buyer in the hope that they would still take the piece even if it was late. This strategy tended to work, with social ties and respect buffering the transaction from both sides. Sometimes, though, craftspeople were left with cloths they had spent long periods weaving. The few with enough capital could hold onto these pieces and wait for another buyer to come along. If, however, a weaver was short of cash to cover their day-to-day expenses they would be forced to sell to textiles traders at a mark-down price. This common scenario was a source of some rancour in the relationships between weavers, their customers and the entrepreneurs who made a living trading cloth, with weavers feeling that they were trapped between fickle customers and predatory traders.

The following section will look more closely at contracting relationships between weavers and the role that these played both in managing the routine demands of the craft and in weavers' attempts to build longterm, sustainable livelihoods.

Contracting out weaving and brokering weaving work

Because hand-weaving narrow-strip cloth is laborious and customers will often commission a textile for a particular occasion, needing the piece to wear to a wedding, funeral or for a festival, weavers regularly find themselves working to tight

⁸⁸ Rendered unable to work, even for a short time, craftspeople often had to spend payments set aside for materials on subsistence costs, “eating” the money from customers. Left short of cash to pay for yarn, weavers would then be compelled to take on new projects before existing ones were complete to get the money to buy the materials they needed.

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schedules. The sharing of work, or offering fellow weavers “contracts” as it was called in the workshop, was a principle strategy for managing these situations. A weaver, taking on a commission that they know they would not be able to complete by themselves, would broker a deal, contracting part of the work out to another craftsperson whom they know to have the requisite skills, they trust to do the work on time and with whom they will share the payment. In these relationships, the craftsperson who made initial contact with the customer was the primary weaver, with contract weavers rarely having any contact with the person who commissioned the cloth. This meant that the primary weaver and broker was in a position to negotiate with the customer over the cost of the cloth, with contractors receiving a fixed, agreed upon payment. As well as helping weavers to manage tight deadlines, contracting was also seen as one of the ways that those with well developed social ties both in the crafting community and with customers could accumulate capital for possible future ventures and tended to be the first step for weavers hoping to become cloth traders.

However, although contracting was routine in the crafting community, the business of negotiating contracting agreements could be contentious and fraught with difficulty, particularly because unequal access to social and material resources structured many of these relationships. It is important to recognise, that in the context of contracting relationships, workshop weavers did leverage their relatively better developed social networks and reputation to their advantage. Although these relationships were not necessarily exploitative, craftspeople acknowledged that whilst a weaver working alone might be able to cover their subsistence costs, successfully contracting out work offers the opportunity of profit. In this, contracting inscribes hierarchical relations in the crafting community and experienced weavers benefited from the poorly paid labour of other, younger men in ways which although not clearly illegitimate could, at times be felt to be unfair and exploitative.

A point of contention in the workshop were the ways that members shared contracting work. Whilst some maintained that contracts should be shared with fellow workshop members, contractors were often sought amongst craftspeople who worked elsewhere. Because “outside” contractors tended to be younger men and adolescent boys with less experience in the loom and fewer, weaker social ties to customers, these weavers often had less bargaining power than workshop members and could be contracted to work for less. For primary weavers hoping to make a profit on a cloth, this marginal saving was important. However, such practices also

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undercut workshop prices and were seen to erode social solidarity in the workshop. As such, even men who themselves looked “outside” for contractors were critical, decrying the greed of those who shared their work with boys from the village.

Managing the production of the cloth itself was another challenge. If jobs were shared within the workshop, members had routine contact with one another and could see how a cloth was progressing. However, if a workshop member had contracted an “outsider”, daily contact was substituted with phone calls and the work was supervised through occasional visits to the weaver’s home. By and large, these arrangements were adequate. However, talk circulated in the workshop of contractors who had accepted advances on cloths and then disappeared with the money, heading over the border into Togo, doing a midnight flit to their natal village or heading out into the “bush”. The severing of social ties in this way served the individual priorities of the thieves. Indeed extra-legal practices are commonly bound up with the everyday work of survival (see MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga, 2000: 81) and “...politics and crime, legitimate and illegitimate agency, endlessly redefine each other” (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2006: 11). It might therefore be more helpful to understand this sort of behaviour as part of a continuum of tactics and strategies weavers employed in managing the challenges of their work and lives. As the flip-side of warm friendships and collegial cooperation, predation and exploitation was possessed of a dangerous sociality of its own (Geschiere 2013b: 63; Gilbert, 2016: 4-7).

Indeed, alongside the social threat of such actions, for the primary weavers who had brokered these arrangements, and whose entire working capital was often just the cost of one cloth, the disappearance of a contractor posed a serious practical problem. Not only could they lose a significant amount of money, but they were also solely responsible for delivering the cloth to the customer in time and thus would be left either to weave it themselves or find the money to take on another contractor to complete the project. Although workshop weavers felt that these situations were very unfair, they accepted that excuses about contractors’ failings were inadmissible with customers who had entered into agreements with them.

Whilst working to honour their arrangements with the customer in the hope of maintaining a good professional reputation, weavers in this position would also try and recoup their losses. Visits would be made to the homes of contractors and sometimes the local police would be involved too. Nonetheless, because events like this were usually precipitated by some kind of unforeseen crisis in the contractor’s

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life, workshop members said that despite the pressure they might exert to try and get their money back, it very seldom happened. Despite being widely considered illegitimate in the workshop, from the perspective of the run-away weaver the decision to take the money and run can be seen as an agentive act in circumstances where choices are severely limited (see Newell, 2012: 63-66). Talking about these incidents, Mensah said:

"At times we have problems, some people collect money and they will not do [the work], so they become a problem. It's a big problem, [and] I will have to find money and do it myself [because] they run away with the money. At times when you see them, they will beg you and pay you small-small money, that is all! So if the person has gone and run away and come back and begged you, you have to accept" (2013)

Mensah's acceptance that, should reparations be made by the thief, a working relationship could be restored, highlights the value positive sociality had in the weaving community. However, it was clear that this kind of behaviour, or indeed, just the spectre of it, put a severe strain on bonds of trust amongst weavers, which demanded constant attention and were never fully assured (see Geschiere, 2013a: 28-33; Meagher, 2010: 81).

The business of weaving- entrepreneurial weavers and *Agbamevo Kente* businesses.

Perched on the wooden stool in his loom in the fading light of the late afternoon, Bright was lamenting his work. Only in his early thirties, he said he could already feel his body growing tired of weaving, the continual ache in his arms, down his back and through his legs slowing him down as he wove. In a saturated market, the value of new textiles had a limit and managing the work relied upon being able to speedily complete commissions. Although Olu, an elderly retired healthcare worker, was a regular member of the weaving workshop, as craftspeople aged and grew slower, relying on the craft became an ever more precarious proposition. Notably, Olu was in receipt of a pension and worked in the loom as a means of busying himself and maintaining mental and physical agility in his old age. Although he wove steadily and was a constant figure in the workshop he did not rely solely on the income from his craft to support himself. Illness and injury posed a similar, if starker threat, to weavers' livelihoods and Gabriel's father had been forced to give up working in the loom altogether after injuring his legs in a car accident. Knowing that it would become harder to make a living in the loom as they aged, weavers sought to supplement their practice of the craft with other income generating activities.

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For those who had built up capital and a network of reliable weavers through the successful management of contracting relationships, trading cloths was one, aspirational option that encompassed the independence weavers so valued with the prestige of business success (see also Gilbert, 2016). Foster, a workshop member deemed successful by his colleagues, complemented work in the loom with trade in cloths he bought from fellow weavers, as well as the production and sale of small accessories including bags and jewellery made from *agbamevo kente* to local customers and the occasional. Felix too hoped to branch out into the cloth trade and he described the difference between weaving and trading cloth thus:

“This [weaving] work, when I don’t get enough money, then I can’t do it! Because when you have children, your children are at school and you are weaving [and earning] only GH₵150 a month, and your children’s school fees are GH₵800 [a term]- how are you going to get enough money, you alone? But when you have enough money, or you have a small store, or you are selling thread, that’s better-like Israel!”

Set back from the road next to Kpetoe’s main junction, the *Israel Kente Store* boasted one of the busiest locations in town. The shop was flanked on one side by a tailoring shop, a store selling school supplies and a stall where two women, from early in the morning until after dark, sold oranges peeled and ready for eating, bunches of over-ripe bananas and fragrant pineapple to travellers passing through. On the other side was a half-finished, multi-storey concrete building that, yet to be fully inhabited, was already crumbling, a wholesale supplier of drinks stacked high with crates of beer and soft drinks and the austere office of the local police with a bare, grubby cell out the back. Across the way was a shady area where *Okado* boys would gather, waiting for passengers who needed to get away from the main drag and up into town (see Smith, 2014: 35). Travelling the road that skirts the Togolese border down south towards the coast from Ho, the regional capital, or heading north from the border crossing at Aflao, this junction was known as Kpetoe’s “station” and the spot where shared cars stopped to pick up and unload passengers and goods.

The junction was alive with the comings and goings of the town, and the *Israel Kente Store* was prominently positioned with a sign board advertising the shop to travellers. Baskets of newly carved tools, wooden shuttles, reed beaters and an assortment of spinning machines carpentered from fresh, pale wood sat in front of the door, where the teenage nephew of the eponymous proprietor, Israel Kporku, would sit in the shade of the sun waiting for customers. Inside, the walls of the shop and the counter were lined with glass fronted cabinets packed with *Agbamevo Kente* cloths of all kinds. This riotous explosion of texture, colour and shape was roughly ordered,

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with hundreds of textiles stacked up, folded and carefully stored in plastic wrappers behind the glass. Fashionable geometric designs woven in a rainbow spectrum of rayon yarn sat alongside more muted stripes of blue, green, black and red cotton. Nestled amongst all this were impressive cloths patterned with figurative designs depicting animals and objects that evoked proverbial sayings. Crafted by “old men” who worked in the outlying villages of Agotime, Israel said that these pieces attracted a premium because so few young weavers still knew how to make them. Of the handful of youths who did, Israel said that hardly any were prepared to invest the time it took to make these heavily-patterned cloths, a sentiment echoed by community elders Samuel Agba and Tsiamiga Ampomah. Alongside the textiles and weaving paraphernalia stood a small stand-alone cabinet displaying a selection of ceremonial slippers and crowns that, adorned with gold and silver foiled shapes, were worn by local area and village chiefs and members of the chiefly entourage for special occasions and festivals.

One of two *kente* shops in town, the *Israel Kente Store* was the best stocked and, benefiting from its spot by the junction, most well situated place to buy *Agbamevo kente* cloths in Agotime. A relatively youthful master weaver in his late thirties, Israel launched his *kente* business in 2002. His previous venture had been selling weaving yarns, and he had saved money from that which he put towards the shop. However, unlike a loom which might be set up for less than GH¢100, a much larger capital investment was needed to found a store stocked with cloths, and this proved the stumbling block for workshop members. Ranging in price from GH¢200 to upwards of GH¢1000 for unusual pieces, many tens of thousands of Ghanaian Cedis would have been spent on the textiles in Israel’s store and he had needed to secure a bank loan in the early days to help pay for stock. Although Israel emphasised his self-sufficiency and reticently avoided discussing the matter of the bank loan in any detail, I wondered what role his twelve older brothers and sisters, all working in government posts, had played in securing the new venture and I knew that few, if any, of my workshop colleagues had relatives who could act as guarantors.

Speaking about his business during November 2013, Israel said that he no longer worked in the loom himself and instead devoted himself to the trade in textiles. Acting as a broker and a middle-man, Israel commissioned and sourced rare and marketable new cloths from weavers in the area that he then traded at a considerable profit to customers who came from Accra, Kumasi and elsewhere in Ghana. In this way, his business can be seen as an extension of the contracting relationships

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workshop weavers were engaged in. Having developed a working network comprised of both affluent clients and skilled craftsmen, Israel had built a profitable business from his involvement in Agotime weaving, and become a respected local figure. He was well liked by the local paramount chief and visible around Kpetoe as the owner of a shiny SUV⁸⁹. For those in the workshop who hoped one day to make a living from the *kente* business, Israel's story was an aspirational one.

Considering the narrative Israel offered as to how he, amongst all the hopeful and well trained weavers in Agotime, established such a successful store trading many hundreds of valuable cloths, the trope of hard work and self-reliance featured heavily. Echoing the tone of other elite Agotime men including the paramount chief, Israel spoke about his success not in terms of luck or patronage, but as just rewards for his entrepreneurial dedication and ingenuity. In this, his story perpetuated the seductive notion that anyone could make it if only they tried hard enough. Seeing how many young craftspeople struggled to make a living, these stories of success had little resonance with the everyday experience of most people in the crafting community. However, such lavish tales did have very concrete effects in shaping weavers aspirations for a better, more prosperous life, and the visible success of a few functioned as powerful motivation for my interlocutors. Mbembe's writing on the power of images provides a framework for understanding this dynamic:

"What was important was the capacity of the thing represented to mirror resemblances and, through the interplay of bewitchment and enchantment- and, if need be, extravagance and excess- to make the signs speak. It was to this extent that the world of images- that is, the other side of things, language and life- belonged to the world of charms. For having the power to represent reality...implied that one had recourse to the sort of magic and double sight, imagination, even fabrication, that consisted in clothing the signs with appearances of the thing for which they were the metaphor" (2001: 145)

In this way, images have a very real power to act in the world, and a projection of success has the capacity to summon up the experience of success itself. Newell's work on how young Ivoirian men negotiate ideas of modernity in contemporary Abidjan picks up on the power of the bluff, showing the real social value and impact that representations of prestige and affluence have in contexts of uncertain precarity (2012: 20-23; 150-155). For Agotime weavers, the good fortune of a man like Israel was important both in that it seemed to put success within reach of other young

⁸⁹ Ostentatious displays of affluence and conspicuous consumption were the expected accoutrements of those who had achieved success. Geschiere argues that consumption "...expresses a constant struggle for affirming one's status. And because the lines of stratification are unclear- the inexplicable enrichment of some, their equally sudden fall- it seems all the more important to underline success with ostentatious spending" (2013a: 94). In this, Israel's smart clothes and fancy car can be seen as part of his strategy for shoring up his social position and status, thus helping to secure his continued success.

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weavers and to the extent that his affluence reflected well on the community as a whole.

Nonetheless, the idea that success is primarily the product of individual determination and hard work, and not also intimately bound up with ones social ties and position, functions to disguise conditions of structural inequality and unequal access to social and material resources. As has already been shown with weaving contracts, the accumulation of capital that is needed to buttress successful textile business occurs through unequal relations of production, where profit is secured through the low paid work of others with less established or weaker social networks.

These issues of capital and finance were bound up with questions of social position and prestige. Access to funds, which had probably been granted him through supportive social and family ties, had given Israel the opportunity to build a business that had earned him respect in the community, from friends in the workshop right up to the Paramount chief, with whom he was in regular contact and who spoke of him in warm and congratulatory terms. A sponsor of the annual *Agbamevoza*, during our meeting he flipped open the pages of that years festival programme and motioned to his nephew to pass him a large, elaborately bound photo album from behind the counter. Leafing through the album until he found the page he was looking for, Israel turned both volumes toward me and, with pride, pointed out a pair of matching photos taken recently at his wedding. Showing him and his wife, standing side by side, dressed in immaculately tailored outfits made of *agbamevo kente*, the photos were evidence not only of their large and expensive wedding, but reprinted in the programme that was distributed throughout the festival, his position in Agotime as a prominent local figure and a man of wealth and esteem.

Just as Israel's stature within the town was bound up with his contacts with other members of the elite such as the Paramount chief, so too was it fundamentally tied to his extensive social network amongst Agotime weavers inside and out of the workshop. Boasting that he commissioned cloths solely from skilled craftspeople in the area, Israel provided many weavers with work, buying their products but also providing them with the specialist materials and yarns they needed to weave unusual orders. With his SUV he was able to travel to the renowned coastal textile market at Agbozume to purchase the silk needed to weave Anlo Ewe style cloths, bringing the materials back to an elderly, and no doubt less mobile, weaver in town who worked on commission for him. Although workshop members knew that it would be most profitable if they could sell their cloths themselves, when faced with a situation where

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they could not find a buyer for a piece they had made (and in which a large chunk of their working capital was usually tied up) some turned to Israel to buy the surplus cloth as stock for his shop. In this way, he was positioned within the community of craftspeople as a patron, tied up in clientelistic relations of work and reciprocity. Embedded within complex networks of exchange and obligation, Israel had skilfully leveraged the resources available to him, accumulating and exchanging material goods and social prestige as he went.

Entrepreneurial ambitions, access to credit and *susu* groups

Access to credit was important to realising the entrepreneurial ambitions and young weavers' attempts to establish their own ventures were often thwarted by the fact they were unable to take out loans. Felix hoped one day to set up a store supplying weaving materials, but without credit facilities his ambitions went unfulfilled. Whilst Israel had managed to accumulate many cloths in his well-stocked shop, most craftsmen in the workshop had the resources to deal in only a few cloths at a time and bank loans were out of the question for workshop weavers who did not have the assurance of a salaried job⁹⁰. The precarious position of craftspeople who lacked access to steady work and financial services is highlighted in Meagher's work on informalised manufacturing in Northern Nigeria which argues that the success and resilience of informal enterprises are often dependent upon the multiple and overlapping connections that are made with and sustained by actors embedded in the "formal" economy (2010). What is more, there was just one small branch of a local agricultural development bank in town and the major banks were a forty minute drive away in Ho. This meant the time and expense involved in making regular bank transactions and deposits was prohibitive. The practical challenges faced by weavers in accessing financial services were evinced by an episode in the autumn of 2013 when an American tour group visited the weaving centre. As their visit drew to a close and their bus got ready to leave, purchases of cloth were hurriedly made. The next day as I left the workshop for lunch, Bright called across and asked if I could change some US dollars he had accepted as payment from the tourists into cedis. He

⁹⁰ Government employees were also eligible for salary-based loans from credit companies. Adverts for these loans were plastered all over sign boards, lamp posts, the back windows of taxis and *tro-tros*, and pinned to tree stumps in Ho, Accra, Kumasi and most other sizeable towns (see plate 16). Offered by a range of companies, the most prominent being Izwe, a South African finance company, these loans are unsecured and based upon salary and thus are only available to those in formal, contractual employment. Repayment of loans is made through deductions from the same bank account as has been nominated to receive a salary, and the terms of the loan include the borrower agreeing that they are not aware of any impending retrenchment plans and undertaking to inform Izwe within seven days, should they lose their job or change employers.

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did not want to have to travel into Ho to change the cash at the Barclays there and assumed that I would be able to spend the money when I returned to the UK a few weeks later. Not only would the trip take up a good part of his morning- the coolest part of the day when most work was done- but the return *trotro* fare would be almost GH¢4, a considerable amount given that some months he struggled to make GH¢180-250 from his weaving work. I could not help so he asked a friend who was already travelling to Ho to take the money and change it for him. At the end of our short conversation he laughingly lamented how “with money, we struggle!” before going back to his work.



Plate 16- Placard advertising Izwe loans for government workers, Ho August 2013.
Photograph by author.

For some weavers *susu*⁹¹ groups were a key means of organising their finances and making contingencies. *Esusu* is the Igbo word for a contribution club, and such

⁹¹ Whilst the literature has focused on how women use *susu* groups to leverage limited capital, the Kpetoe *susu* group was open to men too and was not distinctly gendered.

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groups have their origins during the colonial period in south-eastern Nigeria. In Ewe they are called *esɔ* and a *susu* collector in Kpetoe, explained that *esɔ* was “something that you could be putting [away] somewhere small-small”. Rotating or otherwise *susu* “... developed in answer to the difficulty of accumulating capital on small incomes [and the] high collateral requirements and restrictions on African access to credit...” (Meagher, 2010a: 42) and helped Igbo artisans, traders and small business owners who did not have access to bank loans. Meagher notes that “...like hometown unions, contribution clubs drew on pre-colonial institutions of pooling resources, involving severe sanctions against defaulting on contributions” (*ibid*) and her analysis of the function of *susu* in the informal manufacturing economies of south-eastern Nigeria can be usefully linked to how rotating credit groups worked in Kpetoe.

The main *susu* group in Kpetoe was Universal Susu Savings. Run by a jocular middle aged man called Sinbad, its small office sat at the front of his home compound, on the road running up towards AGOSEC high school. Next door was Sinbad’s equally tiny electrical goods shop, packed with lightbulbs, extension cables, T.V. aerials and all manner of wires, fuses and switches imported from China. Sitting down one afternoon to speak, he said that as a young man he had travelled to Kaduna in Nigeria to work as an operator for a Japanese company. He stayed there for fifteen years and it was during this period that he had come across *susu* groups. Having been a migrant worker for a long time, realising that he was ageing and having accumulated some savings of his own, Sinbad came home to Kpetoe. With him came the idea for a savings group in the town that he would administer. Established in 2009, he saw the work as a commercial enterprise, rather than a social one, and emphasised the fact that he had set up the group as a means of safeguarding his livelihood through diversifying his business interests⁹². Describing the credit union, he said “It's a business- as a man you are not to do [just] one business, so that if this one fails, [the other] one can help you.”

⁹² Sinbad's group was registered with the national government and the district assembly for tax purposes. There was, however a less formal community savings group in Kpetoe that ran in aid of social support and community development. This group was much smaller, perhaps just twenty or thirty members, all of whom lived in a particular area of the village and many of whom had salaried work. It was run by a school teacher and regular deposits were made by members of the group. In the case that one member incurred unexpected expenses due to an emergency, the group would meet to discuss what money could be disbursed to help. These meetings also served as a forum to discuss and plan possible local development projects. Arguably, this group remained relatively small because the bonds of trust and reciprocity which worked to ensure that it functioned properly and survived relied upon members sharing a similar economic position and being fairly intimately acquainted with each others lives through living close by one another. There was no comparable group organised through the workshop and, as far as I was aware, none of the weavers I worked with were involved in this, or other similar groups.

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The credit union was composed of two schemes, one based on daily deposits and the other an annual one where members deposited a fixed amount every week and were then, after three months of deposits, entitled to borrow amounts up to the total yearly deposit. The interest rate for these loans amounted to GH¢3 for every GH¢100 borrowed, per month, until the loan was repaid in full. At the end of every year, all monies deposited in the scheme were returned to individual members with interest of GH¢10 per GH¢100 deposited and the group began anew in January. The *susu* groups were open to all and Sinbad said that he had many members across Agotime. Although he made no checks on people joining the groups as depositors, if someone asked for a loan he would assess their reliability, making enquiries via family members, friends and acquaintances. Living in Kpetoe he was well acquainted with many of his customers, aware of their circumstances, who their families were, where they lived and what they did for work and these personal ties helped him determine who was creditworthy. Additionally, borrowers needed a salaried guarantor within the group whose reliability was also checked out.

The fact that the group was tied to a particular locality and run by someone who hailed from and lived in the area were key factors not only in judging the creditworthiness of members (Napier, 2010: 117), but also in exercising the forms of social pressure and control which ensured people repaid their debts. When asked what would happen should a member default on a loan or disappear Sinbad said that he would “force” repayment by seizing the guarantor's deposits. Later, speaking to a workshop weaver who was part of the group about how social relationships were used to sanction defaulters and compel repayment, I was told visits, sometimes with the help of police, were also made to the homes of both the borrower and their guarantor to take goods. My colleague laughed nervously as he spoke and it was clear that these visits could be intimidating and were overlaid with the threat of violence and the stinging shame of having the police turn up at your door in front of friends and neighbours. Speaking with Gabriel about the loans offered by *susu* groups and other lenders, he emphasised that he did not take loans and would not unless he was quite certain he had the means to repay them. Behind his words was the sense that to endebt oneself was a risk that was just not worth taking when the economic situations of many weavers were often so precarious. A study of *susu*-based lending to traders at Kaneshie, a major market in Accra, showed a 100% repayment rate which the author deemed “remarkable” (Napier, 2010: 119). However, understanding that these loans operate not only through closely knit personal relationships between

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people who are bound together socially, geographically and who probably share a similar sense of duty and risk, but that they are also often backed up by threats and intimidation, makes such repayment figures seem less remarkable. Indeed, in looking at the social ties which underpin these credit arrangements it is clear that the warm sociality of community is tempered with the spectre of intimidation and debtors' fears for their reputation and safety. For weavers with uncertain incomes, getting access to the credit they needed to expand their craft enterprises and fulfil their entrepreneurial aspirations was not only difficult but was also laden with social risk.

Entrepreneurialism, witchcraft and the dangers of success

For those who, through good fortune and hard work, did manage to expand their weaving into sustainable small businesses, entrepreneurialism did not come without its own disappointments and dangers. A powerful man within the community, Israel Kporku's continued success seemed assured. Experiences of faltering business ventures however were not uncommon. For some, the process of ageing meant that once successful enterprises were gradually shuttered and wound down. Samuel Agba, the elderly chairman of the weaving workshop, had, at one time, been master to a number of apprentices who he accommodated in a work compound on the edge of the village. These young men had helped him supply Kpetoe's first *agbamevo kente* store, a business that, although profitable in its day, had been eclipsed by its newer competitor. In his old age he lived a comfortable life in a village compound he shared with his family, as well as having a home of his own in Accra. He did, however, lament the slow decline of his business and worried whether the shop would continue to be able to support his son who was also a weaver in Kpetoe.

For others, their downfall was much more precipitous. Sitting with workshop weavers in the waning light one afternoon, a middle aged woman bearing a bowl of oranges aloft upon her head wandered in through the door of the workshop. Pausing from work, a couple of us bought some fruit, and had a short conversation with the seller, before one weaver helped her hoist the tin basin of oranges back up onto her head as she got ready to leave. As she walked out through the back door of the workshop, a colleague turned to me and asked quietly if I knew who she was. I said no and he went on to recount a lengthy tale of success, money, tragedy, loss and accusations of witchcraft. A "native" of Agotime, the woman had been a trader in Accra for many years, building up a successful livelihood selling from her own store at one of the main markets. She had been a "big" woman, wealthy and successful

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amongst her colleagues at the market as well as back at home in Agotime. At the peak of her success though, a fire gutted her store, destroying all of her stock and ruining her business. Impoverished, she had been forced to return home to family in Kpetoe, and made a living nowadays hawking fruit around the village. My colleague said he was fond of her, that he felt sorry at the loss she had endured and that it was sad to see a once successful woman reduced to hawking. His comments, though, were qualified with more quietly made remarks about the accusations of *juju* that had encircled this woman on her return from the capital. It was said that perhaps, at the height of her affluence, she had fallen victim to witchcraft, the fire a punishment meted out by jealous family or friends who felt she had “eaten” alone and not shared the gains of her success equitably. What other explanation could there be for a disaster of that scale, I was asked, that had seen a powerful woman felled by what appeared to be a freak accident? Making sure to say that he himself was not the propagator of such malicious rumours, my friend asked what I thought. When I was quiet on the matter, unsure how best to respond, we both turned back to our work, dropping the fraught and dangerous subject of jealousy and witchcraft.

When considering the power of the occult, it is important to recognise that, to the extent that words have the power to summon action in the world, even speaking about such matters is dangerous. In his work on the power of images in post-colonial Cameroon, Achille Mbembe captures the potency of words and images to animate reality, writing:

“To publicly articulate knowledge consist[s], to a large extent in making everything speak- that is, in constantly transforming reality into a sign and, on the other hand, filling with reality things empty and hollow in appearance. This is why the relations between “speaking” and “representing” were more than simply those of near neighbours” (2001: 144)

This power accounts for people’s reticence to engage in conversation about witchcraft and *juju*, and the fact that although one workshop members trusted me enough to discuss the topic in relation to others, no one dared broach the issue in reference to themselves.

Success was thus associated with certain kinds of danger, and the bonds of intimacy and trust which underpinned livelihood strategies were liable to become threatening sources of danger. At stake were the contested roles that equality (and, its obverse, inequality) played in patterning social relations. The story of the fallen market trader hinged upon the social morality of one individual’s success in a context where many struggled with the challenges of materially supporting themselves and their families. Whilst aspiration underpinned how Agotime weavers approached their

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working lives, jealousies and resentment were ever-present in how people spoke about their hopes, the opportunities available to them and the inequitable situations they often found themselves in. Francis acknowledged these tensions by saying that many people had “black hearts” and would wish others harm rather than see them succeed. These sentiments were echoed by the Paramount chief, who worried that the jealousy of others, particularly those around him in the village, were a perpetually present and threatening danger. He suggested that the joint pain that had gradually eroded his mobility was the result of witchcraft attacks, jealousy at social inequities in the community made manifest in the body of the chief.

As Peter Geschiere argues, the development of witchcraft discourses in West Africa and what the occult has to say about the fracturing of social relations has historically been bound to the emergence of local elites and growing disparities in wealth during the colonial and postcolonial periods (2013a: 36-38). In globalised, neoliberal orders, where uncertainty reigns and accelerating inequality defines how resources are distributed and used (see Standing, 2011; Standing, 2014; Dorling, 2014), ideas of witchcraft arguably function in making sense of the capriciousness of everyday life and the social and economic forces that are beyond people’s control. Giving shape to these anxieties was fraught, and Newell captures these competing dynamics well when he writes:

“...the key aspect of moral economy [at stake] is the idea of a zero-sum world, where all profit is understood to be someone else’s loss. In such a world there is a continual tension between centripetal forces of hierarchical accumulation and levelling mechanisms of redistribution, for the moral obligation to share one’s earnings with one’s friends must be honoured...” (2012: 68)

Conclusion

The work of weaving was complexly bound up with a variety of different tasks and modes of sociality. Weavers engaged with craftwork as part of diverse livelihood strategies, their time in the loom often functioning as a kind of stop-gap occupation whilst they sought other kinds of work opportunities. Precarity was a defining characteristic of young weavers’ experiences, with uncertainty being mitigated through the work strategies outlined above, recourse to multiple occupations and through the everyday practices of reciprocity which patterned life in the workshop. The flux and change of work and occupational opportunities were thus framed largely in terms of social strategies and obligations. Occupational identities and a “feeling” for weaving developed through apprenticeship and practice of the craft, with craftwork facilitated by contingent forms of sociality.

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Sociality, however, has its limits. In a context where neoliberal regimes, of one type or another, are implicated in the radical fracturing and restructuring of the economy as well as the fragmentation and redefinition of notions of personhood and religion, the social fabric of life in a place like Kpetoe bears the strain of these changes. Social resources are not unfettered, but are rather bound up with the material stuff of life and the challenges of managing precarious work and uncertain futures impinge on individual and collective forms of resilience (see Mosoetsa, 2011). No amount of strategising changes the simple fact that many of my interlocutors in Kpetoe would gladly swap uncertain work in the loom for a job opportunity that offered greater security and recognition. Weavers' work, then, was constituted as hopeful practices, existing in the interstices between what was possible and what was hoped for, with aspiration motivating action in the face of severe material and social limitations. It was also work that could be fraught with uncertainty and danger, and in which success itself posed a threat to the fabric of social relations. Seen from this perspective, the question is how resilient hope is when aspirations are left unfulfilled and the practices of sustaining a decent life become ever harder to manage. The following chapter touches upon this tension and considers the other kinds of work that Agotime weavers engaged with, both aspirational, professional salaried jobs and work which offered subsistence in times of struggle.

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Work beyond weaving, multiple occupation and complex livelihood strategies

In viewing weavers' work from a multifaceted perspective, thinking about the ways that craftspeople use a range of social ties in sustaining their livelihoods and accounting for the role that contingency plays in all of these processes, it is crucial to account for the fact that weaving was not the only, or even sometimes the primary, form of work that many young craftspeople were engaged in. Seen over the life-course, it is even clearer that time in the loom accounts for only part of craftspeople's work, and that as opportunities arose weavers combined craftwork with a range of other occupations. The fact that weaving work involved minimal financial outlay and could be fitted easily around other opportunities meant that weavers also supported themselves through a combination of farming, driving work, teaching, health care jobs and work for NGOs. This chapter looks at the relationship these occupations have to craftwork, the crucial part that work beyond weaving plays in structuring young craftpeople's aspirations and how multiple occupations pattern their livelihood strategies.

Subsistence farming as part of the work of the household

Weaving was a form of work that, despite its uncertainties, formed a crucial component of craftspeople's livelihood strategies, buffering them against the vagaries of a faltering and jobless economy, contributing to a sustained sense of hope, and constituting forms of sociality which could be both pleasurable and challenging. Similarly, small scale subsistence farming also offered workshop members work which was both challenging and valuable. Straddling the Ghana-Togo border, Kpetoe is some thirty kilometres east of the regional capital Ho and more than six hours drive from the bustle of Accra. With its own market, senior high school, health post and petrol station, Kpetoe is officially classified as a "township" rather than a village. However, surrounded by bush and farmland, lush and verdant in the wet rainy season and ash-covered after the autumn harvests when small holders burn back scrubland, the community was bound to the rural cycles of farming and food production.



Plate 17- Maize granary, Kpetoe August 2013. Photograph by author.

In town, families kept livestock- chickens, ducks, goats and the occasional sheep- fed on leftovers and kept for slaughter on special occasions. Small gardens planted with pineapples and peppers grew alongside the fleshy green leaves of *contembre*⁹⁵. Young boys were charged with the care of grasscutters, a large beaver-like rodent whose meat was savoured as a delicacy in spicy pepper soup. Teenage girls and their mother hacked palm kernels away in bunches from the arching great trees that sprouted between compounds, boiling them up over days into a thick, sticky red oil that was either kept for cooking or sold at market in recycled plastic drinks bottles. Morning and evening men, women and boys, alone and in pairs, would trail along paths that wind back into the bush, machetes in hand, dressed in rubber boots and worn work clothes. There, beans, cassava, yam and ears of maize were planted, cultivated and harvested before being carried home in large woven sacks, the surplus stored inside raised granaries shrouded in plastic sheeting (see plate 17). For those who could afford it, the natural cycles of planting and harvesting were given a helping hand with industrially produced fertilisers sold from a small agricultural chemical shop opposite the workshop. Stacked high with brightly coloured cellophane packages of fertiliser, weed killer and insecticides and the mechanical sprayers farmers used to dispense mixtures of muddy water, nitrates and toxic pesticides across their land, the shop did a steady trade. A pair of plastic chairs sat out at the front and passing customers would occasionally stop to chat with the

⁹⁵ *Contembre* is a leafy green vegetable, which when cooked up in stews and soups looked and tasted a bit like spinach.

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owners. Not far over the border in Togo farmers grew salad, spring onions, juicy, almost over-ripe tomatoes, green peppers, potatoes and courgettes, the fresh greenness of this produce supplementing the starch and stodge of Ghanaian yam and cassava. The work of growing and harvesting, preparing and tending was, then, enmeshed with the rhythms of household work in Kpetoe, and if not everyone regularly tended a farm of their own, most knew something of how to plant and grow food.

In the workshop many weavers had farmland, balancing the demands of the craft with the seasonal patterns of sowing and harvest. Craftspeople would come and go, leaving their looms empty when they were away tending to their farms during the rainy season that ran through the summer and autumn months and returning to the workshop at the end of November when the rains dried up and the intensive labour of planting and picking was done. Subsistence farming, rather than cash cropping, was the focus for craftspeople. Small scale farmers' production was oriented towards providing food for themselves and their families and what was grown offset the ever-increasing costs of buying enough to eat at market. In bumper years though, when enough labour had been invested in the fields and the rains fell when they were supposed to, a surplus was possible. Reminiscing about a bean farm he had planted one particularly fruitful year, Francis said that he had grown enough to enable him keep a stash of beans to feed his family and still sell several big sacks, saving the cash for other expenses. More often though, rain was sporadic and yields were low or the rain fell all at once destroying the crops. During the summer of 2013 Felix had not planted a farm. The previous year sudden, heavy rains had wiped out the maize he had been growing and he was loath to invest more time and effort in a farm so soon after this piece of bad luck. Describing what had happened, Felix said that he planned to try again the following year, this time planting on a different bit of land in the hope that his crop would be spared possible flash-flooding.

In this way, engagement with the work of farming was born out of a pragmatic understanding that although small-holders were unlikely to make money from their crops, planting farms offered a way for households to partially feed themselves, with edible crops supplementing stretched food budgets. Sociologist Walden Bello makes this point, writing that small scale peasant farming across Africa, Asia and Latin America "...[does] not provide for consistent rises in production and productivity, but it [does] guarantee survival" (2009: 47).

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Furthermore, as part of many household's work, farming was a skill- not unlike weaving- that was passed through the family. Felix came from a family of cultivators and spoke about the cocoa farm that his parents had planted. For those who were "natives"⁹⁴ of Agotime- this was the term used to described those with longstanding roots in the area- these family connections often translated into access to family land. Given the high levels of mobility that saw people moving from Agotime all across Ghana and beyond for work, these familial ties to the land were resilient. Gabriel's paternal family were from Kpetoe, and although his father had been living away from Agotime for some time, close ties in Kpetoe meant that Gabriel had access to family land for farming.

However, this is not to say that the complex politics of family life did not spill over into issues of land and its use. Saviour's experience stood as a cautionary tale; having moved across the country for education and work, he came home to find that a paternal uncle had, without consultation, sold the family land. This episode was a clear example of the ways that land could be commoditised and used as a bargaining chip in fraught kin relations. Saviour, who worked most of the time in another region, had found the money to buy a new plot of land nearby, thus underlining the importance of farming not only in terms of subsistence, but also in maintaining connections with the place craftspeople called home. Deborah Bryceson picks up on the linkages between rural and urban communities in her history of African peasant labour from the pre-colonial period up through the structural adjustment experiences of the 1980s and 1990s and to the ongoing, intractable crises of markets, labour and land which afflict large swathes of the continent. She argues that the downward pressure on urbanites' earnings that resulted from state retrenchment, have made close ties with relations in rural areas who have access to land ever-more important for urban dwellers trying to successfully make ends meet (2000a: 55-56).

Such strategies, however, raise important questions about the effects that increasing urban reliance on the limited resources of small-scale agriculture has on the poorest people in rural communities. Hearing that my workshop colleague had bought a piece of land to replace that which his uncle had sold, my thoughts turned to the distinct possibility that another struggling family may have been made landless and vulnerable by this exchange. Meagher makes a similar point about the politically,

⁹⁴ Whilst indigeneity and ties to locality and the land were crucially mediated through farming practices, they were also bound up with craftwork. Cochrane's work on Senegalese weavers explores these issues and provides an interesting counterpoint to the discussion of Agotime identity, weaving and heritage laid out in the last ethnographic chapter (2009).

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economically and religiously fractured context of Northern Nigeria. There, policies of “inclusive development” have channelled the swelling ranks of young urban graduates unable to secure formal employment into increasingly saturated informal economies, which has had the perverse effect of squeezing longstanding participants in these sectors into ever more precarious work practices. Meagher links these social currents to the brutal rise of Boko Haram and the increasing reliance of well educated urban dwellers on informal opportunities (Meagher, 2015). Whilst Southern Ghana has a quite different history in which sectarian tensions are far less pronounced or divisive, Meagher’s analysis is a salutary reminder of the limits of subsistence strategies, and the dangers of over-stressing already fragile and stretched local economies.

Apart from these broader social processes of increasing precaritisation and the stressing of already marginalised subsistence producers, weavers who took up farming had also to contend with the routine smaller-scale conflicts and set-backs which patterned their engagement with the land and their interactions with neighbours and fellow small-holders. To rely on farming alone meant exposing oneself to the vagaries of the rains and the whims of other people. A commonplace feature of workshop chatter were grumblings about rains that had fallen too late or all at once and wiped out crops, whilst darker, whispered stories of crops being harvested by thieves circulated more quietly amongst the weavers. Although social ties played a crucial role in getting access to land and helping to buffer craftspeople against uncertainty and precarious livelihoods, sociality also had its dark side. Amongst those who had invested time, labour and cash in cultivating their farms to have their crops picked by unscrupulous neighbours, a sense of mistrust and caution prevailed.

Nonetheless, to the extent that farming did support the livelihood strategies of Kpetoe weavers, its success was dependent on how it drew on strong kinship networks, claims to belonging and the labour resources of the household in creating a buffer against unstable markets, and if craftspeople were to meet the challenges they faced, they were compelled to keep on trying to build trustworthy social bonds. Farming work played a crucial role in these processes and Bryceson describes such strategies as “subsistence fallback”, characterising these kinds of small-scale agriculture as:

“...the act of producing basic food and non-food for direct consumption and its enabling conditions of production, i.e., access to land and family labor. The existence of subsistence fallback lends partial autonomy to peasants, provides insurance against risk, and facilitates physical survival. Its value to

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peasants cannot be overestimated. Even when peasants' command over land or labor is considerably diminished, recourse to their subsistence fallback can give them a negotiating strength and 'staying power' that is not fully evident amongst landless, proletarianized rural populations" (2000b: 312)

Thus, the "essential cushioning function" of subsistence production is in how it helps people in rural contexts who are managing uncertain work to accommodate to fluctuating markets characterised by decline and precarity (Byceson, 2000b: 312). In Kpetoe, where work of all kinds was, for most, perennially hard to come by and the effects of inflation, coupled with the plummeting value of the Ghanaian Cedi, steadily chipped away at weavers' capacity to buy basic goods and command reasonable prices for their cloths, this buffer was a very valuable one⁹⁵.

Landlessness and strategising in the weaving community

Those unable to negotiate access to land through family networks drew on other sorts of relationships to secure basic subsistence through farming. For members of the workshop, the most important of these were informal arrangements with border officials who gave them access to bits of land owned by the Ghanaian government. Situated along the Ghana-Togo border, Kpetoe was once home to an important border crossing and customs check point and the Ghanaian Custom and Excise Preventive Service (CEPS) continue to have a strong presence in the town. As well as running a training academy and school close to the weaving workshop, along with two staff barracks that flank the main road bisecting the town, CEPS' remit is to patrol and secure the frontier. As a borderland that has historically been a tense and contested space (see Nugent, 2003), this means that the government agency also has control of land along and around the border. With tacit permission from local CEPS employees, pieces of this land were farmed by those who lived on the Ghanaian side of the border.

Unlike some workshop members, the family origins of both Francis and his partner Sena lay outside the area, meaning neither had claims to local land. Instead, strategically using the resources that were available to them, they fostered relationships with CEPS officials and planted a farm on government controlled land. Francis's parents had moved from their natal community near the coast before his birth, settling in Agotime, where his father had farmed and hunted whilst his mother worked as a trader. Francis had been born, and lived his whole life, in Kpetoe, and he

⁹⁵ It is important to note that whilst land rights consist of varied local regimes which shift over time and can be hotly contested (for a discussion of the issue in Northern Ghana see Lentz, 2013), during the colonial period communal land tenure in the Gold Coast was, at least in principle, upheld (Nugent, 2012: 127-128). As such, it could be argued that there is a resilient history of peasant, rather than tenant, farming in the region and that this continues to shape how people manage their livelihoods.

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was well integrated into the life of both the workshop and the town. Nonetheless, he distinguished himself as a “non-native”, quipping that his voice bore the accent of someone who came from further south in the Volta Region. For her part, Sena had come to Kpetoe as an adolescent, leaving her family in the coastal area to be fostered with a teacher who lived in town. More than any accent or an amorphous sense that the couple were somehow “outsiders”, their lack of a claim to family land meant that they were forced to contend with one more layer of uncertainty than those with longstanding ties to the area. Although Francis and Sena knew they were lucky to be able to farm at all, they had no substantial claim to the land. Their position, then, was defined by the magnanimity of the CEPS officials.

Although it was never spoken of, the granting of access to land by government officials, informally, constituted a power play. The point is not simply that these relationships represent a personalisation of authority of the kind outlined in the literature on corruption (see Chabal and Daloz, 1998), but rather and more importantly, that these arrangements resulted in people like Francis entering into relationships with government workers of a kind that might generally be reserved for kin. If farming was largely a form of household work that families engaged with together, in these circumstances the demands of a quite different set of relations entered the frame. As such, when considering this issue we should recognise that what was most pertinent was not that these relationships flouted some kind of rational, bureaucratic logic (which was arguably a straw man in this context anyway) but instead that they had very real effects in terms of power. It is clear that there were definite benefits for both Francis and CEPS in negotiating this relationship. If nothing else, these tacit agreements gave Francis and Sena access to land whilst reflecting some kind of largesse back onto the CEPS officials. However, as put by Carola Lentz in her ethnographic work on autochthony in Northern Ghana:

“Property rights over, and access to, land are mediated by membership in specific communities, ranging from the nuclear or extended family, the clan, first-comers or the ethnic group...the reverse is also true [and] land ownership has been and is still used as a way of defining belonging...[with] immigrants or “strangers” now see[ing] themselves obliged to use all available avenues to gain access to land...while locals try to exclude newcomers from fuller control over land” (2013: 166-167)

From this perspective, landlessness constituted a form of marginalisation that certain weavers had to contend with. The landless in Kpetoe were in the position of having to rely on favours from government officials to meet their subsistence needs, rather than having recognised rights and solid claims enshrined in law. The difference in social and political capital in the community effected the kinds of

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relationships people cultivated with government officials and the strategies they pursued in securing their livelihoods.

The value of farming work, aspiration and ties to place

If farming offered weavers a buffer against irregular and unreliable incomes, and landlessness put craftspeople in positions of increased marginality, it must be said that farming itself was not a particularly valued form of work in and of itself. None of the weavers in the workshop expressed any particular desire to farm, their interest in working the land coming mainly from the insurance it offered them when other work strategies faltered. If, as Bryceson argues (2000), farming facilitates survival, its low value in the eyes of the young men in the workshop seemed to stem from the fact that this was its critical limitation and it did not offer much more than basic subsistence. Growing up in families where farm work had been combined with weaving or hunting, several of the young weavers in the workshop linked their own struggles to get access to education and other opportunities with the fact that their parents had “only” been farmers. When talking about the car accident in which his father had injured his legs and been rendered unfit to weave, Gabriel lamented the fact that the older man was now only able to farm, his infirmity meaning that weaving was no longer possible.

One way of considering the values ascribed to work is to take a temporal perspective. Thinking about farming as it was inscribed in the narratives of young weavers, it can be argued that important notions of autochthony and a proud sense of being a “native of the town” were linked to land rights and farming practices (see Lentz, 2013). However, with this came the sense that rather than being associated with aspirational ideas of “progress” and “modernity”, farming was linked to ideas about the past, perhaps to an even greater extent than weaving itself. In this, farm work was little valued beyond its subsistence capacity and the “traditional work”⁹⁶ of farming left some young weavers unsatisfied. Many of the parents and grandparents of workshop members had been farmers and, orientating themselves towards the future, young craftspeople hoped to build lives for themselves that brought together their attachment to their home community with the prestige and (perhaps imagined) security of salaried work. For many, this ideal situation was imagined to consist of a salaried job in a city (Ho, Accra, Kumasi and Takoradi were all places members of the crafting community had travelled for work) which allowed them to maintain land

⁹⁶ I use the term “traditional work” as this was how workshop members themselves described farming.

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at home in Kpetoe, employing farm labourers when necessary to tend the land whilst they were away at work. Saviour described the joint tasks of weaving and farming as “traditional” work that he enjoyed because of the way it complemented his “modern” salaried, government job at a health post in the Western Region. Coming back to the workshop after being away working, he took his time in the loom as an opportunity to socialise with friends and family, to supplement his wage with income from craft work and to tend to his land. Crucially though, through his professional job he was accorded a degree of prestige and respect from other workshop members that those solely engaged in farming or weaving lacked. Spoken to, and about, with a certain deference, Saviour also possessed a charismatic confidence that seemed linked, in part, to his work experiences beyond Kpetoe. From this perspective then, to be bound to the work of farming without the prospect of anything much else could be experienced as a problem of being bound not only to Kpetoe as a place, but also being confined to a temporal space that was considered somehow apart from imaginings of modernity and more closely associated with ideas of the past.

Josef Gugler’s study of rural-urban migration amongst Igbo-speaking people in Eastern Nigeria during the 1960s looked at how ongoing, entwined social and economic ties bound village communities with urban-dwellers, and how these connections crucially underpinned the course of rural development as well as structuring novel forms of aspiration (1971: 412). This analysis of what Gugler termed “life in a dual-system” highlights the importance of claims to land and farming practices in maintaining the links between rural home communities and urban migrants. Written during the optimistic, post-independence period and before the oil crisis of the 1970s precipitated SAPs in Nigeria, Gugler asserted:

“Investment in the home place [by urban migrants] is then primarily not the establishment of a rural source of economic support. It yields no income, and the security it gives is not so much intrinsic- the returning migrant will be assured of a comfortable place to stay- as derived- the emigrant secures a respected position in his home community” (1971: 408-409)

Although prestige still surely accrues to those who, through their professional work, are able to contribute to the economic and social life of their home communities, it is clear that in a context of ongoing economic uncertainty, maintaining ties to rural agricultural production is also a source of basic economic support for squeezed city dwellers.

Nonetheless, whilst farm work was invested with temporal notions and ideas of “tradition”, understanding what farming meant for young weavers also involved considering related questions of aspiration and wellbeing. Edward Fischer’s cross-

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cultural research on how people negotiate aspiration and work towards their vision of a “good life” posits that “wellbeing requires a capacity for aspiration as well as the agency and opportunity to make realising aspirations seem viable.” (2014: 5). As such, hopes for a “good life” make a positive contribution to people’s wellbeing when they are felt to be achievable. Obversely, when circumstances dictate that aspirations remain unfulfilled, individual and communal perceptions of wellbeing can be negatively effected. For weavers who knew that whilst farm work might help feed them and their families in the present, it could do little to radically alter their longstanding social position, the material conditions they contend with or alleviate the chronic insecurity with which they live, it is understandable that farming became devalued and lacked aspiration.

Migration, aspiration and progress

An important element of this dynamic and the dearth of aspiration associated with farming was the value attached to migration and movement in the work strategies of young weavers, and the ways farming could be seen as a tie and a bind. Early in my fieldwork Gabriel accompanied me on a trip to the weaving supplies store that sat on the main road in town. Walking along a stretch of asphalt road, bounded on one side by swampy grasslands dotted with curved palms, and on the other by small wooden cabins housing a tailor's studio and a general store, I tentatively asked about his work plans. With a surprising frankness, considering that I had met him barely a month before, he spoke about his desire to move to Ho to study at the Polytechnic there and then perhaps on to Accra where he imagined there might be a more lucrative market for both his craft skills and his academic qualifications. For Gabriel, farming was important when he was at home in Kpetoe but if he had the chance to go elsewhere he intended to make full use of it. Towards the end of 2015 he finally made the move, travelling to Accra in search of work. Whilst the challenges of finding decent work persisted, when I heard from him in the spring of 2016 Gabriel remained optimistic that the opportunities available in the capital were better than those back home in Kpetoe.

This exchange was the first of many with workshop weavers who spoke both of their desire to migrate for work and their experiences of having moved in search of job opportunities. Implicit in many of these conversations was a sense that although land and the work of farming remained an important anchor for young craftspeople's sense of belonging and home, they sought to move beyond their natal communities,

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complementing their ties with home to their experiences elsewhere. For Selorm, a social studies student at the University of Ghana at Legon⁹⁷ who wove at a loom in the workshop during the holidays to fund his education, a seminal moment in his young adulthood had been leaving his parents' home in a coastal fishing community to travel along the coast to Nigeria in the year before he embarked on his degree. There he had worked weaving the Anlo Ewe cloths typical of his home area, finding buyers who were willing to pay a premium for the novelty of Ghanaian-style cloth and saving money to fund his way through university. When speaking of his aspirations, Selorm emphasised his desire to move once more to a city, in Ghana or abroad, where he felt he would not only be better able to find work which might closer match his skills, but also meet a wife who had benefited from a similar level of education and with whom he would share an outlook and values. From Selorm's perspective, mobility and not being tied too closely in place by the demands of subsistence agricultural work (or rather, in his case as a "native" of the coast, fishing) offered him the hope of aligning his aspirations for work with his hopes for a fulfilling social and family life.

For others, mobility had brought them from their homes in rural villages to Kpetoe for work and education. Kwaku was in his late teens when we met but he had spent his childhood in Togo, moving across the border to Kpetoe as an adolescent. An exceptionally skilled weaver who had honed his craft skills from a very early age, learning at the loom rather than in school during his childhood, he had been settled in Kpetoe for several years. Because *Agbamevo kente* is more popular and commonly worn on the Ghanaian side of the border, Kpetoe was a much larger hub for the production of ceremonial and fancy cloths than villages in Togolese Agotime (see Nugent 2010a). This meant that Kwaku's move to Kpetoe gave him access to bigger markets, more established client networks and work-on-commission for other, more established weavers in the community of craftspeople. What is more, as a French and Ewe speaker who had missed out on formal schooling in his childhood in Togo, living in Kpetoe meant he could enrol for school classes where he was given the chance to improve his fluency in English and possibly gain other, hopefully marketable, skills. With admirable diligence, Kwaku attended school early in the day, sharing classes with pupils much younger than he was, before turning up at the workshop in the afternoon dressed in the short trousers, cotton short sleeved shirt, smart black shoes

⁹⁷ Ghana's most prestigious university, the University of Ghana has a large, leafy campus in Legon, an affluent suburb of Accra.

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and white socks that was the uniform of male pupils. Much like Selorm's experience in Nigeria, Kwaku's move from Togo to Ghana had the effect of widening the horizon of his experience and improving (although probably not as much as could be hoped) his chances at finding work and educational opportunities.

Considering imaginings of migration in African contexts, Knut Graw and Samuli Schielke develop the notion of horizons to explore how migration is not just a process of physical movement and dislocation, but also one of shifting expectations, aspirations and constraints. They write:

"...The notion of horizon refers not only to what is actually visible but to what is familiar, known, and imaginable for a person in a much more encompassing sense... A person's horizon is often conceived of as the reach and orientation of her or his knowledge, expectations, or personal ambitions...A horizon is not just a static given but also entails something very dynamic, something that can be formed and widened... through education, working experiences, meeting people, travel...In so far as any horizon shifts as soon as the person moves, horizons are necessarily specific" (2012: 14-15)

The social production of success, the weight of expectation and cutting ties

The dynamic, shifting relationship between ideas of work, the value of "home" and experiences of migration was also patterned by the considerable familial and social expectations that were directed at those who had achieved "success" through their combined work and migration strategies. Families routinely and strategically marshalled considerable resources to support young people and fund educational opportunities in the hope that this support might translate into viable work. As such, the attainment of aspirations was intensely socially negotiated and bound up with a sense not only of individual success but also that of the wider family and community (see Mains, 2013: 68-69). Considering that these investments were made in a context where lucrative jobs were largely limited to those who either had access to supportive (patrimonial) networks or experienced remarkable good fortune, when someone "made it", securing a government post in Ghana or the chance to go abroad to work, a large circle of family, friends and associates were invested in the success⁹⁸. These investments were made with pride, and parents spoke with pleasure about their hopes for their children and the ways they were working to support their success. However, this pride also translated into a series of material and social obligations and expectations that people were expected to honour and repay (see also Jónsson, 2012: 109-110) . These ranged from financial help with funeral expenses and school fees for

⁹⁸ Mains' Ethiopian ethnography highlights the ways young men's ideas of success are bound up with their desire to be able to support their families, "repay" the investments that have been made in them by parents and offer their own children opportunities (2013: 69). In the context of my own research, I would argue that this important insight should be tempered by a sense that expectations of this sort, self-imposed or socially mediated, were often felt to be stifling, and just as success was a social production, so too could it be felt as a weighty burden (see Newell, 2012:68)

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younger family members (Selorm, who himself was a student of limited means, made regular contributions towards the school books of a younger brother), to support in kind through offers of accommodation and subsistence, to help getting access to jobs through salaried workers' own social networks. In many instances these expectations were met and the support provided by those with valuable resources and work experience acted as a "hand-up" for others who were trying to find fulfilling work or make the move to a new city (or country) where their chances of success might be higher. For Francis' partner Sena, the several years she spent in Accra were facilitated by her relationship with Francis' siblings, who hosted her in the city and gave her a job in their chop-bar.

Nonetheless, the weight of expectation was heavy and not everyone felt they had benefited from the success of a family member or close friend. With feelings ranging from quiet disappointment and confusion to bitter rancour, young craftsmen spoke of instances where people close to them had achieved success and then failed to deliver on their supposed social obligations. These disagreements were often contingent and shifting, old rifts between family and friends growing wider or being patched up as circumstances changed and time passed. For precisely this reason, because social relations were so closely bound up with reputation, the performance of social respect and the avoidance of open conflict, workshop members were often reticent about speaking openly of these disagreements and talk was often veiled and indirect. This had the dual effect of creating an atmosphere where feelings often went unspoken and there were simmering undercurrents of jealousy or disaffection that were liable to periodically erupt in unforeseen ways, but also where friendly relations were generally maintained and overt criticism was tempered.

Talking about a period during his adolescence when his father had lost his job and he had been forced to fall back on the support of relatives in Kpetoe, Joseph was wary of describing the family conflicts that had been triggered by his father's work crisis for fear of reigniting the acrimony that had characterised that period in his life. Nonetheless, he spoke hushedly of his hurt that a well-off family member, who had always treated him as a son, had denied him much needed help when his father was unable to support him himself. For Joshua, chairman of the workshop weavers' association and a mentor to Joseph, it was easier to speak about his disappointment in an older brother who, having secured a job in the national police force, had not helped his younger siblings get into police training too. Gabriel seemed perplexed when he described an uncle who had acquired a US visa many years before and, who

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ever since leaving, had not been heard from by his family in Agotime. Little was said about any of these disappointments but the feeling of betrayal from all three men was palpable and I empathised with my colleagues and friends in the workshop.

With time, however, I also developed a personal understanding of the weight of social obligations when I too was asked for help and resources that I was unsure about or unable to render. Over the course of my apprenticeship, I gave gifts of food to share in the workshop, presents to mark birthdays and Christmas and the customary offering of drinks for libations. As fieldwork drew to a close, in acknowledgement of the hospitality, care and guidance offered me by workshop members I agreed with Joshua, the chairman, to design and print a new signboard for the workshop, and commissioned a welder to construct a sturdy metal support for it. The sign, along with a meal shared with the workshop members the day before my departure from Kpetoe, was a token, acknowledging all that my colleagues had offered me. Requests for help establishing business ventures and contacts with NGOs who could support struggling artisans, as well as for expensive pieces of electrical equipment were, however, beyond my means and tact was needed to sensitively navigate people's expectations of me. These encounters, though not a defining feature of my workshop experience, left me feeling guilt and frustration, emotions that were heightened as I neared the end of my longterm fieldwork in Kpetoe and the sense of obligation on all sides intensified. In this, my sadness at leaving the workshop was tinged with relief at being able to distance myself from expectations that, at times, felt unbearable. In this, I understood something about Gabriel's uncle, Joseph's Aunt and Joshua's brother, who dealt with the weight of expectation by distancing themselves, spatially and socially, from the ties that bound them to family and community.

Imaginings of migration, work, and the ambiguity of cosmopolitanism in the community of craftspeople.

Coupled with weavers lived experiences of mobility were their unfolding and fertile imaginings of what migration in search of work might mean and a profound curiosity to find out about places that they aspired to go to, but might never actually have the opportunity to visit. In a context where the attainment of social adulthood is blocked by limited work opportunities and a signal lack of the resources needed to establish a family and a home of one's own, migration offered young men the chance of "social becoming" (Jónsson, 2012: 113). High levels of mobility within Ghana and

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across West Africa more broadly, particularly for working-age men, meant that many of the workshop weavers had experience of travelling to metropolitan areas, including the Togolese capital Lomé, Accra and Lagos, as well as various Ghanaian regional capitals. The focus, then, of imagined trajectories of migration were often further-afield to the big cities of Europe and North America. In this, there was a paradox between the reality of blocked physical mobility for young men who would struggle to get the papers needed to travel and youths powerful aspirations towards upwards social mobility and the chance to travel further afield (see Jónsson, 2012; Gaibazzi, 2015). Of this dynamic, Graw and Schielke write:

"But while the returns of globalisation are very unequally shared, or not shared at all, the promise of these returns [in the form of aspirations to migrate] has spread all over the world" (2012: 16)

My workshop colleagues would quiz me about my "hometown", asking about London and my life in the UK, as well as pitching questions about elsewhere in Europe and the United States. They probed insightfully, gleaning morsels of information that rounded out the picture they had built up of far-away places from films, television, radio, the internet and, perhaps most importantly, the carefully passed along stories of those who had worked and lived elsewhere. The singular cosmopolitanism of Kpetoe, a small town tucked along the border, was evinced in the powerful way that these stories of migration circulated around the workshop and the village. The relative of a neighbour turned out to be a nurse in the south London suburb of Carshalton and I found myself sitting one evening in the cool darkness outside our houses, sharing fufu and a fiery bowl of red pepper soup with her and her brothers and talking about the chaos of London transport and the missed comforts of our British homes. In another encounter, one afternoon while passing by the junction in town, a passerby, catching my accent, demanded to know where I was from and went on to say that he had for many years lived and worked in West Norwood, just minutes from the flat I would go home to when I returned from fieldwork.

For the weavers, then, aspirations for work and the possibilities of migration were tied to these shared stories about what it was like to make the journey elsewhere. Snippets of news, gossip and almost-truths that spoke very clearly to the conditions of West African migrants embroidered these stories in telling ways. Perched at his loom one day, engrossed in work, Gabriel stopped short and asked me, matter-of-factly if there was indeed a fence surrounding Spain that kept Africans out of Europe. Caught out, I scrambled for some sort of decent and honest reply and ended up prevaricating. No, I said, there was not an actual, physical fence around the

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whole country, but there might as well be considering how hard it has become for people making the perilous journey across the Mediterranean. Qualified with some remark about the unfairness of it all, I fell quiet and Gabriel turned back to his work, inscrutable as he continued throwing his shuttles of neon-coloured rayon. I was left feeling uncomfortable by his astute question and recording the short exchange in my notebook that evening, this snippet of conversation became a vivid memory. Shortly after I returned from fieldwork to begin the process of writing up, I came across photos of scores of African migrants scaling the barbed wire topped fences that cut the Spanish enclave of Melilla off from the rest of Morocco (see plates 18 and 19). Faced with the pictures, popping up on my computer screen at home in London, I turned back to these scribblings with a mixture of dread and awe. Adjusting back to another life in a world far from Kpetoe, I reflected on how the talk in the workshop was bound up with the circulation of images and ideas in a globalised world⁹⁹, as well as thinking about how incisive the stories which circulated in the workshop were in the way they captured the blunt force of inequality experienced by my young interlocutors.



Plate 18- Photo taken from the Guardian website showing migrants scaling the fence which surrounds the Spanish enclave of Melilla, March 2014.

⁹⁹ Newell's work with young Ivoirian men in Abidjan brings attention to how migration feeds into the circulation and consumption of seductive and desirable images of alterity, arguing that the circulation of images means that "...migration itself [has become] a fashion, a form of consumption that ha[s] replaced earlier modes of self-production." (2012: 208). Conversely, as this episode shows, the aspirational image of migration is qualified by the circulation of other more ambiguous and darker images such as those taken at Melilla or pictures showing the ever-present dangers and deadly inequalities faced by people who, in crossing the Mediterranean in search of security, work and better opportunities, are too often losing their lives. Ferguson explores this in his writings on neoliberalism and globalisation in Africa (2006).

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When the real world turns into a horror movie.. This picture was taken this morning at the Spanish enclave of Melilla where hundreds of African migrants tried to climb the fence which is symbolically separating Africa from Fort Europe. This is what inequality looks like. Via the Spanish Red Cross @CruzRojAlbacete



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Plate 19- Screenshot from Facebook showing Think Africa Press story about Fortress Europe and the Melilla fence, March 2014.

In these ways powerful aspirations and feelings about the relationship between work opportunities, migration and “success” were tempered by an acute awareness that the fulfilment of aspirations could entail a high degree of social and bodily risk. In this, disappointments about the lack of opportunity and being left behind by successful family members and friends melded with anxieties about the imagined and real dangers of leaving home for work elsewhere. Mains explores this issue in his research about young unemployed and underemployed men in Ethiopia. Drawing on James Ferguson's (2006) work on the effects of globalisation in African contexts, Mains makes the compelling point that for his interlocutors the challenges associated with finding (and keeping) fulfilling work were experienced as the temporal problem of having too much time, and that this problem was widely seen as being amenable to the spatialised strategy of seeking migration opportunities. His ethnography details the struggles young men experienced both securing opportunities to migrate for work and the challenges they faced when away from home. Unpicking his young interlocutor's assertion that “[We] can do more in six months in America than [we]

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can in five years in Ethiopia. In America there is progress" (Mains, 2012:135), the ethnography explores the place that the U.S. Diversity Visa Lottery scheme, migration to the Middle East and travel to other parts of Ethiopia hold in the lived and imagined experiences of young Ethiopian men. Mains highlights the unrelenting uncertainty of visa application processes, in which a fragile sense of hope is maintained by the much-touted success of a select few who manage to pass through the bureaucratic morass and make it "out"¹⁰⁰. In this, Mains hints at how aspirations are not only sustained, but also rendered liable to capture by exploitative middle men, brokers and bosses who capitalise on the disjuncture between people's desire to migrate and the limited opportunities available for many to actually make the move (2012: 145).

Piot's Togolese ethnography develops this point in a West African context. Describing how the enchantments of witchcraft, Pentecostal prayer, fraudulent duplicity in the form of false marriage certificates and the proliferation of brokers and middle men constitute an economy of desperate aspiration that ordinary Togolese put to work in applying for and (hopefully) securing one of a handful of US Diversity Visas, Piot argues that these enormous efforts are a symptom of Togo's abjection within the global economy (2010:77). Developing Jane Guyer's notion of "Atlantic African economies" (2004), Piot situates the visa lottery as a series of practices which, historically rooted, are a strategic adaption to intractable economic crisis, writing that:

"...the domain of the economic in Africa has long been situated at the intersection of various crossroads and within a transcultural space between the local and that which lay beyond: the slave trade, the colonial, and now, a differently globalized postcolonial. It has also straddled the material and the performative, the impersonal and personal, the formal and the informal. Atlantic African economies are thus hybrid, improvisational border practices engaged in the ongoing negotiation and invention of registers of value and personal distinctions, practices and negotiations that mediate (and are mediated by) an ongoing state of 'crisis'. *Under conditions of perpetual turbulence...economic actors seek their gain by strategically accessing those multiple scales of value that are in play in such borderland spaces*" (2010: 78, emphasis added)

For the first few months of my main fieldwork, I stayed in Ho, the capital of the Volta Region. Close to where I lived during this period was a temporary shop, advertised along the street with a technicolour banner offering the services of middle men who, for a fee, would assist hopeful applicants with their Visa Lottery scheme papers ahead of the October and November US government deadlines. Stopping by one morning on the way to take a *tro-tro* the thirty kilometres to Kpetoe and the

¹⁰⁰ Questions of the resilience and fragility of hope and aspiration as well as the arbitrary, and oftentimes, dehumanising nature of these application processes are explored journalistically in This American Life's podcast "Abdi and the Golden Ticket" (WBEZ Chicago, 2015)

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weaving workshop, I asked one of the young men sitting in the shade of the shop how they helped with the applications. Unsure, he replied that they took the photographs for the applications and assisted with other aspects of the process which he left unspecified. For him, no doubt a high-school or university graduate struggling to find decent work in a provincial town, the lottery offered an opportunity, however evanescent, which was not to be missed. Before long the enterprise was gone, an apparition that had vanished over night leaving the store it had occupied shuttered once more.

Kpetoe did not have a visa lottery application shop of its own but the uncertainties associated with the practices and imaginings of migration were experienced as a generalised vagueness about where people went and what they were doing once they had travelled away from the area. When one charismatic young weaver, well liked and integrated in the life of the workshop left, supposedly for Accra, no one seemed sure of his whereabouts, although unconfirmed stories circulated that he had either found a job working in a bank or had set up his loom in the capital. Thus, the stories associated with migration were characterised by ambiguities (see Piot, 2010: 78), which contributed to the more generalised uncertainties many young people faced when navigating the shifting terrain of their work and livelihoods.

Driving, *okado* boys and the uncertainties of working on the move

If transnational migration for work was a focal point in the community of craftspeople for a rich interweaving of both aspirational and ambiguous imaginaries, then the routine work of driving and working on the move was treated with greater sanguinity. An occupation, not unlike weaving, reserved for men, the term “driving” referred to commercial pillion riding, the driving of taxis and small, shared minibuses known as *tro-tros* which, usually in advanced states of disrepair, plied key routes ferrying people and produce around, as well as, less commonly, chauffeur work. However, as a form of labour that a number of weavers had engaged with at one point or another, the experiences of driving work within the community of craftspeople raised the critical issue of weavers limited access to capital and the stratifying economic effects this had on their work strategies. What is more, pillion riding, despite being increasingly commonplace in Kpetoe and beyond, was a site of contestation around which anxieties about young men, unemployment and social order coalesced (see Smith, 2014: 36). Driving then, intersected with the work of

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weaving in ways which shed light on young weavers social position in Kpetoe and vis-a-vis national and global economies.

Before turning to look specifically at weavers experience of driving, a brief description of the kinds of vehicles one can see on Ghana's roads and an outline of the broader economics of buying and selling vehicles gives a sense of how driving work fitted into broader national and global economic processes. It has been jokingly said that Ghana is a nation of taxi-drivers (see Verrips and Meyer, 2001). Whether true or not, what is clear is that motorcycle taxis, yellow painted taxis and rickety *trotros*, body work bashed about and the insides gutted to make space for three and sometimes four rows of bench seats into which passengers cram, far and away outnumber private cars on the roads. In a context of ongoing economic restructuring and crisis, where people must strategise with the often limited and unequally distributed resources available to them, the preponderance of motorcycle taxis, cabs and *trotros* makes sense. These vehicles are commonly owned by government employees and civil servants who, despite having access to the capital and credit needed to buy them, are nonetheless vulnerable to late payment of their wages by the state. Important assets, these vehicles were widely traded, rented out to contract drivers and put to work generating income and buffering their owners from the financial insecurity of unpaid salaries.

These vehicles were also part of broader patterns of trade and were bound up with globalised economic inequalities. Bought second-hand and exported to Ghana from Northern European countries including Germany and Holland when they were no longer deemed to be roadworthy (see plate 20), these "left-over" cars and vans were patched up and ingeniously (if sometimes dangerously) modified by resourceful mechanics with limited access to spare parts. Their multiple histories of movement and exchange were marked by the logos and stickers of German and Dutch community groups and small businesses that had been overlaid by the diverse slogans painted across the front and back windscreens¹⁰¹. Echoing how children creatively combined left over odds and ends to make playthings and weavers adapted various materials to fix broken looms and tools, this *bricolage* was an inventive response to scarcity and an economic situation which made the import of new vehicles and parts

¹⁰¹ In his work on transnationalism and the experience of life in contemporary Accra, Ghanaian literary and cultural theorist Ato Quayson offers an analysis of the multiple and shifting meanings attached to the proliferation of vehicular slogans arguing that they "...entextualize the movement of transition between multi-nodal points of discursive significance, including local and translocal languages, orality and literacy, tradition and modernity, and the exchanges between different popular media that are shared by everyone that traverses the city's streets" (2014: 141).

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prohibitively expensive for all but a small elite. Jojada Verrips and Birgit Meyer pick up on the crucial role of *bricolage* in their humorous and sensitive ethnography of the struggles of Kwaku, a long-distance taxi-driver plying the route between Accra and Takoradi who worked tirelessly to keep his old Peugeot 504 on the road. Verrips and Meyer argue that the everyday tactics Ghanaians employ to materially accommodate faltering technology so as to keep on going are tied up with a spirit of creativity and resourcefulness borne out of scarcity. They suggest that despite emerging from conditions of material scarcity, these processes of ingenious adjustment are characteristic of an African modernity that is rich in both cultural creativity and evinces a powerful will and capacity to, literally and metaphorically, “keep the engine working by all means” (2001: 163).



Plate 20- Card advertising a German vehicle export company which pays cash for vehicles, including those which are damaged and have been deemed unroadworthy,
Dresden, April 2013. Photograph by Author.

These vehicles were joined, most noticeably in the eastern Volta Region, but also increasingly elsewhere in the country, by fleets of shiny, cheap motorbikes, painted metallic red with chrome exhausts that quickly wore out and broke down. Built in China and shipped to the free port of Lomé in Togo, the bikes were then traded over the border and into Ghana where they were sold at a store in Ho and ridden by young men offering transport in rural areas where dirt tracks and roads

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became impassable for cars. Borrowing the Nigerian term, these motorcycle taxi riders were known locally as *okadø* boys. In Kpetoe, the name conjured up images of the gangs of (potentially unruly) young men in their teens and early twenties who noisily congregated at the three major junctions in the village, waiting for potential customers to exit *trotros* from Ho or the coast, laden with stuff bought at market or with small children in tow (see Smith, 2014: 37). During breaks between trips they whiled away their time boisterously laughing and joking with one another and calling out to passersby. Their behaviour was not unlike that of large groups of young men anywhere, but the *okadø* boys were nonetheless treated by certain community elders as a menace, and their zooming along the asphalt road that bisected the town was construed as a dangerous affront to social order. Thus, this uncertain work was a point of contention around which concerns about the “youth” coalesced. During one meeting with the village chief, I was told that a complaint had already been filed with the Kpetoe police, which the older man had every intention of following up and pursuing to the point of an outright ban on *okadø*, should the boys not comply and desist from riding their bikes through town. Across the region, a link between riding *okadø* and youthful delinquency is commonly drawn, with pillion drivers in Nigeria and Cameroon also figuring as criminals in the public imagination and suffering considerable police harassment as a result (Wage, 2006: 77-79; Smith, 2014: 37-38).

What is more, as routine, material reminders of the long-standing and historically rooted disparities between the Ghanaian and Togolese tax and import regimes (see Nugent, 2003; Chalfin 2010; Piot 2010), these bikes were a relatively recent arrival, having been an unseen rarity at the turn of the century¹⁰². More affordable than cars or minivans, motorbikes also tended not to be the property of the young men who rode them, but were instead owned by elders and civil servants with the money to pay for them upfront. The bikes were rented out at a day rate to young men who, paying for fuel themselves, would offer rides on the back for a small fee of between 50 pesewas and one cedi for journeys within Kpetoe. In this way, *okadø* boys’ social marginalisation was compounded by the fact that most were working in positions of extreme economic precarity, whereby they relied on clientelistic relations with the bike owners for their survival. Such is the extent of their precarity that, in the Nigerian context, Smith has argued *okadø* drivers have become a potent symbol of contemporary social insecurity around which:

¹⁰² Daniel Jordan Smith’s ethnography of *okadø* riders offers a short history of the trade in southern Nigeria (2014).

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“...crystallize...many complex and entangled elements of...unease, including the recognition that people are complicit participants in the monetisation of everyday life even as they commonly and simultaneously lament these trends” (2014: 43)

In this we see that young drivers’ social position was bound up with powerful ideas (and fears) regarding vocational and personal morality.

Driving work, strategising and the uncertain terrain of work and livelihoods

The distinctions and points of overlap between experiences of driving taxis, *trotros* and motorbikes, as well as the profound impact that capital and access to funds can have on livelihood strategies, came together in Francis’s account of driving work. Having learnt to weave as a teenager, Francis took his driving test with money he had saved from time in the loom. A skill that he spoke proudly of in our earliest discussions, the licence was put to use when Francis paired up with his brother to operate a rented *trotro*. Leaving aside his weaving, Francis invested himself in this new venture in the hope that it would provide a more stable income than craft work. Splitting the job of driving and *trotro* “mate”¹⁰³ the brothers worked for several years on the roads, making enough money for Francis to put some savings away. In time though, the owner of the van demanded more rent, inflation led to greater fuel price hikes and the shortfall in profit became harder to make up with fixed ticket prices that were centrally negotiated by the powerful national transport unions¹⁰⁴. At some point, Francis and his brother decided that the long hours, the journeying away from home and the trouble with the vehicle owner were not worth it and they gave up renting the van.

With the money he had saved working on the road, Francis was able to buy a car of his own and began driving solo. Initially pleased that he was no longer a contractor beholden to a demanding owner, Francis welcomed the shift from working the *trotro* to offering shorter taxi trips. The possibility of negotiating fares with private customers, rather than being compelled to stick to union-negotiated tariffs, was also welcome and for a while he drove the car himself. However, he suffered a series of breakdowns, the damages of which were finally compounded by a car crash. Although Francis emerged, remarkably, unscathed he was left without the funds to repair the car. His savings now bound up in a car that was wrecked, he had little

¹⁰³ The *trotro* mate acted as a conductor, sitting with his back to the driver in the most uncomfortable spot by the door, collecting fares, coordinating stops and storing passenger luggage in the overstuffed boot or atop the roof of the van.

¹⁰⁴ Transport unions operate throughout the country and are responsible for setting fares and running *trotro* stations. The Ghana Private Road Transport Unions, (GPRTU) and the Progressive Transport Owners Association (PROTOA) are two of the most prominent.

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option but to sell it at a loss. With the cash that he got from selling the car for parts, Francis bought a motorbike and, for a short while, rode local journeys around Kpetoe. However, as an activity that is almost solely the preserve of otherwise unemployed young men, *okadø* driving felt even more precarious than weaving, which however poorly remunerated retained a certain caché through its associations with tradition, local culture and the elites who bought and wore *Agbamevo kente* cloth. By now father to a little boy, the income from this work proved barely sufficient to support his small family and, when another breakdown occurred, rather than investing what little he had left into the repairs, he sold the bike, cut his losses and returned to the loom.

Told with equal measures of self-deprecating humour, resignation and hopefulness that he might one day be able to carve a decent living from driving¹⁰⁵, this story illustrated several key points. Firstly, it indicated the challenges faced by young men in finding work which allowed them to accumulate sufficient material resources with which they could buffer themselves from unforeseen accidents and shocks. Despite his best efforts, an ethos of hard work and attempts to build up a “cushion” of savings, circumstances prevailed against Francis and he was forced to return to craftwork, an occupation which was replete with its own set of challenges.

This return to the loom raises the second important issue when considering how driving and other forms of work figure in the livelihood strategies of weavers, namely how trajectories of work, much like those of education, are not linear and progressive, but rather circle backwards, forwards and sideways, as craftspeople strategise in relation to constantly shifting circumstances. What might look promising at one moment, in the next becomes inviable, forcing young men to be creative in their responses, acting as *bricoleurs*¹⁰⁶ with regard to their work strategies as much as in relation to their fixed up and oft-repaired looms.

Creative strategising and the inventiveness with which young weavers faced the challenges they encountered brings us to a third point, which is that however ingenious the strategies weavers employed when facing uncertainty, creativity and resilience alone were sometimes not enough to resist a downwards spiral into

¹⁰⁵ Francis' hopes for supporting himself from driving were pinned on finding a job as a personal driver for a member of the local elite. Local politicians, chiefs, and assembly members commonly employed the services of drivers.

¹⁰⁶ The contingent nature of these experiences was underscored upon my return to the Kpetoe workshop in the summer of 2015. At that time Kwaku, who as discussed above had moved from a Togolese village to Kpetoe to weave, had given up weaving to drive *okadø*. With a precipitous economic downturn underway, he felt that he was better able to support himself through offering rides, but would no doubt draw upon his craft skills further down the line as circumstances changed and new opportunities arose.

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increasing precarity. Francis, by dint of character as much as anything else, remained positive in his outlook and, in partnership with his wife Sena, he had achieved modest gains. Most notable of these was the completion in 2015 of the building of a small home for their family close by the compound of his mother and sister. The two-roomed house had taken him several years of savings and steady work to build and offered his family a modicum of security they had not had when renting lodgings in a large shared compound. Nonetheless, these gains were set against repeated setbacks and the chronic insecurity of uncertain work. Although sunny natured, he expressed frustration at feeling stuck in a position that was often far from his ideal.

Francis' experiences of driving and his feelings of frustration can be usefully characterised as being enmeshed in a series of broader discourses and debates surrounding the structural, economic and social position of "youth" in African contexts. Francis's frustration, like that of a great many of his friends and colleagues in the workshop, was being "stuck" within social and economic relations that denied him the dignity, work or resources he felt he needed to care for his family and assume a respected position within his community. Nearing thirty, with a child to support and a partner whom he wanted to marry but lacked the funds to do so "properly", Francis found himself weaving in much the same way he had been when he left school at fifteen. "Progress" then, had proven to be a seductive, but illusory fiction. In the workshop, these feelings were echoed by Gabriel, Bright, Felix and Joseph, who reiterated time and again the problems they, as "youth", faced in making their way in the world.

Scholarly interest in the position of young people in relation to restructuring and "adjusted" economies has been longstanding, with Margaret Peil's work in Ghana during the 1960s raising key questions about the relationship between the social position and aspirations of increasingly educated "youth" and rates of un- and underemployment in post-independence Ghana (1968: 72). Her later work on craftwork in West Africa presupposed that the growing numbers of young people who were engaging with formal education would increasingly find salaried work in a formal sector as industrialised economies developed across the region (1979: 22). However, already in his 1973 essay, Keith Hart had raised the spectre of possible structural reasons behind the youth unemployment crisis, framing the debate in terms of processes of economic informalisation (1973: 62). Hart's work prefigured much of what was to come, and with faltering economic growth in the late seventies seguing into economic collapse and the imposition of structural adjustment programmes that

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savagely cut state capacity in misguided and ideological attempts to balance the books, high levels of youth unemployment and economic uncertainty became the norm rather than any kind of anomalous exception. In contemporary African contexts, where the rhetoric of “Africa Rising” rings hollow in a post-structural adjustment era of chronic economic crisis, Meagher's work continues to highlight the volatile relationship between youth unemployment, uncertain economies and currents of political unrest (2010a; 2010c; 2013; 2014; 2015). Writing that “In the wake of the Arab Spring, there is a growing awareness that a decade of exuberant growth has failed to create adequate jobs for Africa's growing population [with] youth unemployment rates... double those of adults across most of the continent.” (2014), Meagher captures some of the current anxiety surrounding the swelling ranks of unemployed and precariously employed young people both in African contexts and globally.

NGOs, resources and outside validation

Whilst young weavers' everyday experiences of work tended to be bound up with the routines of crafting, farming and driving, their ideas about the value of work were also linked to occupations that were considered aspirational. This last part of the chapter focuses on NGOs and government jobs and consider how ideas and experiences of these sought-after vocational opportunities structured weavers' experiences of work.

NGOs were recognised by workshop members as important sources of both material resources and social validation. For many, NGOs constituted potential means of marketing their products, providing material support for the running of the workshop and getting access to credit to expand their weaving work into small enterprises. For weavers who had benefited from post-secondary education, NGOs were also seen as potential employers. Talking about his plans once he had completed university Selorm said:

“I will soon finish school, so the question still remains whether I will get a job. This question is ringing in my mind. I would want to do any kind of social welfare services, with the government or NGOs”

Speaking about his prospects, Selorm clearly recognised both that the Ghanaian state had a severely limited capacity to provide opportunities for well-educated young people, and, crucially, that key functions of state social provision were increasingly the domain of NGOs (see Piot, 2010: 140). His aspirations, then, lay as much in

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capitalising on this socio-economic shift as they did in looking for a much-vaunted government job.

However, as well-educated young weavers strategically positioned themselves in relation to NGO opportunities tensions arose around the appropriate use of resources, particularly vis-a-vis community elders. These conflicts highlighted how flows of resources from NGOs reconfigured power relations in Agotime's crafting community along lines of age and social hierarchy. The agricultural chemical shop that sat opposite the workshop was a prime example, showing how rumour and gossip worked to question the social value, and possible dangers, of NGOs in the town.

In the quiet privacy of the paramount chief's parlour one afternoon, talk turned to NGOs and he spoke about the shop and a weaver who lived in the town. This craftsman was someone with whom I was little acquainted, but I occasionally met his children or his wife in the neighbourhood as they worked or played nearby. They were a friendly family and so I was surprised to hear the chief speak of this man's alleged duplicity and fraud. The building that housed the shop had been built by an NGO as part of a community development and agricultural support project. In collaboration with the weaver, who had acted as a local intermediary, the NGO had supplied equipment, including a tractor to be used by the community. The entire project had been backed by the chief who was well acquainted with, and fond of, the weaver and his family. However, the paramount said that before long the weaver began "taking [the resources] as his personal thing". When the NGO heard of the alleged fraud, the chief said, they removed the equipment and withdrew from the community. The building, however, remained and had apparently been signed over to the weaver who rented part of it out to the owners of agricultural chemical shop.

The whole story was told by the chief in a tone of resigned disappointment; he sounded sad as he said that something meant to benefit everyone had been fraudulently personalised. I agreed, but I was left with the sense that the conflict was more complex than that between a just chief and a corrupt younger man. Reflecting on other conversations I had had with community elders, in which I had heard open criticism of the running of the workshop and assertions that my colleagues were "money-focused" young men, intent on running the place into the ground, I wondered to what extent the conflict over the NGO building was an intergenerational struggle for power, rather than a clear cut issue of justice and corruption. From the paramount's perspective, in turning to a young intermediary

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rather than passing through the generationally ordered hierarchies of chieftainship, the NGO had bypassed his chiefly authority. When the younger weaver then further subverted the chief's authority by allegedly taking for himself property that should have been "public" (or at least might have been disposed of and apportioned out by the chief himself), the entire episode was construed as unjust and unjustifiable.

Writing about how development work in African contexts is socially mediated, Olivier de Sardan notes the close relationship between local development brokers and patron-client systems (2005: 174) and describes:

"The constant symbolic struggle engaged in by social actors in their attempt to distinguish where legitimate corruption (generally the kind they benefit from) ends and where illegitimate corruption (usually the type to which they fall victim) begins" (2005: 168)

This is not to say that what the Paramount said was untrue. I was, however, only privy to one side of this complex story and claims to resources and power within the community of craftspeople were relative and mutable, with one person's perception of corruption being another's legitimate livelihood strategy. Access to resources were contested and fraught, with the hierarchies of age and social positioning being a crucial nexus around which contestation coalesced. Considering NGO influence as an important source of validation that comes from the "outside" (Mosse, 2005: 218), the economic and work opportunities presented by NGOs were liable to disrupt extant power relations, even whilst reinforcing others (Piot, 2010: 140-141). It is therefore important to remember how the chief's status as a knowledgeable elder was partially co-created through his extensive interactions with NGO representatives, and that he himself had benefited materially and socially through his engagement with NGO projects in Agotime.

Government work, the allure of a salary and the complexity of aspirations

"Government work", jobs as teachers, nurses, in the police force, civil service or as border officials for the Customs and Excise Preventive Service, were held up as the gold standard of work by young men in the workshop. Whilst not everyone in the workshop had attempted to gain entry into one type of government work or another, many had tried and almost all had aspirations toward a salaried government post, if not for themselves, then for their children. Considerable material, social and emotional resources were expended in seeking government work. Considering the investments young men made in trying to secure government work, the allure of a salaried job was not solely tied to the material security that a regular income brought,

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but rather that government workers were emplaced within a complex of hierarchical social relations, with social prestige accruing to those with government jobs. Thus, the rich social networks in the community of craftspeople were valued for how they helped weavers strategically mitigate the challenges they faced, but also for their own sake, in what might be termed an “aesthetics of exchange”. Much like successful cloth trading, government work was seen to powerfully position people within complex networks of reciprocity and exchange. This was appealing for insecure young weavers, who sought social resources and recognition as much as wealth. In an important sense then, ideas about government work were part of hopeful, future-oriented discourses that young weavers engaged with in the hope of situating themselves within what they felt would be more rewarding relations of exchange and reciprocity.

It is important to recognise that whilst government work was partly valued in terms of the material security it offered people, this was not always young people’s primary motivation in seeking out these kinds of jobs. A look at formal education helps us better understand this dynamic, as the values attributed to schooling offers an interesting parallel. In his study of formal education in Kpetoe, Blakemore argued that apart from any perception of the associated economic rewards, formal education was valued as a good in and of itself (1975:240). This chimes with my interlocutors views about formal education’s worth, which was highly prized as a social achievement and formed the basis of a great many aspirations even when it did not (as was most often the case) directly translate into work opportunities and higher incomes. In this way, young weavers highly valued and invested in education as much on the basis of social distinction and prestige as they did in search of material gains, such that the social and material elements of these aspirations were bound together and mutually constitutive rather than distinct and separate. Applying this same logic to aspirations for government work, we can see similar dynamics were at play. To have even the lowliest of jobs as a “government worker” was extremely highly valued, to the extent that monetary reward was clearly not the primary issue at stake, but rather these jobs were desirable because of the heightened sense of social standing and esteem they offered. Mains’ work in urban Ethiopian contexts bears this out, emphasising the considerable prestige that accrued to those in government employment, almost regardless of the work itself (2012: 94). Considering that government salaries were routinely paid months, if not more than a year, in arrears, it stands to reason that young men were invested in these kinds of jobs for more than

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just financial gain. Models which try to understand how young Agotime weavers approached questions of work and education solely in terms of "...rational, self-interested, utility-maximising individuals" (Fischer 2014: 14) bypass the intense social negotiations which constitute livelihood strategies. Ideas about salaried government work, then, were underpinned by moral economies which spoke to people's sense of justice, aspiration and experience of a "good life" in which they would be materially secure and socially recognised members of the community¹⁰⁷ (see Fischer, 2014: 1-17)

Saviour's story spoke clearly to this dynamic of hope, aspiration and social prestige that defined the discourse around government work amongst the weavers. Having completed his training as a nurse just shortly before my arrival in Kpetoe, Saviour was, for the first months of my stay, a regular face around the workshop who helped me with my weaving as I settled into the rhythms of work in the loom. Before long, though, he found a job at a health post some distance across the country and moved to start work. Periodically, he would return home, appearing in his loom for a long weekend, before heading back. His spot in the workshop was reserved for him whilst he was away and he was always very warmly welcomed home by his friends, relatives and fellow weavers. Sachets of gin- his tipple of choice- would be bought from the drinking spot opposite and shared around to mark his return. In his mid thirties and thus slightly older than many of the others, he was treated with deference and commanded a greater degree of respect than almost anyone else in the workshop. His younger cousin Gabriel particularly looked up to him and it was clear that holding a government post had had a considerable effect on Saviour's social position within the workshop and his natal community more widely.

Some months into his new position it became apparent that Saviour's visits back to Kpetoe were not only social. Through conversations with Gabriel, I realised that Saviour had yet to be added to the government payroll and that he was still supporting himself and his young family with weaving work. This was not unusual and new recruits in the health, education and civil service commonly went without a salary for the first year or more of their contracts. Seeing how Saviour worked at and strategised the financial constraints and practical demands of his new, much-sought

¹⁰⁷ This is not to deny the constitutive role that capitalism plays in shaping people's sense of hope and aspiration. In relation to the disjuncture between aspiration and experience, Ghassan Hage makes a compelling point writing that "...capitalism hegemonises the ideological content of hope so it becomes almost universally equated with dreams of better-paid jobs, better life-styles, more commodities, etc. [with the] power of these hopes [being] such that most people will live their lives believing in the possibility of upward social mobility without actually experiencing it" (2003: 13-14).

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after job, underlined how aspirations for government jobs were embedded in social concerns as much, if not more than, financial concerns.

Saviour's story also crucially underlined the connections between different types of work, and how work trajectories were neither linear nor straightforward. Just as weavers strategically engaged in local farming practices, along with driving work and entrepreneurial weaving and contracting activity, so too did some of them take salaried jobs and engage in "professional" work alongside their crafting. Thus, stark distinctions between salaried jobs and other kinds of work such as driving, weaving and farming cannot be drawn, as it was the complex combination of all of these activities which secured people's livelihoods in contexts of precarity.

There is, however, a paradox at the heart of how government work was seen, because although young weavers expended great energy trying to gain access to these jobs and the social prestige and benefits attached to them, they were also highly critical of politicians who they felt had failed to represent their interests and state officials who were believed to use their office for predatory and corrupt ends. This ambivalence was undoubtedly tied to enduring histories of state crisis, which have put basic services and living conditions for the majority under constant pressure, whilst an affluent elite has been seen to enrich itself (see Young, 2012: 168-169; Nugent, 2012: 430). In Kpetoe, criticism was levelled at the local MP, NDC representative Juliana Azumah-Mensah, for failing to make progress on local development projects, including the pot-holed market road which had long lain half-built. This dissatisfaction found a nationwide voice during mass protests across all ten Ghanaian regions in the summer of 2014, against the increasing cost of living. Dissatisfaction at the political response to economic crisis hinged around demands to reinstate state fuel subsidies, and a year later when I returned to Kpetoe discontent at the political and economic situation remained palpable in the workshop. Government work, however, retained its aspirational cache with youth who sought to escape precarity for the imagined rewards of secure work and social recognition. Marloes Janson explores the ambivalent power of such imagined spaces in relation to how her young Gambian interlocutors view the Western world as "Babylon", encompassing both spiritual danger and abundant possibilities for those who either seek, or refuse to migrate there in search of work (2014: 22). The Janus-faced nature of attitudes towards the government and its leaders, is therefore symptomatic both of the ambivalence attached to success (see Geschiere, 2013) and the contradictions of a

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faltering economy where the price of material security and social esteem was seen to be entry into relations which could be predatory and corrupt (see Smith, 2007: 90).

Conclusion

Whilst the complex negotiations over questions of work and learning that have been explored here and in the previous two chapters played out over the course of a lifetime, weavers also had to navigate the everyday challenges and opportunities of life in the workshop. Developing the arguments laid out above, about the interconnections between craftspeople's social worlds and the material conditions of their work, the next chapter considers weavers' problem solving strategies and looks at the small-scale ways that craftspeople negotiated both the material challenges and the social pleasures of their work.

Chapter 5

Problem solving and strategising problems- Social strategies and material fixes in Agotime weaving

Drawing on the insights into the complex relationship between the material and social dimensions of craft learning and work put forth in the preceding chapters, this chapter questions what “problem solving” means for Agotime’s workshop weavers. The ethnography presented here argues that while craftspeople in Agotime were extremely adept at manipulating materials and tools to find solutions to the practical problems which arose in the course of their work, what concerned them most was successfully and strategically managing the complex networks of social relationships and ties that facilitated their work and embedded them within the community of makers. This work was an ever-evolving process, contingent and unfinished, making the social challenges of being a weaver and a person in Agotime intractable and insoluble. As such, I argue that in order to understand how craftspeople managed their lives we must look beyond those problems that were amenable to a “quick fix”, to the wider social contexts in which they lived and worked. From this perspective skilful material problem solving went hand in hand with the long-term nurturance, management and strategising of, often precarious, forms of social capital that called for continual renegotiation. As such, technical skill, know-how and the ability to produce high-quality cloths were closely related to the strength and successful management of numerous ties between weavers, customers, patrons and traders, with the crafted product itself making materially manifest the quality of the social relationships that went into making it.

However, sociality, by its very nature is shifting, contingent and unfixed, and the limitations of these relationships must also be recognised. As has been noted before in West African contexts (Meagher, 2006, 2010a, 2010b), social capital is never an unlimited good. An integral part of the fabric of the community, these social limits and borders could be exclusive and exclusionary, limiting a craftsperson’s capacity to weave well and curtailing their relationships with fellow makers, customers and traders. Rather than framing the issues in a negative light, looking at the opportunities and limitations of craft people's social networks contributes a sense of realism to on-going discussions of the role that relatedness plays in how craftspeople learn, form communities and forge livelihoods in contexts that are challenging.

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Working and living with challenges- an aesthetics of exchange and why sociality matters

In a context of economic uncertainty Agotime weavers' social strategising makes functional sense. Without state funded social security and with work opportunities scarce, young Agotime weavers rely upon skills that allow them to produce and market a distinctive and popular commodity, whilst working to build up resilient and widespread social networks. Nurturing relationships and feeding social ties with a wide range of colleagues, family members, friends, neighbours and visitors to the workshop and the town was a way of hedging one's bets in the event that the worst should happen. Inspiring loyalty and fostering ties of dependence and mutual exchange means that should disaster strike and a weaver is unable to work or is faced with unforeseen expenses, they were able to "call in their debts" so to speak, relying on the support of those to whom they were closest. Based on continued reciprocity and a cycle of on-going and unresolved indebtedness between members, this sort of sociality calls upon weavers to support each other so that they themselves are also secured; the strong social network becomes the buffer against scarcity and the unexpected.

Extensive social networks in Equatorial African societies have developed historically as "wealth in people" (See Goody, 1969; Goody 1973; Argenti, 2007; Guyer & Belinga, 1995), and these networks have been crucial in negotiating scarcity and the challenges of uncertainty across West Africa. Whilst this functional interpretation holds in relation to the working and social lives of Agotime weavers, in the context of the weaving workshop the importance of social ties arguably extends well beyond their basic utility. Rather than being solely a means of safeguarding oneself against scarcity, so much attention was paid to the work of becoming a well-connected person in the community of makers that the on-going reciprocity and the cultivation of many and various social ties of dependence and exchange was a kind of social style with an aesthetics of its own. At stake here was not just mere material survival but also, and perhaps more compellingly, the pleasures of sociality as well as the prestige and status attached to being a well-known, well-connected and successful craftsman. Social strategising and its continual renegotiation brought a sense of security, however contingent, to the precarious economic conditions faced by young Agotime weavers, as well as going some way to answering the question of what it meant to be a "proper" person in the workshop and the wider community. It was in the successful cultivation and maintenance of a social aesthetics of exchange,

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indebtedness and hierarchy that knowledge of the craft was fostered and solutions were found for problems in the day-to-day practice of weaving. With sociality tied to the material in this way, the on-going negotiation of social challenges was pivotal in creating the spaces in which practical and material problem solving could happen.

A small pile of pebbles: material solutions to material problems

If intense sociality underpinned how workshop members managed the challenges and pleasures of making a living, craftsmen were of necessity also constantly engaged in finding material solutions to the problems that cropped up in the process of weaving a cloth. Time was of the essence, and being able to quickly, efficiently and neatly produce cloths that met the needs of customers was essential to making a living in the craft. No matter how well connected you were, if you were not able to produce the goods you would struggle to make a name for yourself in the workshop or the village.

Early one Sunday morning and I was sat against the open trellis-work walls of the workshop reading a book, waiting to meet Felix, who was yet to emerge from Sunday prayers. With most people still in church, an unusual stillness hung in the air. At his loom in the otherwise deserted workspace, Saviour sat shuttling bobbins of orange and black cotton back and forth as he worked on a funeral cloth. Perched on a low stool in the loom, bent over his work, legs swiftly working the heddles that open and close the web of warp threads, he was silent and focused upon the strip of cloth that was stretched out in front of him. From time to time he paused to carefully reel in the bit of cloth he had been working on, the stack in the bar at his lap growing thicker as he went. Set out on the squat stool next to him was a shiny cylinder of brown wax for smoothing the warp threads as they snapped open and closed, a supply of prepared yarns to throw as weft threads, a pair of scissors for trimming loose ends, a short length of reed and a small collection of ten or so pebbles divided into two piles (see plate 21). Periodically he paused, looked up from his work, and shifted a pebble from one pile to the other. The wax, the yarn, the reed and the scissors were all tools I was familiar with and things I kept in the work box by the side of my own loom. The pebbles, though, were something new.



Plate 21- Saviours' counting pebbles, wax, measuring reed and weft bobbin, July 2013. Photograph by author.

He was home for the weekend from his government job in another part of Ghana to see family, catch up with friends and spend some time at his loom. He was busy, time was short and if he managed to complete a cloth or two he could take them back with him when he returned to work and perhaps sell them to one of his new colleagues. As the sections which comprise the strip he was weaving stacked up on the loom, the pebbles shifted from one pile to the other, their movement keeping track of the number of sections completed and the eventual length of the cloth. When eleven black sections interspersed with ten orange ones were completed the strip could be finished and the next one started.

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Saviour's pebbles and the importance of keeping count in the process of weaving makes more sense when you consider the format of narrow-strip cloths. Composed of multiple narrow woven bands stitched together edge to edge to form larger cloths, design possibilities and the overall look of a cloth hinge around the placement of individual sections on particular strips across a whole cloth. Unlike other kinds of loom, narrow-strip weaving technology and the technique of stitching together strips of textile lends itself to the production of cloths which can have carefully matched and symmetrical designs, asymmetrical elements or variations of both¹⁰⁸ (Gilfoy, 1987: 46). Moreover, for a cloth to look well made once it is stitched together, each constituent strip must be of equal length. Agotime weavers placed great store by neatness and balance in a cloth. When each strip was several yards long and each cloth could be made up of twenty or more strips, keeping track of the number and length of sections during the process of weaving was an important, tricky task that indexed the skill of the weaver. My mentors had tied a tape measure with a notch in one end to my loom and drilled me in the importance of ensuring that each section I wove was of equal measure. The small reed, perhaps eight or nine centimetres long which sat on Saviour's stool served the same purpose. The counting pebbles, though, were a novelty and a solution to a problem that I myself had often run up against during my own weaving. My solution, following the example of the weavers who surrounded me, was to laboriously unwind, count and rewind woven sections. By comparison, Saviour's method seemed efficient and inventive.

Watching him work, I eventually interrupted to ask about the pebbles. Where had he got the idea from? Why was he using them now, when I had never seen anyone else keep track that way? Would he mind if I took a photo? Replying with a degree of reticence, perhaps wary that I knew he had taken time off work to be in Kpetoe, Saviour said he was "feeling lazy", the pebbles helped him keep track when he was tired and wanted to work quickly and that I could take a picture if I wanted. He returned to his work without engaging in further conversation and I sat back down to wait once more.

I recorded this episode in my field-notes that evening and often returned to it when thinking about the part problem-solving plays in the making of Agotime weavers and their cloths. The pebbles spoke to the fact that weaving *agbamevo kente*

¹⁰⁸ Gilfoy suggests that the complex aesthetics of various West African narrow-strip weaving traditions can be thought about in relation to the region's musical traditions in which "...a strictly regular pulse is frequently only implied while a wide range of rhythmic variations embellish the basic structure" (1987: 17).

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cloths involved a number of tasks that require sophisticated mathematical and spatial problem-solving skills. Skilful work routinely calls upon weavers to calculate and measure with precision, estimate quantities and lengths accurately and to manipulate shape and colour imaginatively both within individual strips and cumulatively across both faces of an entire cloth. Tasks range from calculating the number of spools of each colour thread they will need to complete a cloth of a given size and the painstaking process of counting and laying out of the background warp threads, to the construction and configuration of the colourful geometric and figurative designs that adorn the individual strips and the accurate measurement of each of the sections that make up a strip, so that, sewn together to make a whole cloth, the strips are in alignment. In a context where pens and paper were scarce, the complex work of designing and planning was often done without reference to written notes, plans or calculations and instead was rooted in the materials and tools of the craft. Only one weaver claimed to use notes and drawings when making cloths and even in this solitary case I never saw evidence of paper plans.

Materially situated problem-solving

Similarly, the calculations and problem-solving skills involved in making a cloth were not learnt as discrete activities, but rather holistically embedded in making practices, the experience of the tactile pull of thread and the material capacities of the loom. Concrete in nature, these sharply honed skills lost their focus and became hazy when abstracted from the demands of the cloth. Young men who could seamlessly work out the amount of thread, in multiple colours, they would need for a project were stumped when called upon to add up two figures noted down on a page. Throughout my own time in the loom, my ineptitude at several of the key skills needed to calculate thread counts and lay out background threads was a constant reminder of the stubborn complexity of the mathematical operations involved in planning and weaving. Attempts on Gabriel's part to explain these calculations quickly faltered as the experiential and sensory basis of his skill resisted transformation into propositional knowledge. Tacitly embedded in the routine work of weaving, the mathematics of the craft resisted verbalisation and functioned without paper notation.

Research in psychology bears out these observations, showing that socially situated problems framed meaningfully in terms of everyday experience are more amenable to solutions than those which are grounded in the abstract concepts of logic

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and number (Plotkin, 1993: 194). Millroy's ethnomathematics takes these ideas further, focusing on the part played by action and tools in the development of mathematical reasoning. Highlighting how mathematics is commonly seen to consist of "universal truths which exist independently of people...are discovered by mathematicians through a process of formal reasoning...[and which are] believed to be decontextualised activity..." (1991: 2), Millroy's work socially situates problem solving in terms of apprenticeship and problem-solving strategies. Arguing that the mathematical ideas of the carpenters with whom she was apprenticed in South Africa were "...framed by the context of the workshop and shaped by familiar tools." (1991: 20) and that their mathematical reasoning was accompanied by action (1991: 18), Millroy draws an important link between the material processes and tools of craft work and the cognitive development of specific problem-solving skills.

Imagine Saviour, sleepy on his way to the workshop early that morning, collecting the pebbles from the ground outside and setting them down next to his loom as an *aide-memoire* before he began his day's work, his deft workaround to a recurrent problem also emphasised how particular material conditions (and, importantly, their limits) encouraged resourcefulness and framed problem solving.¹⁰⁹ The whole action seemed to fit neatly into the *ad hoc* ethos of the workshop, where scraps of material, lengths of yarn, bits of wood and used parts of old looms were stored away in corners to be refashioned and put to new purpose when some tool or loom part wore out, broke or needed to be replaced. I was impressed with the resourcefulness of my colleagues- a resourcefulness, it must be said, that was borne from necessity- and Saviour's pebbles seemed to be the perfect example of using what was to hand and what could be gathered freely from the workshop's surroundings to ease the working process.

Bricolage, making do and learning how to make and repair tools

I never again saw Saviour or anyone else use counters to keep track of their weaving, although I continued to be impressed by the uses to which gathered odds and ends could be put. When my cross bar snapped, Gabriel had cut a pliable branch from the tree at the back of the workshop and whittled me a new one. Brooms made from tied bunches of palm reeds were kept in the corners of the workshop and used each morning to sweep the dusty concrete floor. When a bobbin came loose from its

¹⁰⁹ Shortages of material things engendered a fruitful and generative creativity whilst also imposing limitations in the making of the cloth.

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shuttle casing one or two reeds would be pulled out from a broom and snapped to size to slot it back in place. When weft yarns were being prepared on the spinning machine another length of reed, pulled from the broom, snapped and folded back on itself, would be used to fix the bobbins in place. Snippets of plastic cut from an empty sachet of water or stray ends of cotton were wound round yarn that was being spun to stop the fast moving thread burning a weaver's fingers. Odd, loose lengths of yarn and excess lengths of fabric left over from old weaving projects were put aside, stored in plastic bags, and then brought out later to be plaited, with circles of coconut shell attached that nestled between toes to form the straps that operated the heddles. If a leash or two of the many leashed heddles frayed and snapped, the tool would be carefully repaired using saved lengths of thread. Unused bobbins of spun yarn would be carefully stored, kept away from the light and dust in case some future project would call for a design in that colour and ply of thread. When the carved soft-wood pulley that held the heddles cracked from years of use an old plastic spool that had once carried thread of its own was coupled with a salvaged length of sturdy wire and put to work as a makeshift replacement pulley. Abandoned and crumbling breeze blocks that looked as if they were left over from the building of the workshop many years before had been saved and put to work weighing down the small wooden sledges that kept the lengths of warp thread in tension. Things that were no longer needed at home would be brought to the workshop where they took on a new lease of life; old sofa cushions became the padding for hard wooden work stools and a place to rest your head in the middle of the hot day, worn out shopping bags with snapped handles were used to wrap cloths, protecting them from dirt and the hungry jaws of the armies of termites that colonised every corner of the workshop. Tools also doubled up, with the knife a weaver used to trim loose lengths of weft thread coming in handy when he needed to repair some other part of his loom. Each weaver had a small stack of photographs of the cloths they could make to show to prospective customers, and these pictures doubled up as a notepad with phone numbers, notes and measurements jotted on the back.

Knowing how to repair tools that wore out with long use, many weavers were also skilled at fashioning and building from scratch the looms and other things they needed to weave. Francis, who had started weaving as a teenager after taking a vocational class at school, said that to begin with he had not had the money to buy a carpentered loom and had instead constructed a "traditional" one at home, planting the structure, made from a number of interlocking branches, into the ground and

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working outdoors. As he became adept and secured more work, he decided to make the move into the workshop in the hope of attracting more custom. Unable to use his old loom any longer but still struggling to find the £50 or so that it would cost to commission a carpenter to build him a portable loom, Francis set to work constructing his own. With the help of a friend and using another loom as a guide, he built the base, frame and cross bars, carefully notching the wood so that the whole thing could be reconfigured when necessary, in alignment with his body and the cloth. He carpentered a low wooden stool to sit on and a box to hold his bobbins and scissors and, with his new equipment, took up his place in the workshop. Years later, the whole thing had grown worn and rickety from use, termites having invaded the joints of the wood. Francis spoke about eventually replacing his old loom with a carpentered one that he would pay for, but in the meantime, he patched it together and kept on weaving.

These processes of material *bricolage* whereby craftspeople made creative use of the things to hand in order to keep weaving, reflect the diverse social strategies they employed to accommodate themselves to the challenging, uncertain terrain of their work (see Scheper-Hughes, 2008: 48). Describing how people adapt to the constraints that structure their lives, de Certeau writes:

“...[He] insinuates *into* the system imposed on him...and, by that combination, creates for himself a space in which he can find *ways of using* the constraining order of the place or of the language. Without leaving the place where he has no choice but to live and which lays down its law for him, he establishes within it a degree of *plurality* and creativity. By an art of being in between, he draws unexpected results from his situation” (1984: 30, emphasis in the original)

Thus, material and social processes of accommodation prompted novel ways of making and forms of sociality that underpinned the resilience of craftwork.

Finding a way through the craft and establishing a working rhythm

This reworking of materials and the things in the environment into improvised and shifting combinations to work around the problems that arose in the process of weaving, was a kind of tactical and skilful way-faring that allowed weavers to find a path through the challenges of the craft and keep on with their work (Ingold, 2010: 120). Moreover, in the moment that a loom got stuck or a tool gave way, a weaver was forced to step out of the flow of their work to fix a problem. Managing the encompassing physical and emotional engagement with the cloth, tools, materials and one's bodily and affective self was crucial to the practice of the craft and these short periods of detachment played an important part in shaping the overall experience of

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making. Writing of the life of a Scottish masonry yard, Thomas Yarrow and Siân Jones argue that this process is composed of balancing periods of engagement and immersion in the work with counterbalancing moments of detachment (2014: 260). Peter Durgerian makes a similar point in relation to the process of editing film, writing that:

“Problems don’t always have to be solved through concentration and hard graft...Studies in psychology show that problem solving can be achieved during down time, as well... Taking a short to medium-length break allows unconscious processes to work in the background and, sometimes, solutions seem to pop into one’s head” (2016: 94)

Finding a rhythm in the work, a flow of thrown shuttles, heddles opened and closed and a feel for the give and take of materials took time, skill and purposive effort. Maintaining the level of focused and unbroken attention needed to work quickly and without error was therefore demanding and tiring. If a thread snapped, or a tool gave way this flow was disrupted, forcing the craftsman to step back, disengage, take stock of what had happened and what went wrong. Despite the frustration of being pulled from the flow of one's work, these moments offered opportunities for reflection and were often intensely social, as neighbouring weavers paused themselves to look over and make suggestions about what could have gone wrong. Periods of disengagement as one fixed a snapped thread, replaced a broken component of a tool or discussed with a colleague why it might be that the cloth was behaving unexpectedly provided a breathing space that facilitated eventual re-engagement with the flow of the work. What is more, the social nature of these problem-solving exchanges meant not only that momentary disengagement made way for re-engagement, but also that the defeating frustration of a complex and insoluble problem was kept at bay. Having attempted during the course of my own apprenticeship to stubbornly make repairs to my loom that I simply was not skilled enough to manage, and foundering as my fingers clumsily manipulated tools and materials that just would not do what I wanted them too, I came quickly to recognise the value in turning to others for help in the moments when I myself was unable to pre-empt and quickly fix something gone wrong. A fresh pair of eyes and the wisdom of a more experienced craftsman was often enough to fix a problem that had seemed intractable. Taking a step back and turning for help to the workshop community kept the process of weaving on track, whilst crucially fostering supportive social ties between craftspeople.

In a context where everyone worked to a tight timetable, often with very limited capital- perhaps just money enough to buy materials for only one project in advance- and paying for the basic necessities of rent and food depended on finishing

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quickly, costly repairs, hold-ups or the complete replacement of old tools was rarely an option. Thus, when things went wrong, workshop members relied heavily upon a combination of their ingenuity, the magpie skills of the *bricoleur* (Lancy, 2008: 313) and social ties that could be called upon when all else failed. To problem-solve effectively, weavers were forced to look beyond the materiality of their craft, to the social fabric of the workshop.

Skill as the ground upon which we work- sociality and the invisibility of skill

Seeing weavers combining materials in novel ways to fix tools and work together to find ways around the problems which arose in the course of their work, I began to ask questions about problem solving. Part of lengthy discussions where weavers would speak eloquently about all kinds of aspects of the craft, their learning and their livelihoods, these questions, without exception, were met with utter confusion. Although fully engaged in the creative and skilful manipulation of tools and materials in ways that allowed them to manage problems and develop novel ways of designing and making, the idea of “problem solving” was not familiar to my colleagues. Hoping to elicit some explanation of the processes whereby sparse and often elegant solutions were found to the challenges presented by the loom, I would rephrase and modify what I was asking until I got some sort of answer. Laboriously trying to get craftsmen to speak about things I had been watching them do for months, I was frustrated when the responses I eventually got were cursory references to “friends helping each other”. Just as Saviour had not had much to say about his small pile of counting stones, the others were not much interested in speaking about their work as *bricoleurs*, skilfully recombining tools and materials to work around the problems that arose in the process of crafting. The practical and material work of fixing a loom or finding the most efficient way to spin thread was left largely unspoken and preoccupations with the development and negotiation of relationships between fellow craftsmen, customers, elders and visitors to the workshop came to the fore. How a particular branch was used to repair a loom or a length of yarn to fix the heddles was just not something anyone wanted to speak about. I alone was interested in such things and over the course of several months, every weaver having responded with a similar lack of interest and feeling as if I was somehow missing the point, I stopped asking about problem solving.

In expecting workshop members to understand my questions about problem solving I had taken for granted that they approached their work in the same way that

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I did. Thus, I had embarked on my apprenticeship with the Agotime weavers with a conception of learning as a conscious and deliberate process in which the development of skill takes centre stage. Having set out to learn how to weave and see how others honed their skills, I had assumed that enskilmement would be everyone else's priority too. This focus on skill meant I saw problem-solving as a material process in which a maker took what they knew and those things they had at their disposal and applied themselves in creative ways to the task at hand. In temporal terms my view posited the movement from problem to solution as one moment, in which a concrete problem arising in the course of the work would be immediately amenable to a material solution. From this perspective, new ways of doing things are made somewhat linearly in a kind of mechanistic interplay between the environment and the skilled practitioner. Although I would have said that craft was a social process of open-ended collaboration and learning within porous and shifting communities of practice (see Lave & Wenger, 1991), upon reflection my perspective was premised upon a socially and temporally bounded view in which the individual was the primary locus of skill and innovation and the process of work was made up of discrete and discontinuous moments of practice. In short, in focusing on material solutions to material problems, I initially missed the fundamental ways in which practice was socially mediated over long periods of mutual engagement, exchange and interaction between makers.

Ethnographic work is forged in the process of learning to be elsewhere, at the frontier between what one already (thinks one) knows and something else entirely. As such it entails the idiosyncratic bundle of partialities, positioning and blind spots which characterise fieldworkers and their interlocutors. Much has been written about how best to approach and evaluate the possibilities and deficits of a method that is grounded in the contingencies of encounter and personality (see Bornemann and Hammoudi, 2009; Clifford and Marcus, 1986). During the process of my own preparation for fieldwork, reflexivity and critical engagement with one's own work were emphasised repeatedly. Lave has written compellingly of the importance of re-engaging, re-thinking and re-working one's own ethnography, and the difficulties that inhere in such a project (Lave, 2011) and her work calls on anthropologists to commit to questioning our own work and producing critical ethnography.

In grappling with how Agotime weavers negotiated their work, it was only having admitted defeat in the field, put my interview questions to one side and begun the process of writing up my thesis after returning home from Ghana that I began to

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understand what problem-solving in the workshop really entailed. Rather than searching for things that had not been said and trying to make meaning out of things that the weavers themselves saw as unremarkable- like Saviour's pile of pebbles- I was forced to look at what the data I had collected in Kpetoe actually said about the links between practical skills and social relationships. In a process that could be described as its own kind of ethnographic *bricolage*, I began trying to make sense of the materials that were at my disposal. Recordings of formal interviews, snippets of remembrance from the long hours spent in the shed, the feel of working amongst those men and memories of the things they did and said as they went about their working lives have all been re-visited and reflected upon. In giving due consideration to the fact that weavers spoke at length about the importance of managing their social ties alongside their immersion in various forms of skilled practice, it has become clear that rather than being something to talk about, practical skills formed the kind of invisible and unremarked ground upon which weavers worked. Underpinning their craft practices, a level of skill was taken for granted and, with this basic assumption made, questions of skill were sidelined in how weavers spoke about themselves and their work. Instead, talk centred upon the meshwork of relationships which bound one to another, in the workshop and beyond, and the skilful manipulation of materials, the fixing of looms and the re-jigging of tools was enacted with little comment. Unlike the taken-for-grantedness of practical skills, these friendships and ties were ever-present and always being worked on, new ones sought, existing ones nurtured or jettisoned and old ties reactivated and brought back to life according to the exigencies of personality and circumstance. Moreover, in contrast to the bounded temporality of the kind of problem-solving I had set out to find, these relationships were expansive, long-standing and encompassed whole life-times in the community of craftspeople.

Working together- craftwork and collaboration

Mensah was one of the first weavers I met in Kpetoe. Small and sprightly, his shirt and trousers hung loose on his neat frame, and his open face bore a broad grin that would erupt from time to time with infectious laughter. Arriving in the workshop one afternoon shortly after I had begun visiting, Mensah greeted Gabriel with a handshake and a click of his fingers, before squatting down low to the ground on his haunches close by to Gabriel's loom. The pair began to talk and laugh, the quick-fire volley of Ewe passing back and forth between them being lost entirely on me as I sat

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quietly to the side. Having turned to offer greetings to a few other friends around the shed and, brimming with confidence, Mensah introduced himself and gestured for me to follow him and Gabriel to the other side of the workspace. The chat between Gabriel and Mensah continued to flow and soon the pair were unpacking a bag full of brightly coloured spools of rayon thread that I had bought from the store in town the day before. Counted and organised according to colour and laid out in groups on the dusty concrete floor of the workshop, Gabriel and Mensah set to work pegging out the warp threads that would be set in the loom for my first cloth. Involving the careful counting of threads and a series of mathematical and spatial calculations to determine the length of weft being prepared, this was a complex task. The preparation of the warp was a task fundamental to the practice of the craft and yet something that an apprentice weaver might struggle to learn, mastering only at the very end of his training, if at all; I left Kpetoe still unsure of how to lay a background and remained entirely dependent on the help of friends to prepare skeins of warp threads. A tricky job that even for the initiated involved skilfully manoeuvring large numbers of threads laid out across many metres (Clark Smith, 1975: 36), laying the warp was best done collaboratively. Trailing yarn back and forth between two sets of nails hammered into lengths of wood two foot long, Mensah and Gabriel worked fluidly, exchanging a word or a glance here and there as they set up an intricate warp-striped pattern of threads in purple, deep blue and pink. I looked on, asking questions now and then, which although Mensah tried to answer, left me none the wiser. After an hour or so of careful counting, each section being meticulously checked before the next was begun, the last of the background was laid. Snapping the final lengths of yarn from the spool, Gabriel fetched a circular wicker frame from the opposite corner of the workshop and Mensah, bearing back with his weight pivoting around his heels, began to carefully wind the background up. Before long, they had repaired to Gabriel's loom to continue chatting and shortly after, Mensah bid everyone goodbye and headed home, out into the dusky evening. A former member of the workshop who had moved his loom back home several years before, Mensah had nonetheless remained a regular face around the shed. Regularly stopping by to see his friends, and occasionally lending a hand or offering an opinion on a cloth, his visits epitomised how the work of weaving was interlaced with the pleasure of socialising with old friends.

Although Agotime weavers emphasised the importance of being able to work independently, there were a number of instances in which they would band together

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to get things done. Moreover, depending on the nature of the task and the kind of help one was asking for- an opinion in passing, guidance completing a task or to use or borrow someone else's materials- different levels of intimacy inhered in these collaborative relationships. Although pride was attached to being able to manage alone, the laying of warps, particularly those that featured complex striped designs, was a key task on which good friends would collaborate. In the run of an average day, however, there were several less obvious instances in which a weaver might turn to a colleague for help. Facing a weft pattern that one had never attempted before and unsure of what to do, it was perfectly acceptable to call on the help of someone else and weavers often said that being able to do this was one of the main advantages of having a loom in the workshop. There often being more than one way to approach a particular weft-pattern, colleagues would sometimes discuss the advantages of different techniques, before one method or another was settled upon. When someone had finished all the strips that would make up a cloth, often they would work out the best arrangement by laying out the pieces, edge to edge, on the floor of the workshop. Flipping the strips back to front or end to end alters the overall design of the cloth and colleagues would gather at this stage, before the pieces were sent to the tailor to be sewn together, to proffer their opinion as to the most attractive configuration of strips. Whilst novelty in the colour-way and design of a cloth is valued, considerable emphasis is also placed on finding visual balance in the overall appearance of the textile. With a few weavers gathered round, these questions would be debated and strips moved about as different options were suggested. Both of these kinds of assistance were given quite freely and worked between workshop members who were not necessarily the closest of friends. Requiring greater trust between partners and an understanding that offers of help were reciprocal, knowing someone who could lend you a tool or a few spools of yarn was also highly valued. Weavers would work out the amount of thread they needed for a project before they began, drawing on a few simple rules of thumb and their cumulative experience of the craft. Occasionally, miscalculations would occur and a weaver would run out of a particular colour before he had finished making the cloth. With limited capital, having to top up on materials before selling the finished piece and recouping the whole cost of the cloth could pose a financial problem. Knowing someone who trusted you and was willing to lend you a few spools of yarn until you could finish and repay the debt, might mean the difference between being able to deliver a completed cloth to a paying customer and the project being abandoned, tying up a sizeable portion of a weaver's capital.

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Considerable bonds of intimacy and trust also inhered in relationships in which work was shared. As discussed in chapter three, weavers who had large contracts or who were already busy with other cloths would subcontract out part of their work to trusted fellow craftsmen in the workshop and the village. As an arrangement which allowed the principal weaver to meet the demands of his customers during busy periods whilst offering work to those who had little of their own, sharing work functioned to smooth out the flow and availability of jobs and offered a solution to one of the key challenges that faced Agotime weavers.

Making cloths, collaboration and commensality

Looking at the social relationships between weavers, we can see that making a cloth in the workshop was a collaborative effort that drew together a number of different kinds of social ties into a process of material production. With weavers who worked together also tending to socialise and share food with one another, an interesting parallel can be drawn here between the collaborative strategising that went into managing the material problems that arose during the course of weaving and commensality as a process that grew bodies and relationships. In short, if cloths were made collaboratively so too were the bodies of weavers grown together in the shared social and material world of the workshop. Bloch makes the point that sharing food is a semi-universal mechanism for creating common substance, as "...food unites the bodies that eat together and eating different foods distances them" (1999: 138). In the weaving workshop, the production of common substance extended from commensality and talk about certain sorts of foods through to the practice of weaving itself, so that food and work were bound together in the discursive production of a particular type of socialised working body.

Labouring through the sticky heat of the mid-morning or the cool shade of the late afternoon, weaving could be extremely physically demanding. From time to time, over the course of the day, women, bearing tin bowls of fresh oranges and plastic basins full of boiled maize upon their head or carrying a machete and bundles of fresh sugar cane, would wander through the workshop. The kin and neighbours of workshop weavers, they would stop to chat, setting down their wares, untying sleeping infants from their backs and sitting down to speak shortly before carrying on their way. The craftsmen would keep a few loose coins in their pocket or work box, buy a cob of corn or a piece of fruit, break from their weaving to snack and talk before returning to work. Selling food they had grown on family plots and prepared

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themselves, these women's visits were part of the fabric of the workshop, offering an opportunity for all to break from work to eat and talk.

Buying food or drink to share with someone signalled that you valued their company and these gifts would be accompanied by kindly smiles, joking and chatting. To feed someone also initiates a gift-exchange of sorts, in which the offer of food may be returned in some other way at a later date. As a guest in the shed I was often bought snacks of ground-nuts, boiled and roasted maize or oranges by several of my workmates. Remarkably generous in their gifts to me, these offerings were a mark of friendship but also left me feeling slightly uncomfortable, as if I owed each man something that I would one day have to return. In time, as my relationship with them strengthened, their gifts to me were indeed returned in one way or another. These sorts of generalised and diffuse gift-giving relationships were not discrete moments of give and take between two individuals, but rather embedded within the ongoing flow of life and work (MacLean, 2010: 48). Engaging with similar questions surrounding the politics and etiquette of dealing with gifts in the field, Piot has written about the delicate hierarchies created by the back and forth exchange of gifts between the anthropologist, friends and interlocutors over the course of many years (1999: 56). Arguing that these exchanges are more about maintaining relationships than about access to things, Piot makes the important point that these kinds of exchange focus on the fulfilment of immediate needs as well as creating difference between exchange partners (1999: 62-65). It is these differences, and the fact that gift giving reproduces indebtedness, respect and the tacit promise of a return, that allows for leverage between exchange partners and keeps these relationships vital (1999: 70). To not engage in gift giving is considered an abominable refusal of life's fundamentally relational nature and to court accusations of witchcraft (1999: 68). Similar ideas about the link between occult power, gift giving, reciprocity and social relationships can be found across West Africa and played a crucial part in how Agotime weavers negotiated their working and social relationships. Relatedness and maintaining long-lasting and often unresolved ties of exchange is thus not simply a function of strategising to manage the problems of material hardship and scarcity, but perhaps more fundamentally a property of being a full member of the community and a person who can be said not to be caught up in the world of the occult.

Mutual assistance and the limitations of belonging

Whilst food was the thing most often shared in the workshop and that which seemed most obviously tied to processes of belonging and growing into the craft and the community, the strategies employed by weavers to manage their precarious working lives also included more substantial forms of mutual assistance. During times of financial stress, gifts of money would be made to very close friends and family members. When faced with an unexpected expense, particularly those associated with a funeral¹¹⁰ or the “outdooring” of a new baby, a weaver could reasonably expect to defray the costs with gifts of money from relatives and close friends with whom he shared deeply held ties of mutual respect. These relationships, like craft skills, had been slowly grown during a lifetime of shared experience and friendship. They thus, were treasured assets that created a kind of social buffer, allowing weavers to organise their working lives with some sense of security, however limited. In return, it was expected that any gifts would be reciprocated when those who had offered support faced similar expenses themselves. In explaining these arrangements Gabriel said that he was happy to give to a small, select group of his closest friends and associates because he trusted each of them to return the favour should he need help. These arrangements helped to even out unexpected financial demands and the money exchanged over a period of time became the material manifestation of longstanding relationships.

However, the reciprocal nature of these gifts was crucial and clearly emphasised by weavers. To maintain such strong and close ties one had to have the means to reciprocate accordingly when the time came. Thus, in conditions of sustained material scarcity and hardship where one party was simply unable to return the gift, these precious relationships were liable to fray and disintegrate. Lauren MacLean's work on reciprocity in the Brong Ahafo region of western Ghana highlights the fact that much needed assistance was commonly withheld if someone was known to be unable to make a return offer (2010: 51). It could then be argued

¹¹⁰ Funerals in Agotime, and throughout Ghana, are often elaborate and lavish affairs which start on a Friday and can run until Sunday evening. Generally taking place in the deceased's natal community, they are often organised and advertised many weeks in advance so as to allow time for relatives and guests travelling from other parts of the country and abroad to organise a trip home. With large numbers of people travelling considerable distances to attend funerals, the family of the deceased are expected to provide hospitality in the form of food, drink and entertainment for groups of mourners that often number in the hundreds. An opportunity to socialise as well as mourn, funerals are a marker of a family's status and prestige. As such, weavers held that a family should invest as much as they could reasonably afford in a funeral not only out of respect for the dead but also to fulfil their obligations and renew ties to their social network.

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that the strength of the social strategies at work amongst Agotime weavers was only as strong as the resilience of those most vulnerable to adversity. The literature on the resilience, resourcefulness and the capacity of social worlds to endure has made this point well. Meagher's work on informal manufacturing in Nigeria emphasises the fact that in contexts of enduring poverty, state weakness and infrastructural failure, social ties and networks can only do so much and should not be hailed as a cure-all for systemic and deep seated problems (2006; 2010a; 2010b). Elizabeth Povinelli's writing on the social patterning of experiences of abandonment, vulnerability and endurance also provides a fine-grained analysis of the insidious effects of chronic lack and constantly "making-do". In discussing the accumulation of what she terms "quasi-events"- moments of potential harm which are so widespread, slight and everyday that they become masked and pass unremarked- Povinelli argues:

"...the force of will on which [people] rely to continue...meets the rhythm of these decomposing worlds [where] so much is jerry-rigged [,] so much exists in the gray zone [and] there are very few places in which something like ease of coping can be seen. And all of this *everywhere* and *everything* is never huge. It's always a lid. A telephone call missed. A maybe this or maybe that- a neither, neither. [Here] the weakness of the will is coextensive with the wobbly order of the everyday" (2011: 144)

Making the point that the accretion of these seemingly small harms and minor set backs erodes the material and social fabric upon which people's capacity to endure and persist depends, Povinelli highlights the mundane nature of violence and the depth of its grip on life in neoliberal, or "late-liberal", contexts (2011:134, 154).

With limited, and often ever-dwindling resources to draw upon, weavers contend with these chronic depredations by carefully and constantly weighing the value of social ties and things, one against the other, in the hope that their calculations will pay off and that they can keep on "managing". Based on deeply embedded ties of trust which require constant and costly social work to maintain and renew, offers of mutual assistance between weavers were never freely made. They functioned exclusively between specific workshop members and the likelihood that a weaver would offer to share a contract with a colleague or make a contribution to unexpected costs arising from a funeral or other special occasion marked the intimacy not only of their immediate relationship, but also of the ties between families. In this, it was not surprising that some of the most generous offers were made between cousins. Gabriel had two patrilineal cousins in the workshop, Saviour and Bright. The three of them enjoyed warm, friendly and productive relationships with one another that extended beyond the immediate working environment of the workshop and into the fabric of each of their lives. All kinds of social contact and exchange

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were made and maintained between these three men, with financial contributions being made for unexpected costs, work shared amongst them, food exchanged, help offered at each others' looms and visits to one another's looms over the course of the day, to sit and talk. Things would sometimes become more lively, and boisterous volleys of joking and laughing could be heard bouncing between the three of them, from one end of the workshop to the other. They spent time together outside of the workshop at funerals and festivals, and there was a definite sense that in weaving together family ties, a shared working life and friendship, these men offered one another on-going social, emotional and, at times, financial support through the challenges of the work and their lives.

With family ties, friendship and craftwork closely entangled in the life of the workshop and its members, not everyone enjoyed the same membership of a closely knit group as Gabriel and his cousins did. Victor was a shy man in his early thirties who had been apprenticed in adulthood to a skilled older weaver who had since retired, leaving the workshop to take up a job as a nightwatchman at the other end of the village. Victor's parents had been farmers who had come to live in Agotime from another part of the Volta Region, and he spoke of his hope that one day he would make a living from his father's land. Talking with Victor, he was friendly and willing to speak, but lacking the confidence of some of the others, he would avoid eye contact and stumble over his words. From time to time, the ebullient chat and joking amongst workshop members spilt over into open taunting and mockery, with Victor often the target. Quiet in nature and without the family ties and close friendships many of his colleagues enjoyed, at these moments Victor was cast clearly as an outsider. One afternoon, in the midst of a particularly rowdy back and forth between Gabriel and his cousins, Victor was called from his work to carry an empty water sachet to the bin. The indignity of the request was writ large across his face, and yet pushed to the centre of someone else's joke and with the entire workshop looking on, he slowly bent down to pick up the rubbish and walked away, cautiously glancing over his shoulder as he went. As he walked back to his loom he muttered something angrily under his breath. Met by whoops of laughter from a couple of his colleagues and the ashamed silence of everyone else, this quiet protest did nothing to quell his humiliation and he returned to work cowed. Witnessing the exclusionary dynamic at work, which moments before had seemed like playful joking, it was striking that that which made some weavers feel so at home in the craft and the workshop had the potential to leave others feeling alienated and defeated.

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Speaking some time later with the weaver who sat next to Victor in the workshop, this usually tolerant and gentle man began to express his frustration with Victor. Saying that Victor did not know how to lay out his own warp background and that he would often ask his neighbours in the workshop for help when he encountered a problem with his weaving, it was clear that at times there was little patience afforded Victor by even his kindest colleagues. Moreover, the fact that in the course of his apprenticeship Victor had not been taught how to lay the warp of a cloth- a complex skill that is fundamental to a craftsman's capacity to work independently as a master weaver- meant, somewhat paradoxically, that he was perpetually reliant on others whilst being excluded from full knowledge of the craft. Not having a father, uncle or older brother to train him or the opportunity to gradually develop a feeling for the work through long exposure to the techniques and materials of the craft at home, Victor had been reliant upon learning from his master to whom he had no familial ties. When his former mentor had retired and left the workshop, Victor was forced to pay others to help him and, when this was not possible, to fall back on the grudging goodwill of his colleagues. He was running short of both the practical problem-solving abilities and the social capital that would allow him to work successfully as a weaver, and in this he struggled. Although it might be overstating the matter to say that Victor's master had purposefully refrained from showing him how to set the background (see Dilley, 1999: 43), it would seem that he had not fully mastered certain practical, material skills because socially he just was not as embedded within the community of makers as other workshop members. Highlighting the role that the politics of exclusion played in constituting knowledge (see Kresse and Marchand, 2009: 5), it was clear that the important relationships which allowed others to problem-solve and collaboratively resolve the challenges of the work, left Victor in a precarious social position that was reflected in the poorer quality of his workmanship.

Conclusion

Skilled practice developed through the careful cultivation and nurturance of relationships of exchange and commensality, so that the ongoing and insoluble challenges of being a craftsman and a person in Agotime were socially framed. The point was not that everyone who weaved comes from a family of weavers, or that you had to be from Agotime to participate in the community of craftspeople, but rather that growing up as part of a weaving family in Agotime was entangled with the

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development of both skills and a certain sense of belonging. Growing together during the course of a lifetime's involvement with the community of makers, processes of enskilmment and emplacement form the basis of weavers problem-solving strategies and are fundamentally at the root of a craftsman's subjectivity. Where ties to the community are poorer, this seems to entail a weaker grasp of skills and a reduced capacity to collaboratively problem-solve around the practical and social issues which arise in the process of crafting. The idiom of food, sharing and nurturance that runs through the everyday life of the workshop and powerfully expresses ideas of community, growth and belonging, thus also entails its opposite. To be outside or on the margins of the workshop community could be characterised as an experience that stunted the growth of weavers who, without the support of their fellows, were unable to develop into independent, fully fledged craftsmen and struggled on, marginalised and reliant. If weaving was "the work of the community", then it was this craft, so often shared with warmth and friendship, but also laden with the potential to exclude, that defined the possibilities and limitations of belonging amongst these men.

Questions of community are explored further in the last chapter, with the focus shifting from the everyday practices that constitute a sense of belonging and exclusion to the role that craftwork, cultural heritage, history and festival practices play in forging a community. Focusing on the disjunctions between how the paramount chief has framed Agotime's annual festival and young weavers' attitudes towards the celebration, the ethnography explores how the heritage narratives on display in the festival are structured according to unequal power dynamics. In this, Agotime's festival makes compelling claims to political recognition, whilst simultaneously sidelining the voices of young craftspeople.

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Agotime's *Agbamevoza*- The crafting of citizenship and the politics of recognition in a Ghanaian festival

Each year in early September, the *Agbamevoza Kente* festival celebrates Agotime's weaving traditions. A complex performance of heritage and the politics of place, the *Agbamevoza* was instituted in 1995 by Paramount Chief Nene Nuer Keteku III in Kpetoe¹¹¹. Over the past two decades it has developed into a week long festival marked throughout Agotime featuring historical re-enactment, firing of musketry, displays of Agotime *kente* weaving, a "Women and Children's Day" that seeks to recoup a number of life-cycle rites, an *agbamevo kente* weaving competition, a beauty pageant and a spelling bee. Festivities culminate in a Grand Durbar, held on the Saturday following the celebrations at the Ghanaian Customs and Excise Preventive Service Academy parade ground in Kpetoe, marking a high-point in the calendar of the community (see plate 22). The event places Kpetoe on the cultural map of Ghana, a country renowned and marketed for its festivals (see Day, 2004; Lentz, 2001 and Odetei, 2002), whilst playing a part in the (re)construction of a distinctive heritage that, fractured by the partition of Agotime between Ghana and Togo, has long been considered "...a kind of proxy Ewe [culture]." (Nugent, 2008: 948). The festival also played a key role in the development of this project, as I arrived to begin fieldwork in Kpetoe during the midst of the 2012 festivities and found myself a year later celebrating alongside the weavers who had taught me the craft. Having the festival frame the fieldwork gave me the chance to explore how heritage is constructed and valued differently by Agotime weavers and members of the local elite, and the relation these contested values have to the weavers' craft and their livelihoods.

¹¹¹ Agotime's *Agbamevozo* preceeded the establishment in 1998 of a *kente* festival in Bonwire, the centre of Asante weaving (Ross, 1998: 23).

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Plate 22- The durbar ground at the Ghanaian Customs and Excise Preventive Service Academy, Kpetoe September 2013. Photograph by author.

This final chapter considers the role that the *Agbamevoza* has played in engendering a politics of recognition and citizenship in Agotime. Focusing on how the paramount chief has framed the festival, and how young workshop weavers engage with the celebration, issues of contested power, history and the performative elaboration of citizenship, both local and national, come to the fore. Crucial is the idea that:

"Heritage is... formed in a plural discursive and aesthetic field, in which state officials, chiefs, ethnic activists, religious leaders and cultural entrepreneurs seek to convince audiences of the appeal of their versions of heritage while disclaiming others" (de Witte and Meyer, 2012: 44)

In engaging with notions of Agotime's past, this chapter, rather than seeking out a definitive history, considers the mutability of memory and the slippery nature of storytelling. During the course of fieldwork the contested value of Agotime heritage became quickly apparent, and I realised that attempts to construct a cohesive picture of local history would elide the politicised tensions between the multiple perspectives of weavers, the paramount chief and other members of the local elite. The aim then is on the one hand, to highlight how the symbolic, rhetorical and imaginative resources of local history can be used to fashion a distinct sense of belonging and compelling claims to recognition and resources. On the other side, the ways that young weavers are excluded from this process will be explored. Thus, the forms of history and heritage-making at work in this chapter are relational ones, where power is at play

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and what is at stake is not simply the unfolding impact of the past in the present, but rather how the exigencies of current circumstance and personality remake ideas about Agotime's past. In foregrounding particular lived experiences of cultural practice and focusing on certain historical narratives, the representations of festival practice put forth here are partial and question heritage as either monolithic or fixed.

These multiple perspectives on both past and present, together with the weaving practices for which Agotime is known, form the fulcrum of the *Agbamevoza* festivities. Wedding craftsmanship to cultural performance and globalised flows of culture, the festival figures vividly in the life of the community and its diaspora. However, with ideas about the past being relationally configured, the perspectives projected most prominently through the festival tended to be those of a local elite, with the concerns of young craftsmen often going unheard. Thus, the chapter will consider how, through the hierarchical organisation of the festivities, young weavers' perspectives were sidelined to the extent that a celebration focused on *agbamevo kente* fundamentally failed to challenge the conditions in which young weavers struggled to make a living.

Crafting festival practices and creating history

Since its inception in the mid-1990s, the annual celebration of the *Agbamevoza* has engaged with and re-imagined a distinctive Agotime history. Much of this work has been done by the Paramount Chief, Nene Nuer Keteku III, whose writings on the history of the Agotime people, experience as a master *agbamevo kente* weaver and vision for the festival have contributed to how the event has been conceived of and structured. Nene Keteku's writings, the way in which he speaks about the festival, its history and how it is performed are important in terms of the claims they make to recognition at the local, state and international levels. As such, this analysis looks at how the resources of the past, inscribed in text, spoken as words and translated into festival performance, are creatively turned towards the political and social exigencies of the present, but also how these resources are not equally distributed, with the views of young craftspeople often missing from the debate. These cleavages are at the heart of festival's vitality, but also speak to concerns about the viability of craftwork and "indigenous" claims to culture in a globalising world.

Notions of locality and ideas of the global in a craft festival

Nene Keteku spent several long sessions in the summer and autumn of 2013, and again during June 2015, talking with me about the place weaving holds in the life of Agotime and the process by which the Agbamevoza festival came to be celebrated. He emphasised that the development of both weaving skills and the festival itself call for dedicated work if they are to continue to thrive and grow. As such, here I take ideas of the “local”, “national”, “global”, “culture” and “community” as actively constructed achievements, made through the complex interplay of actors, relationships and things. In the process of continual negotiation, the idea of what constitutes locality, the global, community and culture are also mutually defined so that what happens at the local level plays into a sense of community, the nation and global flows of culture (See Piot, 1999). Just as the educational and working lives of Agotime's weavers are, in part, defined by the interconnections between experience and opportunities (or lack of them) at the local, regional and global levels, so too do ideas of culture and heritage emerge at the interstices between the local community, the nation and global cultural flows. It is clear that the interconnections between these terms has emerged, at least in part, in relation to the development agenda of both the national government and NGOs. Yarrow picks up on this in his work on the relationships between rural communities and development NGOs in Ghana, arguing that “concepts of the ‘local’ are used to refer to political and social relationships far less bounded than the term suggest” (Yarrow, 2011: 118). Similar dynamics are at play in Agotime, with the collaboration between Nene Keteku, politicians and heritage NGOs working to frame aspects of Agotime culture within a series of overlapping contexts which straddle the local, national and global. Not everyone, however, is invested in the collaborative construction of the Agbamevoza, and the sidelining of young weavers in the construction of the Agotime festival highlights the exclusionary dynamics which are at work in the making of heritage.

Crafting Agotime culture in the Ewe-speaking hinterlands

Agotime has a history of complex entanglements with its Ewe neighbours and the Ewe secessionist movement that gained momentum during the independence era, with calls for self-determination and a united homeland for both Ghanaian and Togolese Ewes, emplaced Agotime within an Ewe-speaking social and cultural context. Indeed, the fact that Ewe is the majority language in Agotime masks the

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historical and cultural disjunctures between Agotime and its Ewe neighbours. The Agotime paramount has, however, worked to delineate the distinctions between Agotime history and culture, and that of the nearby Adaklu and Ho Ewes. He has written extensively on Agotime history and weaving (Keteku, n.d.) and the proud vision of local history and culture he writes relates to the form the festival has taken. His writings and involvement in the establishment and ongoing organisation of the festival are attempts to translate and disseminate a particular view of what Agotime culture is and might become. This work positions the Agotime paramountcy as an intermediary through which complete and “true” knowledge of Agotime culture can be accessed, a position that traditional leaders and chiefs throughout Ghana and across West Africa generally tend to occupy (Yarrow, 2011: 136). Importantly, the attitude of village elders towards heritage matters mirrored their stance on the dissemination of craft knowledge. Key figures in the local elite thus positioned themselves as the “true” bearers of an entwined body of cultural and crafting knowledge that brought together narrow strip weaving and festival traditions.

Marked by the generational cleavages that distinguished elders from youths in the weaving workshop and beyond, knowledge was an unevenly distributed good, concentrated in the hands of an elite who had the power to delegitimise the views of younger members of the community. Conversely, these social relations were productive of ignorance just as they constituted knowledge and power. Crucially then, the kinds of claims Keteku makes of history are tied up with his experience as paramount chief and the attendant demands that characterise his role in the community and beyond. In his reading of Agotime's past, the need for tact and diplomacy must be carefully balanced against the tendency towards aggrandisement that comes with his status as a local chief and “big man”.

Instituting a celebration of local history and culture was a way not only of asserting the independence of Agotime and marking the differences between them and their neighbours, but also of carving out a space in which local demands for recognition and support in development might be made of the Ghanaian state (Lentz, 2001: 48-50; Odetei, 2002: 17; Nugent 2012: 127), NGOs and the diaspora. As a chief of longstanding, sensitive to the politics of place at work in this borderland, Nene Keteku was aware from the outset that instituting a festival that focused on Agotime's militarised history¹¹² risked reminding Agotime's neighbours of “...the way

¹¹² The Agotimes are said to have resisted the Asante attacks of 1869, defeating the invaders in a battle at Kpetoe. According to Keteku, the Agotimes "...continued with wars of plunder and raids until the colonial powers came to Eweland." (Keteku, *A Short History of the Agotime People*: 26), with Nugent

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we captured their ancestors, the way we tormented them". Moreover, official recognition and financial support for local cultural festivals is available from both the National Commission on Culture and the Regional House of Chiefs if the celebration is thought to "...promote interethnic exchange and development" (Lentz, 2001: 54; see also de Witte and Meyer, 2012: 48). Furthermore, a festival celebrating the ending of war with Asante, the *Avakeza*, had been staged twice in the early 1980s before being abandoned when the Ghana-Togo border was closed for most of the remainder of the 1980s. To revive this celebration more than ten years later meant revisiting the heroism of Agotime's military victory at the expense of drawing attention to the part that slave trading had played in the area's military history (Nugent, 2008: 936-937). Instead, as an *agbamevo kente* weaver who had maintained links with the craft throughout his career as a teacher and after taking up his chiefly position¹¹³, Nene Keteku chose instead to celebrate the craftwork of the community.

The *Agbamevoza* and the politicisation of craftwork

Rather than depoliticising the festival though, the contentious politics of history have been transposed onto weaving and the weavers themselves, with craftwork taking up an important position in the definition and negotiation of what it means to be an Agotime person. Weavers expressed their sense of belonging to the community in terms of their work, which was routinely described as "the work of the community". Having come to signify the town at a national level across Ghana, locally woven *Agbamevo kente* cloths are widely worn during the festival by the chiefly elites, weavers and Agotime residents, although this is not so much the case on the Togolese side of the border (Nugent, 2010a: 91-92). The primacy of *agbamevo kente* and its makers over Asante weaving is reiterated repeatedly by craftsmen and festival goers during the celebrations and over the course of the year, the cloth standing as a kind of proxy for the contentious history between Agotime and the Asantes. This is despite the fact that fashionable and marketable cloths often draw on an aesthetics which is Asante in origin, with younger weavers finding that their time is not profitable invested in learning to make "older" Agotime cloths. Taking ownership of local textile traditions and projecting this onto the national stage constitutes a community working and living on the borders of the Ghanaian state, using history to

saying that it is indeed likely that the Agotimes went on to militarily dominate their Ewe neighbours (Nugent, 2008: 937)

¹¹³ Interestingly, although perhaps coincidentally, Lamb notes in her writing on Asante weaving traditions that although weaving skills are not a requisite for chieftaincy in the weaving centre of Bonwire, the Bonwirehene (or chief) usually has been trained in the craft (1975:125).

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claim recognition from an Asante elite that has long dominated national politics and the globalised imaginary of what it is to be Ghanaian.

Discussing the early development of the *Agbamevoza* festival, Nene Keteku spoke eruditely, skilfully weaving together local Dangbe terms, acronyms and the language of local government and bureaucracy with the captivating flair of a man who knew how to persuade and impress with words and stories. In her ethnography of the Ghanaian press, Hasty coins the term “Big English” to describe similar strategies employed by journalists who combine rhetoric reminiscent of Akan courtly language with language accrued through formal education and contact with the institutions of state and development (Hasty, 2005: 59-60). Speaking persuasively in a tone that brought together “local” knowledge with the authority of bureaucracy, Nene Keteku described how the form and content of the festival programme had evolved in relation to a range of political and personal exigencies. Using the social and historical resources that were to hand, Nene Keteku and his festival organising committee responded strategically to shifts in power at the local and national levels, incorporating their own changing experience and knowledge into the event as they went. Listening to the paramount chief describe the inauguration of the festival and its early years offered a lesson in the power of oratory to shape and redefine local perceptions of recent, and more distant, history. Both the festival itself and how Nene Keteku spoke about it were types of *bricolage* that pulled together disparate elements to imagine and perform a new type of Agotime history. These festival practices and modes of speech were, then, not ones of representation, but rather of mediation, where the events of the past were variously conjoined to the present concerns and demands of certain individuals and groups within the community. However, with this process of reworking being done mainly by members of elite groups- primarily Nene Keteku and his organising committee, local business people and politicians- the type of community history that emerged was clearly implicated in local hierarchies of power, largely excluding the views and concerns of young *agbamevo kente* weavers.

Lentz's work in northwestern Ghana argues that *bricolage* of this kind has long characterised cultural festivals across the country:

“...many-sided mixing and mutual borrowing of festivals [in which] the cultural and political interaction between town and country, capital city and local elites, village and district headquarters and village chiefs and paramount chiefs... shapes the... festival [dynamic]” (2001: 50)

Considered as a project embedded within, and negotiating a particular and often fragmented history, the festival can be seen to emerge:

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“...not [from a] tabula rasa... [but] rather, [as] experience of those events and processes that become sedimented as memory are themselves mediated and configured by memory. From such a position we can recast persistence, recurrence and reproduction as integral parts of transformation and innovation rather than as their antithesis” (Shaw, 2002: 10).

Bringing together a multitude of practices, people and perspectives, the *Agbamevoza* was both embedded within the wider context of Ghanaian cultural politics and has been crafted through the careful selection and creative re-imagination of various local cultural and historical resources, to present a particular view of Agotime’s cultural heritage.

The festival planning committee and inscribing community hierarchies

In order to understand how the paramount’s view of Agotime’s heritage and history has come to define the *Agbamevozo*, attention must be paid to how the festival was organised and the limited role that young weavers played in the process. Tasked with preparing the festival programme, organising events and paying for the rental of the equipment and furniture needed to stage the grand durbar, the festival planning committee was instrumental in the staging of the annual festivities. The paramount chief headed the committee, aided by local business leaders and representatives from the local assembly and meetings were organised in private in the months leading up to the festival. Despite the *Agbamevoza* seeking to celebrate local traditions of weaving, no workshop weavers were on the planning committee. Describing how committee members were chosen, Francis said:

“As for that, they demand something for it- money! The planning committee people, they contribute, they put their money inside the festival, to rent chairs and canopies. After that, if they get contributions or festival fees, they then deduct their money from it. So we, the workshop people, we don’t have money, and if they demand an amount of money from us, we can’t afford it. That is why they didn’t put us on the planning committee board” (2016)

Compounding their exclusion from the planning of festivities, workshop members were also ill-informed about the festival programme, to the extent that over the past few years they have missed parts of the festival entirely because they were unsure where or when events were happening. Although this was most likely a matter of miscommunication rather than a concerted attempt to sideline young weavers, the effect was to re-inscribe extant social and economic hierarchies within the community onto the festival. Elders and local “big men” acted as gatekeepers both of material resources and knowledge about the celebration and the voices of young weavers were sidelined, a dynamic similar to that highlighted by Joy in her account of Djenné’s *Festival du Djenné* (2012: 174). Where weaver’s involvement was sought,

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it was not on equal terms in the co-creation of local heritage, but rather as spectators at the durbar or poorly rewarded participants in the weaving competition. When Gabriel, Felix, Joshua, Bright and Francis decided to run a stall selling *agbamevo kente* at the durbar in 2013, they paid for the pitch themselves, and their involvement was predicated around their financial contribution to the planning committee.



Plate 23- Francis, Joshua, Gabriel and Felix at their *kente* stall in the durbar ground, Kpetoe September 2013. Photograph by author.

Without the social or material resources to contribute more fully to the planning effort, weavers' perspective on the event was starkly different from that of the paramount chief. They spoke very little about the historical and cultural elements of the celebration that were so highly vaunted by the paramount and his elders and festival season in the workshop was primarily an opportunity to make and sell cloth. In the summer of 2013, Gabriel hoped that a successful festival would compensate for a slow summer when commissions had been hard to come by and the fact that visitors from across Ghana and further afield were likely to visit the festival was seen as a chance to make new work contacts and widen weavers' networks of customers. The weeks leading up to the *Agbamevoza* were usually some of the busiest of the year, and the durbar on the final Saturday of the festival was a day of work as weavers tried to sell textiles and accessories to festival visitors. Francis described his business aspirations for the festival, saying:

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"The only thing that we are hoping to see is that people will be coming and buying things, so that we will benefit from the festival...Last year, people came, white people were here and they bought our strips [of cloth] with the writing- some of us do writing on the cloth, 'Greetings from Ghana', so they bought those ones" (2016)

The evening after the durbar was, however, spent meeting friends and relaxing at one of several drinking "spots" in town and Francis and Gabriel said that their greatest pleasure during festival time was the chance to see friends and family, as the celebration gave the Agotime diaspora an opportunity to travel home (see Gugler, 1971: 412). Alongside the fun of socialising, in a quiet border town like Kpetoe the festival was also a major event, replete with colourful sights, music and dancing and the celebrations was also seen as a form of entertainment that would make for good stories. Francis said:

"For me, myself, I like to see those things so I will know how to tell a story about it to my son or somebody [else and] I have been planning to take [my son] to go and watch everything, see everything!" (2016)

In this, it is clear that despite being sidelined by the organising committee, weavers attached their own meanings to the celebration, using the festival as an opportunity to diversify their customer networks and reconnect with old friends, combining their work with the satisfactions of socialising.

The power of performing history in a local festival

If the festival took on different values for various members of the community, Agotime festival practices, and the images of local heritage and history that they project, were also crucially legitimised by borrowing from a number of other successful Ghanaian festivals and cultural displays. Historical re-enactment is a practice which, key to the construction of the *Agbamevoza* as an Agotime tradition, is also part of the annual *Hogbetsotso* festival commemorating the Anlo Ewe's escape from Notsie. It also formed an important aspect of 2000's lavish centenary celebrations of the military resistance offered by Yaa Asantewa to British colonial incursions into Asanteman (see Day, 2004).

In the Asanteman festival historical re-enactment formed a bridge between the exigencies of the present day and the labile possibilities of a re-imagined past (Day, 2004: 107). Similar processes were at work in the *Agbamevoza* and during the 2013 festivities I arrived at the weaving workshop one morning to find the place almost deserted. I asked the lone weaver who remained at his loom where everyone had gone and was told that his colleagues had headed out en masse to Agotime Zukpe, a village in Togolese Agotime, for a display of musketry fire. A rowdy outdoor

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gathering of men dressed in brown and red *batakali* smocks, pinned all over with protective amulets and wielding hunting rifles, the event was described in a recent documentary of the festival as a display of *Asafo* groups (Folk Fine Art, 2013). *Asafo* companies are most widely known as the Fante warrior groups associated with the Fante coastal communities of Cape Coast and Elmina. As local militia, coastal *Asafo* groups mustered considerable resistance to the Gold Coast colonial regime (Hernaes, 1998: 1-2) and the visual culture of their appliquéd flags has been widely celebrated in the world of West African art (see Adler and Barnard, 1992; Clarke, n.d.).

The history of *Asafo* in the Volta region is, however, quite distinct and has its origins in the earlier Asante and Akwamu expansionism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as territories east of the Volta increasingly fell under Akan control. Under threat from formidable Akan armies, a group of hitherto independent and disparate polities in the south of the Volta region, including the peoples of Agotime, Kpando, Ho and Peki, banded together to mount a defence, becoming known as the Krepi states (Yayoh, 2002: 67-68; Baku, 1998: 22). In coalition, these states successfully rebelled against Akwamu suzerainty in 1833 (Verdon, 1983: 77; Yayoh, 2002: 75). In his account of Agotime history, Nene Keteku notes the military role that Agotime, which had originally been allied to the Akwamus, played in this defeat (Keteku, 12-14). It is thought that it was during these tumultuous military encounters with the Asante-backed Akwamu that the political and military structures of many groups east of the Volta took shape, with the Akan tradition of *Asafo* military groups becoming an important feature of social organisation in the region (Baku, 1998: 22-23).

In recalling Agotime's past military endeavours at the *Agbamevoza*, historical recreation and the performance of *Asafo* groups links the area with a broader history of military action, heroism and resistance across the region. Moreover, as an astute politician, aware of the value of cultural display and adept at gauging opinion, Nene Keteku included the firing of musketry at Agotime Zukpe within the broader auspices of the craft festival as a measured nod towards those "... who still had the interest that those war times should be remembered... If we [did not] put that in the festival, they would not take interest... It was to incorporate them" (2013). In this way, local exigencies and allusions to a history of military power across the Gold Coast and Ghana came together in the staging of the *Agbamevoza*.

Whatever the part played by historical re-enactment in staging the festival, the view of Agotime culture enacted during the firing of musketry was a particular one

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that did not necessarily resonate with *agbamevo kente* weavers themselves. Although many were spectators at the event, for some these displays were linked, uncomfortably, to ideas about the past, Christianity and “traditional” religious practices. One young craftsman explained that the pastor at his church had warned congregants of the spiritual danger posed by such events, where *Asafo* warriors were thought to be followers of “traditional” religion and possibly *juju* men. For others, the issue was more mundane and a hazy grasp of local history and a lowly position in local hierarchies meant that although they might participate in the event, they lacked the social and material resources to contest the image of local culture at stake in the performance. Which is not to say that workshop members were disengaged with the ideas of local identity and history that these events embodied, but rather that, for the large part, they had less power than the local elite to fundamentally shape or challenge the dominant discourses.

Along with historical re-enactment, the link between Agotime and a history of interaction with Akan polities was also made in the chiefly regalia Nene Keteku and his area chiefs used during the festival's grand durbar, which included several gilded, carved staffs that he kept for ceremonial occasions (see plate 24). Most commonly associated with the linguists of Akan courts, the carved finials of these staffs are bound up with a widely recognised and rich proverbial and oratory culture (Ross, 1982). Widely adopted across southern Ghana as insignia of chiefly power, Nene Keteku had bought his from a carver whilst travelling away from the Volta Region. On display alongside an impressive black and gold-studded throne in the cool, comfortable parlour where Nene Keteku received his guests, one staff was gold and topped with a leopard and the other featured a silver bird. As we spoke he explained laughingly that the gold leopard staff was associated with a military proverb and so, in the name of diplomacy, he avoided using it when meeting to resolve a dispute or other contentious issues. Next to the two staffs sat a white painted stool, the seat of which was supported by the outspread wings of a carved bird. The stool is a potent Akan symbol of political, ceremonial and religious power¹¹⁴. The stool, like the carved staffs, has thus become a powerful symbol of the power of tradition and heritage throughout southern Ghana and beyond. With contact between Akan

¹¹⁴ The golden stool of Asante is seen to embody the legitimacy and spirit of the Asante nation as a whole. The Yaa Asantewa war of 1900, which resulted in the annexation of Asante to the British Empire (see Day, 2004), was triggered when British governor of the Gold Coast, Sir Frederick Hodgson, demanded to be allowed to sit on it. During his presidential inauguration in 1957, post-independence leader Kwame Nkrumah capitalised on these allusions in his use of a carved stool, covered in gold (Hess, 2001: 65).

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polities and Adangbe speaking peoples (including the Agotimes, Adangbe, Krobos and people of the Shai Hills) during the nineteenth century having been fundamental in the constitution of chiefly power in these areas (Quarcoopome, 1991: 60), there is a shared heritage of chiefly regalia. Although Nene Ketku's stool and the stiffs, brought out and used during the *Agbamevoza* grand durbar, do not function exactly as those of Akan polities might, their inclusion in the Agotime festival draws on the widely recognised visual culture of powerful Akan polities. This rich heritage of association with chiefly power, skilful oratory and military success positions Agotime powerfully in relation to hegemonic constructions of Ghanaian national culture premised upon ideas of "unity in diversity".



Plate 24- Chiefly *Agbamevoza* procession through Kpetoe using gilded staffs and ceremonial umbrellas, September 2015. Photo taken by Francis Olu Keku.

Thus, a shared visual and performative heritage is evident in festival celebrations across southern Ghana. Contact and exchange between diverse heritage traditions is a building block of Ghanaian national identity that has been promoted by the Ministry of Culture since independence (Lentz, 2001: 53). Moreover, support for local heritage as a building block of national identity extends from government policy and practice through cultural performance and into Ghana's education system, where young people are taught cultural studies along with dance, drama and drumming

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traditions as a means of inculcating a sense of local and national identity (Coe, 2005: 77). In Kpetoe, where emphasis was placed on young people engaging with the relationship between the particularities of Agotime heritage and the shared auspices of a broader national perspective, the *Agbamevoza* is as much an educational event as much as a social one.

Cultural performance, media and the formation of localised citizenship

These issues come to the fore in the “Miss *Agbamevo*” beauty contest that takes place on the Friday evening before the Grand Durbar in Kpetoe (see plate 25). “Miss *Agbamevo*” combines youth involvement with cultural performance, educational imperatives and the aim of “promoting *kente* in the country and beyond” (Hormeku, 2012). Tickets for the pageant were sold in advance and on the night a crowd gathered around a catwalk festooned with flowers and ribbons in the courtyard of “America House”, one of the few two storey buildings in town. The competition followed a standard format with participants modelling evening dress and *agbamevo kente* as well as having their general knowledge tested and giving short, didactic oral presentations. The competition was described as “empowering the young ladies in the community to acquire public speaking skills for engagement with institutions of state [as well as] enabling the elegant ladies to be abreast of [the] times” (Hormeku, 2012). As the women presented on a given theme- the dangers of alcohol and tobacco, the causes of Hepatitis C or the importance of girls' education- the language of the state and co-opted government jargon peppered their speech. Adding authority to what contestants say, this language projected an idealised type of Ghanaian citizen who, in practising safe sex, treating girl children equally, being hygiene conscious, refraining from smoking and controlling their appetites, regulated themselves as modern subjects of the state. In the context of the pageant, the performance of citizenship was highly gendered. Women were presented for consumption by the audience, and materially rewarded for conforming to local and more widely accepted standards of feminine beauty and comportment. Mens' roles were more loosely defined, acting as organisers and spectators, directing and consuming the performances on stage. For male workshop members, whose part in the organisation of the festivities was limited, the gendering of the event was experienced as a devaluation of their contribution to the construction of Agotime citizenship. Although not expressed explicitly in terms of gender, weavers said that the disparity in the value of prizes offered pageant contestants and those taking part in the weaving competition was proof that they

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were being relegated. Indeed, how could it be fair that the women would be rewarded with computers and smartphones whilst the male craftsmen who produced the cloth at the heart of the festival were offered a coffee table? Implicit in these complaints was the sense that whilst the beauty pageant offered an entertaining diversion, it was the male weavers work which should be most highly valued.



Plate 25- Poster Advertising the Miss *Agbamevoza* Kente Beauty Pageant, September 2014.

"Miss *Agbamevo*" contestants posed to be filmed and photographed by spectators and organisers on mobile phones and digital cameras, their faces emblazoned on promotional posters around Kpetoe and memorialised in a documentary of the

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festival (Hormeku, 2012). The scrutiny the contestants were subject to parallels, if not equals, that experienced by participants in the national “Ghana's Most Beautiful” beauty pageant. A longstanding feature aired on the private free-to-view channel TV3, its reality TV format has a woman representing each of Ghana's regions. The programmes is described as:

“...promot[ing] Ghana's national unity amongst the unique regions, its people, their culture and values of Ghana through the eyes of ten beautiful women from the various regions [where]...these beautiful, talented women must show the nation something from their region and after three months, the most beautiful in knowledge, moral values and good upbringing in the ways of her people is crowned Ghana's Most Beautiful” (TV3, 2013).

Cultural performances featuring “traditional” clothing, bodily adornment, music and dance typical of the contestant's home region were important parts of the competition and these performances captured and promoted in a wider national context the spirit of local traditions. Each woman's contribution was presented equally before the viewer, given the same amount of air time and supposedly judged by common criteria of grace, knowledge and “moral values”. Circulated widely through television and social media, these images presented national heritage as a multiplicity of cultural practices which, in their diversity, were equally valued. From this perspective, national identity was composed of a unified patchwork of local cultures, with citizenship at the local level constituting an important part of what it means to be a Ghanaian. The institution of a beauty pageant that mirrors the entwinement of cultural performance and the media at a national level makes important claims about the part Agotime citizenship and culture has to play in configuring national identity and vice versa. The politics of place, citizenship and heritage are, of course, more complex and contested than those presented in “Ghana's Most Beautiful” or “Miss Agbamevoza”. Nevertheless, both speak compellingly to how local culture is circulated, shared and comes to shape what it means to be a local citizen and a national subject.

Aesthetic and sensual pleasure also played an important part in the staging of these events. The links between cultural performance, heritage, media and fashion were appealing to a young audience, and the pageant was one of the most popular parts of each year's festivities. Workshop weavers would accompany their girlfriends to the beauty pageant and the event was an important social occasion for young people in the town which foregrounded consumption and fashion. The images portrayed in these performances were also aspirational ones tied to hopeful practices of self-improvement and success (Gilbert, 2014: 331). In their focus on the

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techniques of self-control and success these pageants were imbued with the North American traditions of self-help and positive thinking that also inflect the prosperity gospel (Gifford, 2004: 44-53; Gyadu, 2005: 203-205). Considering the often fraught relationship between heritage, tradition and Pentecostalism beauty pageants prominently featuring modes of dress and practices considered “traditional” constitute an interesting space in which heritage and aspirational subjectivities meet. In this, they work to project positive new forms of “African values” (de Witte and Meyer, 2012: 56), which are of particular interest when thinking about how young Ghanaians manage the challenges and opportunities they face in their educational and working lives.

Festival heritage, the Adangbe diaspora and the production of locality

If contact and exchange between a number of festival traditions, facilitated by mass media has meant there are shared elements of ceremony that are widely recognisable across southern Ghana, the importance which locality has in the production of festival culture is clear. The distinctly “localised” feel of *Agbamevoza* traditions comes to the fore in the way that aspects of girls’ initiation rites have been incorporated into the celebrations. Historically, Agotime families would have kept specific types of *agbamevo kente* cloth for the performance of various life-cycle rites including female initiation at puberty (*dipo*) and the outdooring of a new baby. These cloths would have been kept in the family and jealously guarded, forming a crucial part of each generation’s inheritance. Beginning in the late seventeenth century with the Akan wars, which saw the rise of the Asantes, through the coming of the Basel Missionaries in the early nineteenth century and the eventual incursions of British colonial power in the Gold Coast, a succession of influences have historically served to undermine and erode the importance of *dipo* rites amongst the Agotime and their Dangme speaking kin west of the volta (Wison, 1987: 494). The explosion in Pentecostal Christianity across southern Ghana since the late 1970s, changing family structure and government drives to expand the education of girls have cemented a precipitous decline in the performance of these rites. The abandonment of village shrines in Agotime Afegame¹¹⁵ meant that *dipo* rites now do not take place at all in the area. The few families who wanted their daughters initiated were compelled to send them to the Adangbe-speaking Krobo settlements west of the Volta (see Steegstra,

¹¹⁵ Afegame is considered the site of first settlement for the Agotime people and in Ewe *afegame* means “the big house” and refers to the compound of the founder of the settlement and his descendants (Klein, 1998: 14)

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2005). Nene Keteku saw this shift in traditions as a threat not only to the fabric of Agotime's cultural heritage but also to the moral formation and education of the youth; community elders often linked a disavowal of local traditions with a (perceived) increase in juvenile delinquency, unemployment and teenage pregnancy. Whether or not the popular abandonment of *dipo* and other rites had indeed led to social problems within the community, the inclusion of a Women and Children's Mini Durbar in the festival programme was an attempt to culturally recoup some of what has been perceived to be lost. Moreover, as a keen proponent of the notion of an Adangbe diaspora, Nene Keteku has dramatised the linkages between the Agotimes and fellow Dangbe- speakers by including elements of Krobo *dipo* rites and other rites into the Women and Children's Mini Durbar. Featuring a programme of dances performed by women and girls, special *agbamevo kente* cloths are worn and strings of Krobo beads like those used to decorate neophytes in the *dipo* rituals are placed around the necks and waists of participants. Distinctive geometric white chalk patterns made up of crosses, circles, spots and lines that mirror those donned by Adangbe shrine devotees are painted on the faces, upper bodies, arms and legs of performers (Quarcoopome, 1991: 59-50; Hormeku, 2012).

The performance of elements of Adangbe and Krobo ritual in the course of the *Agbamevoza* functions in two related ways. Firstly, in recouping a tradition that has been largely abandoned as "pagan" into the performance of a cultural festival, elements of *dipo* can be performed without participants being stigmatised as "backsliding" Christians. This is important in a context where, since the advent of the Basel Missionaries in southern Ghana in the early nineteenth century, *dipo* rites have been constituted as pagan practices (Steegstra, 2005: 74), that impede modernisation (Wilson, 1987: 494), and in which Evangelical forms of Christianity continue to be very powerful arbiters of behaviour, taste and public mores. In her work on the relationship between Pentecostalism, memory and modernity in contemporary Ghana, Meyer describes a similar situation in which the traditional festival rites of her Ga interlocutors were being abandoned and neglected with the rise in membership of Pentecostal churches (1998: 316). As such, framing involvement in the Women and Children's Mini Durbar as a cultural performance and celebration of heritage, rather than an overtly religious or ritual practice, works to lessen the threat to Christian practice and belief that is posed by full involvement in *dipo* and other Adangbe rites. In a sense, the performance of these rites in the context of the festival sanitises them, making them palatable for consumption as cultural spectacle. This

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dynamic, whereby religious practices are reformulated as cultural heritage and in the process made profane and somehow safe, is not limited to Agotime and has been widely identified in disparate cultural contexts (Meyer and de Witte, 2013: 277). Secondly, the incorporation of these elements into the *Agbamevo* situates the Agotime in relation to an Adangbe diaspora, anchoring their sense of having a distinctive heritage within a wider context of cultural practice in Ghana.

Whatever links the festival might draw between the Agotime and their Adangbe kin, it is important to note that for young workshop weavers their sense of belonging to an Adangbe diaspora is, at best, hazy. In Kpetoe, none but the very eldest members of the community could actually speak Dangbe, and although the situation is slightly different in Agotime Afegame, a village on the Ghanaian side of the border where Dangbe is still more widely spoken than Ewe, young people seldom spoke about the language or their links to Adangbe or other Dangbe speaking groups. As such, the disparity between the ambitions of the chief and his organising committee for the festival and the experiences of young weavers highlights how history and culture are relationally configured along the lines of power and in the interests of the local elite.

Agotime on show: government and NGO recognition of the Agbamevoza

Describing the first years of the *Agbamevoza*, Nene Keteku wove a cohesive narrative that emphasised the importance of fostering relationships between government officials, local politicians, NGOs and the media in negotiating the festival's standing in the community and beyond Agotime. The *Agbamevoza* was inaugurated in 1995, and the press were invited the following year. The increased media profile of the celebration saw then MP for Keta, Dan Kwasi Abodakpi, the minister for trade and industry in Jerry Rawlings National Democratic Congress (NDC) government, attend in 1997¹¹⁶. As noted above, support for *agbamevo kente* from the NDC government in the late 1990s prompted the construction of the workshop as well as Nene Keteku's participation in a UNESCO exhibition on Africa in Washington DC. Together with the former *Agbamevoza* festival chairman, Nene Keteku mounted a display of Agotime's *agbamevo kente* in the United States and the trip marked the beginning of ongoing working relationships with a number of

¹¹⁶ The NDC, founded by Voltarian Jerry Rawlings, has long counted the constituencies of the Volta Region as party strongholds. I was in the midst of my Agotime fieldwork during the general election of December 2012, a ballot that returned the NDC parliamentary candidate Juliana Azumah-Mensah to her Agotime seat with 79% of the vote.

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UNESCO representatives. These ties developed into links with other NGOs including an ecotourism organisation and the United States Peace Corps. Nene Keteku remembered this period fondly and it was clear from how he spoke about this time that he greatly appreciated the recognition offered him by NDC politicians, UNESCO and other NGO representatives. He was particularly impressed when, through his dealings with UNESCO, he became aware of the discourses surrounding intangible heritage, and UNESCO's classification of *agbamevo kente* as an example of Ghana's intangible heritage. Positioned as a "custodian" of Agotime *kente*, Nene Keteku partnered with UNESCO in their attempts to protect and preserve the cloth and its craft traditions. Yarrow's ethnography of NGO development work in Ghana argues that interactions of this kind between NGO actors and community elders can catalyse reappraisal of both "local" forms of knowledge and the problems faced by communities (Yarrow, 2011: 113). Meyer and de Witte make this point more broadly in reference to processes of heritage formation, arguing that "once brought into the framework of heritage, cultural forms are made to assume additional or even new value" (2013: 276). I would argue that similar processes were at work in Agotime in the early years of the *Agbamevoza*, as the sustained contact between Nene Keteku and representatives of UNESCO and other heritage NGOs resulted in the co-creation not only of the festival but also novel understandings of what Agotime craft, culture and heritage meant in a globalising Ghana. With the handover of power in 2000, Nene Keteku said that the New Patriotic Party (NPP) government, whose power base has traditionally been Asante, lost interest in the project. However, with the weaving workshop already up and running and Nene Keteku having been named a custodian of *kente* by UNESCO, some momentum had been built up around the weaving and its festival in Agotime, and the *Agbamevoza* has been celebrated annually since.

Nene Keteku's narrative speaks of the entanglements between personal relationships fostered amongst elite actors and the creation of public and shared forms of culture and heritage. The ambivalent place these relationships hold is captured in Yarrow's analysis of NGO practices in southern Ghana, where:

"...interpersonal relationships based on past engagements are often utilised in the creation of formal and informal networks linking NGOs to other public actors and bodies, including politicians, the media and various international development organisations...Elites themselves acknowledge that interpersonal relations are at times used to further personal interests, but also highlight how these are central to the enactment of various forms of public 'good'" (2011: 14)

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In this sense the *Agbamevoza* was a site at which public and private spheres coalesced, producing “localised” forms of culture that could be strategically deployed in making claims upon available state resources. Festivals provided a forum in which close links between politicians and their constituents could be publicly performed and strengthened (see Joy, 2012: 164), and to have a prominent member of parliament as a guest of honour was a marker of the local elite's status and prestige. These celebrations were also occasions during which local development projects and aspirations were emphasised (Lentz, 2001: 54-55), with residents seeking the support of powerful government figures through their participation in the festival. During the *Agbamevoza* grand durbar on the final Saturday of the 2013 festival a considerable part of the programme was devoted to speeches on themes of local development and heritage. Nene Keteku spoke alongside Agotime *Chefs du Canton* from Togo, local politicians and guests of honour from the Ghanaian government, the language switching between Ewe, English and French as the programme progressed. The proceedings were moderated by an MC and pledges for funds towards local development projects and the costs of staging the festival were taken in both Ghana Cedis and CFA and announced over the PA. Major donors were listed in ascending order on the back page of the glossy colour-printed programme that could be bought at the festival ground. A highly visible performance of status and recognition, the spectacle of the durbar centred upon how a local elite played host to figures of state power, who in turn reciprocate through publicly promising support for the “work of the community”. Seen as a performance of the relationship between state and local actors, the festival puts *agbamevo kente* and Agotime culture at the centre of negotiations between state power and the legitimisation of local politicians, with both parties making appeals to the community in developmental terms.

The intertwining of localised forms of culture and processes of state formation in the performance of West African festivals has been examined in Apter's work on Nigeria's 1977 FESTAC celebrations (Apter, 2005:167-169). Focusing on the durbar as an invented tradition that had its origins in the British colonial administration of India and was introduced to West Africa by General Lugard, British colonial officer to Nigeria at the time of the 1900 surrender of the Royal Niger Company to the British crown (Apter, 2005: 179-180), Apter highlights the role the durbar played in the formation of the colonial state. Just as colonial authorities across West Africa worked to reconfigure local power-structures into chiefly elites who would be more amenable to their governance (Wilson, 1987:494), so too they instituted festival

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practices that consecrated these new chiefs. Thus, it is of little surprise that in Agotime, as elsewhere across southern Ghana, the paramount chief and his entourage was at the heart of festival celebrations. Scaled up and put at the centre of a Pan-African celebration of culture during FESTAC '77, the colonial history of the durbar was, at least in part, erased and it became an expression of national heritage and a tool of national government (Apter, 2005: 193-199). The durbar is a ubiquitous feature of Ghanaian festivals and although not as lavish as the Grand Durbar of FESTAC, which was watched by a staggering 200,000 spectators in the northern Nigerian city of Kaduna (Apter, 2005: 170), these performances, rooted as they are in the exercise of colonial power, continue to play a role in defining state power and local culture.

Putting aside the contentious question of whether the relationships enacted in the durbar constitute patrimonialism, a charge which in itself depends upon one's position in a web of social relations (Yarrow, 2011: 98), an interesting feature of Nene Keteku's account of the development of the *Agbamevoza* is that the links forged between the Agotime Paramountcy and government representatives exceed the bounds of local-state political relations and involve NGO actors too. In the post-structural adjustment era vital streams of international funding to sub-Saharan Africa have been increasingly channeled away from the state and through NGO projects and organisations. The, perhaps counterintuitive, effect of this has been an ever closer entwinement between state and NGO power across the continent (Yarrow, 2011: 8, also see Chabal and Daloz, 1999). In Ghana, this trend has developed alongside increasingly strong ties between chiefs and international development agencies, as traditional leaders, reliant upon a shrinking state for resources, turn to other sources of funding (Yarrow, 2011: 141). With the involvement of UNESCO and a range of smaller, local organisations in the *Agbamevoza* we see how a particular type of craftwork has been recast not only as local heritage, but also as a globalised form of culture that could be put to work making claims on globalised resource streams. Indeed, NGO interventions in festivals worked to inscribe distinctions between what constituted "local" knowledge of cultural traditions, craftwork and history and "global" flows of expertise, heritage and media, a distinction that held considerable political leverage for NGOs and their partners on the ground in places like Agotime (Yarrow, 2011: 110). During the development of the *Agbamevoza*, NGO involvement fostered an awareness amongst both the local elite and workshop weavers that local cultural practices and traditions are related not only to a broader

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culture of festivals in Ghana, but also to globally configured notions of sustainable development and heritage. These links between local practices and global discourses could then be put to work by local elites in making claims upon NGO resources, and conversely by NGO workers in implementing development and other projects on the community.

The politics of craftwork and heritage.

None of this is to say that NGOs themselves would describe their involvement in the festival and broader initiatives to promote, research and protect *agbamevo* weaving traditions and cloths as political acts. Indeed, in discussions with a UNESCO official at the regional headquarters in Accra, the point was clearly made that the remit of UNESCO was in no way political, but rather focused squarely upon protecting and preserving Ghana's heritage as part of a global effort to sustain indigenous cultural traditions. I was told emphatically that work on *kente* in Agotime, Ashanti or wherever else would go on regardless of which government was in power (in interview with Carl Ampah, UNESCO official, 2013). However, looking at weaving and the *Agbamevoza* as component parts of a national culture that fit into a global picture of heritage, itself raises politicised questions about the value of national culture in a globalising world. The creation of heritage is always a politicised process (Meyer and de Witte, 2013: 276) and regardless of the intentions of NGO officials, on the ground in Agotime it was evident that the forms of heritage and history played out in the festival had become deeply politicised tools for negotiating and contesting the power not only of Nene Keteku himself, but also that of local and state politicians and *agbamevo* weavers too. As such, claims to political neutrality on the part of an international NGO like UNESCO cannot be taken at face value. Instead these claims to neutrality should be seen as integral aspects of the politics of culture, which by disguising how symbolic and material resources are appropriated and put to work by elites, legitimises and naturalises their power.

Contested claims to indigeneity and the Agbamevoza

As well as playing a part in the negotiation of Agotime's position vis-a-vis its neighbours, the Ghanaian state and globalised forms of heritage, the festival has also been involved in making claims to indigeneity and to the land, as well as managing conflicts between the area's constituent towns and villages. In the run of a long-standing chieftancy dispute between the paramount in Kpetoe and the area chiefs of

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Agotime Afegame, previously separate festivities at Afegame have recently been included within the broader auspices of the *Agbamevoza* festival. In this, the supposed neutrality of the weaving festival has been put to work in overcoming resistance to the Paramountcy, resolving intra-area conflicts and inscribing claims to indigeneity upon the landscape. The event, then, is a politically charged and polymorphous performance that has evolved to serve the disparate and conflicting interests of Nene Keteku and his challengers at Afegame, as well as drawing on the participation of local residents whose part in the production and interpretation of the festivities crucially legitimises the claims being made. The festival as a site of political challenge and contestation thus revolved around a number of perspectives that variously related to one another, overlapped, conflicted and coalesced to produce forms of heritage and culture that were not fixed and stable but were liable to slippage.

In 2013 the festival was launched at Agotime Afegame and the following week included a historical re-enactment in the village of the arrival of the Agotime people in the area. As told by Nene Keteku, the history of the Agotime before their arrival in Afegame, the village now considered their “ancestral home”¹¹⁷, was one of war and migration. His account of the events leading up to and following the settlement was meticulously detailed and the name “Agotime” itself references this initial settlement as the “place among the palms” where they eventually settled (Keteku, n.d.: 11). The journey of the ancestors to the area was dramatised at Afegame, and the re-enactment begins with warriors scouting out the area around the river Todzie, one of few watering holes in the dry plain, before landing their dug-out canoes on the river banks. The movement from the water onto land recalled the multiple journeys the Agotime people made, spreading out from the Adangbe ancestral heartlands east of Accra, before settling around the banks of the river (Hormeku, 2012; Sprigge, 1969: 93). Safe passage onto land is marked as women daub the faces of assembled participants and spectators, gathered by the side of the river in celebration, with white powder, a symbol of auspiciousness. Libations are poured, firecrackers are set off and women dressed in *agbamevo kente* dance. The resources needed to establish a settlement -stools, gourds, bundles of fabric and tin basins piled high with goods- were then unloaded from the canoes and carried aloft in procession through the village. Nene Keteku claimed that what became Afegame was uninhabited at the time of the ancestors’ arrival and the Agotime people are often described as the indigenes

¹¹⁷ It was said that “Afegame” meant “head of Agotime”, the name of the village referencing the fact that it was the first place in Agotime that was settled by Adangbe speakers.

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of the area (Hormeku, 2012). Although the considerable degree of exchange, conflict and intermarriage between the Agotimes and neighbouring Ewe peoples make the claim that the land was completely virgin territory difficult to sustain, the performance at Afegame undoubtedly re-inscribes a narrative version of Agotime history upon the landscape. The importance of marking history spatially on the ground at Afegame is heightened by the fact that the village was once home to the sacred groves and shrines at which girls' *dipo* initiation rites took place. The priestesses who once tended these shrines having abandoned them, Pentecostal Christianity and social change have made significant incursions into beliefs that are now feared as "backsliding" and sinful. As priestesses and initiated women age and die, the collective memory of this sacred landscape has faded and these points on the cultural map of Agotime have lost their potency and power. In an important sense then, re-enacting the landing at Afegame was not only a performative reiteration of the Paramount Chief's own historical account, but also a powerful performance of his strongly held belief that the heritage of his people be protected, preserved and re-inscribed upon the landscape of their home.

These festival rites make important claims to indigeneity, rooting the history of the Agotime people in the village and bush surrounding Afegame. In the context of an ongoing dispute over legitimacy between area chiefs in Afegame and Nene Keteku's paramountcy, such claims are powerful. Discussing how the *Agbamevoza* came to be celebrated in Afegame, Nene Keteku emphasised his agency in "incorporating" challengers to his authority within the festival. He presented the event as marking the symbolic submission of Afegame area chiefs to his authority. Behind his words though, bravado gave way to a tactical and diplomatic assessment of the power struggle. Paramount chiefs are important political figures at both the local and national level, but their work is nonetheless a balancing act in which they must constantly re-negotiate their position and recruit allies. Nene Keteku has held the Agotime Paramountcy for much of his adult life and is long practised in the arts of diplomacy. For him to offer Afegame a place in the celebrations was a compromise that both parties could accept without loss of face. For the paramount chief, his role as leader of the Agotime people was left fundamentally unchallenged and from the perspective of leaders in Afegame, re-enacting the landing of the Agotime people in Afegame gave dramatic weight to their claims to recognition as the founding people. The performance offers tacit recognition of the extent to which ancestral ties and the Dangbe language are anchored in Afegame and nominates the village as a seat of

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Agotime cultural and historical heritage. In this we see that the narrative of what constitutes local history and culture emerges from contested power relations and the tactical accommodations that interested parties make with one another. When local heritage and culture are implicated in the production of citizenship and claims upon state support, claims to indigeneity become precious and guarded resources which are sought after, negotiated and apportioned in a complex interplay between multiple actors.

The missing voices?: young Agotime weavers and the *Agbamevoza*

In the weaving workshop during the summer of 2013, discussion of both the festival and those responsible for organising it was far from neutral, as the event became a focal point of contestation around which the young craftsmen sought recognition of the value of their skills from the organising committee and the wider community. In the weeks running up to the festival the weavers were unsure when the festivities would be happening. There was a feeling amongst the weavers that they were being sidelined in an event that was meant to celebrate their work and culture and although keen to participate, their disenfranchisement was palpably indexed by their ignorance about when or where the festival would take place. When the programme of events was finally announced, quiet grumblings from workshop members spilled over into open indignation. The weaving competition, a showcase of young Agotime weaving talent with prizes awarded for the best new design and the quickest weaver, had been scheduled to take place on the Tuesday (see plate 26). Word quickly got round that the prizes on offer included a coffee table and a fridge. In the sticky heat of the workshop a few days before the start of the *Agbamevoza* a group of weavers broke from their work to sit and talk about the competition. Saviour and Godwin, whose looms sat close by one another, pulled their low wooden work stools into the shade of the trellis workshop walls and Rafael walked over from his spot on the other side of the room. Speaking in hushed, affronted tones that occasionally broke above the din of the radio and the clatter of thrown shuttles, each of them said that the way the organisers had handled the situation was “not good!”. Others chipped in, and their joint indignation and shared outrage forged a sort of intimacy that was borne of their “collective marginality” (Herzfeld, 2004: 16). If the festival was meant to recognise them, why did the prizes offered by the organising committee for the weaving competition look so insignificant alongside the laptop, flat-screen television and smartphone that, publicised on posters all over town, were

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being offered to contestants in the beauty pageant? The suggestion that they demand something more as a prize was met with murmured assent. However, it seemed unlikely that they would have their request met by the senior men in the organising committee who were already quite firmly of the opinion that young weavers were “too money conscious” and lacked discipline. Saviour shook his head in angry disappointment and the others looked dejectedly down at the ground. The disparity confirmed to them that they were not recognised or valued by those in charge and, with the cost of the materials needed to participate in the competition being borne by the weavers themselves, none of them thought that it was worth their while participating. With a stung defiance they declared a boycott of the competition. As the afternoon wore on and news of the competition circulated amongst the weavers others joined them, voicing their indignation and saying that they too would stay away from the competition.



Plate 26- The winner of the kente weaving competition is carried around the durbar ground on a specially built palanquin during the grand durbar, Kpetoe September 2013. Photograph by author.

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None of the workshop weavers did take part in the competition, although all were at the Grand Durbar the following Saturday. As I reflected on this episode, their boycott, however strongly felt, seemed like a fairly mute protest. The elders whom I spoke with about the festival later did not mention it and I doubt whether any of them had even noticed. A few boys from the town had entered the competition and one had been crowned the winner and was paraded around the durbar ground that Saturday on a specially built loom palanquin, so what difference did it really make if the weaving workshop members had stayed away? Even in the act of defiant protest, the words and actions of the men in the workshop had been disregarded and a general simmering of discontent amongst the weavers continued to bubble just below the surface, backed up by the continual, grinding struggle they faced in make a living from their craft. It seemed that their demands for recognition via a worthwhile prize for the competition mirrored their battle to command value for the work they did and that both were aspirations they would struggle to achieve. This is not to say that it was not a point worth making, but rather that if the festival provided a space in which the paramount chief and the elders at Afegame could negotiate their differing claims to power, the same cannot be said of the weavers making calls for recognition from community elders and the festival organising committee. Resulting from the multiple cross-cutting generational and power differentials that fundamentally structure access to the symbolic and material resources which made life liveable within the community of craftspeople, in Agotime and beyond, the dissatisfaction of young craftsmen in the workshop ultimately went unchallenged in the *Agbamevoza*. Whilst the perspectives on history, culture and tradition represented in the festival were far from fixed, being instead relationally configured and grounded in the web of ties that link local elites, politicians and NGO, power- or lack of it- played a crucial role in determining which voices were heard. In this, although the festival has played a crucial role in forming local notions of citizenship and history and related claims to state and NGO support, whilst forging a degree of recognition for Agotime culture in a wider national and international context, it seems that the celebration can do little to address the fundamental concerns of those it purports to represent. In a context of high youth unemployment, inflation and limited opportunity, young *agbamevo kente* weavers will continue to struggle, their voices relegated from the festival which supposedly celebrates them.

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This thesis has looked at the everyday learning and work practices of Agotime's workshop weavers in order that we might better understand the challenges and opportunities craftspeople must negotiate in a time of economic uncertainty if they are to support themselves and their families. This, then, is an ethnography which questions the role that craft learning and work play in contemporary contexts of high youth un- and underemployment, and at a time when the value of hand-crafted cloth in Ghana is under threat from a squeezed middle class¹¹⁸ and a flood of cheap imported textiles. The establishment and ongoing success of Agotime's *Agbamevoza Kente* festival, as discussed in the previous chapter, is proof however that even whilst craftspeople's livelihoods are under siege from uncertain and globalising economies, claims to heritage, tradition and crafting have value not only locally, but also on a national and global level¹¹⁹. What is more, as explored in the opening chapter, the formation of the religious subjectivities that are often fundamental to young weavers' personhood, aspirations and approach to work and learning are also bound up with contested and vital ideas about the value attached to tradition, heritage and modernity.

This thesis, then, does not simply tell a story of the decline of a Ghanaian crafting tradition through the eyes of its disenfranchised young weavers. Rather, this work speaks to broader questions of contemporary experiences of inequality and the uneven distribution of opportunities right across the social scale. It takes account of the strategies young people use in forging livelihoods when faced with economic uncertainty and it considers the important work of aspiration in helping people meet the challenges they face. Ultimately, what is at stake are questions of how people negotiate and make sense of their work and learning when they are faced with an ongoing battle to secure a decent education and their prospects for secure employment are highly uncertain. As a close age-mate of many of my workshop interlocutors and friends in Kpetoe and a member of the generation who came of age during the global financial crisis that began in 2008, this question is not solely

¹¹⁸ As noted elsewhere, middle class Ghanaians form the bulk of Agotime weavers' customers. Since the first implementation of structural adjustment programmes in the early 1980s the civil servants and government workers who make up a large part of the Ghanaian middle classes have experienced significant job losses and protracted pay freezes which have impinged on their buying power (see Nugent, 2012: 241-353).

¹¹⁹ Herzfeld's work on Cretan artisans goes a long way to unpicking and making sense of the "global hierarchies of value" which simultaneously valorise the authenticity of craftwork whilst undermining the livelihoods of craftspeople and threatening the social conditions which enable artisanal production (2004: 1-36).

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academic. Despite my relative privilege, I too, along with young people across the world, face ongoing challenges in accessing the educational and work opportunities which hold the promise of a decent and dignified future for everyone. In this, the struggles and successes of young people in a place like Agotime have much to teach us about emerging experiences of youth worldwide (see Comaroff and Comaroff, 2012). It is only through identifying these commonalities that common cause can be found across contexts and, with it, the hope of action towards a better future for us all.

Bound up with these challenges is the opportunity to work towards equality of opportunity and dignified work for all, and anthropologists are well positioned to play their part in these processes. Our ethnographic work produces the fine-grained social analyses with which to document structural inequalities, but it also provides us with experiences of alternate social worlds and possibilities. If we are to address the pressing social challenges that we all face we will need to marry in-depth understandings of the issues, grounded in ethnographic work, with inclusive and hopeful alternatives that offer people the opportunities to define and build lives that are dignified and meaningful. Writing of the possibilities of such an anthropology, Fischer draws on Appadurai's work to argue:

"...we...should, try to offer positive alternatives, contextualised in a way that avoids moral judgement- non-prescriptive, non-definitive options that inspire other ways of looking at issues...Arjun Appadurai calls on us to advocate an "ethics of possibility" that is "grounded in the view that a genuinely democratic politics cannot be based on an avalanche of numbers- about population, poverty, profit, and predation- that threaten to kill all street-level optimism about life and the world. Rather it must build on an ethics of possibility, which can offer a more inclusive platform for improving the planetary quality of life and can accommodate a plurality of visions of the good life" (2014: 215)

In conclusion, the focus will turn back to these questions, asking what kinds of narratives emerge from young people's ongoing experiences of social and economic precarity and considering how this ethnography might inform future work on the topic.

The narrative of lives lived contingently- making sense of uncertain livelihoods

Having looked at the diverse range of strategies young weavers employ in forging livelihoods and supporting themselves and their families, a key issue has been the extent to which the working and educational lives of Agotime's craftspeople are characterised by uncertainty and the strategies that weavers use when navigating precarity. In a context where chronic economic crises underpin precarious work and young people's routine struggles to access educational opportunities, the capacity to

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negotiate shifting economic and social terrain with agility is an essential and valorised skill¹²⁰. However, in forging their livelihoods, weavers must also find a way to stitch together the demands of multiple occupations with the need to make social and personal sense of perpetual contingency.

Human subjectivity is fundamentally grounded in our capacity to reflect upon life as it is and envisage life as it might otherwise be (Long and Moore, 2013:13). In this sense, aspiration and the ability to conceive of a hopeful future is crucially bound up with how personhood is negotiated. However in contexts riven by uncertainty, where the unfolding of events is patterned by contingency and the unexpected, the future is difficult to pin down and aspiration becomes more about mediating present challenges and orienting oneself towards the future than about faithful predictions of what is to come (Gilbert, 2014: 31-32).

Listening to weavers talk about work and their aspirations, it was clear that one way in which young people accommodated the ongoing demands of uncertainty was through the narratives they offered about their work. The routine struggles to get by, combining work in the loom with farming, driving or even far-flung government jobs were given meaning in reference to a series of wider contexts and higher causes. Being able to commit to a larger purpose plays an important role in how all of us engender and sustain our sense of wellbeing, and these sense-making processes “...converge with the capability to aspire, the opportunity structures to facilitate agency, and a social sense of dignity and fairness” (Fischer, 2014: 210). These stories, then, were important for the shape and integrity they offered to lives often lived, of necessity, from moment to moment. Having a story to tell that could make sense of the ongoing uncertainty one faced served as an anchor with which unpredictable terrain might be navigated and was an important part of sustaining hopefulness for a better future. Piecing together a cohesive narrative from the contingent eventfulness of life lived under conditions of uncertainty gave young weavers a degree of agency to determine the purpose and meaning of disparate and ever-changing experiences which might otherwise be seen as random and arbitrary. The process of narrating one’s life also constituted a series of socially legible achievements which might be recognised and celebrated in the crafting community (Long and Moore, 2013: 18). Thus, when educational and work trajectories were patterned by the unrelenting

¹²⁰ The social value attached to “managing” exemplifies how the ability to cope with, and thrive on uncertainty is celebrated in the Agotime workshop. This question is further explored in Jua’s work on Cameroonian youth (2010) and Gilbert’s ethnography of young women in Nigeria (2014: 29), whilst Standing’s analysis of the precariat highlights the fact that despite many being unhappy with increasing precarity, others welcome the opportunities change and uncertainty offer (2011: 59).

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demands of multiple, unstable occupation and the need to think and act opportunistically, these narratives marked the difference between working just to survive from day to day and a sense of agency and optimism that work might lead towards a better and more fulfilling future. In terms borrowed from Daniel Mains, such stories contributed to the "discursive sustainability" of precarious work and learning by at least giving shape, if not always substance, to a desirable future (2012: 156).

The discursive sustainability of hope is all the more important considering that the challenges Agotime weavers face are not singular. Rather, these strategies are deployed in the context of the routine and ongoing challenges brought about by chronic economic crisis, which young weavers along with people across Ghana, the region and throughout the world are forced to contend with if they are to endure (Gilbert, 2014: 33). Vigh's (2008) work on youth and conflict in Guinea-Bissau advocates for social analyses which look at uncertainty and instability not as singular events, but rather as ongoing conditions and enduring contexts of action within which people must continually strive to live and make sense of their lives. In formulating a vocabulary with which to talk about the uncertainties of neoliberalism, Povinelli also touches on the chronicity of crisis in addressing the question of endurance and the sustainability of hope, writing:

"Internal to the concept of endurance (and exhaustion) is the problem of substance: its strength, hardness, callousness; its continuity though space; its ability to suffer and yet persist...Moreover, endurance encloses itself around the durative- the temporality of continuance, a denotation of continuous actions without any reference to its beginning or end...Enduring isn't a singularity...endurance is not a homogenous space" (2011: 32)

Thus, the language of endurance can help us to think about how hope is constituted through ongoing processes of steady accretion, whereby everyday work practices and the narratives that surround them foster craftspeople's aspirations and their sense of the future. This processual perspective, however also highlights the routine costs of endurance and ongoing crisis, as limited material and social resources are expended and young people's longstanding resilience frays. In focusing on two prominent narratives which weavers offer when talking about their work and learning, namely those of family and of the church, I will consider how hope is sustained and what the limits are to such strategies. Moreover, attention to these narratives is also valuable for the insight it offers, in a time of crisis, into the ongoing process of reconfiguration between weavers and the social worlds in which they are enmeshed (Vigh, 2008: 15). This conclusion will finish by turning to this question and asking what the

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ethnography has to tell us about the uncertain role that weaving plays in young craftspeople's livelihoods and futures.

Family, aspiration and forging meaning across generations

Family played an important part in making work meaningful and orienting weavers' aspirations towards the future, however neoliberal and religious reform has left its mark on family structure. Uncertain economies and young people's ongoing experiences of waithood have coalesced with changing religious attitudes towards marriage and family life in tense, sometimes contradictory ways. Whilst Pentecostalism values the conjugal bond and holds the individuated, nuclear family as an ideal, economic retrenchment has made it increasingly hard for young people to get married and establish households of their own (see Soothill, 2007: 182-186; Honwana, 2013: 104-108). These challenges meant that a number of Agotime's workshop weavers, including Gabriel, Selorm, Felix, Kwaku and Bless, remained unmarried, biding their time until they were in a position to hopefully provide for a family. Others had entered into "traditional" marriages and had children, although they hoped that one day they would be able to have their partnerships recognised in the church. Moreover, broad-based social networks remained important in managing the challenges and opportunities of craftwork, as well as in engaging with the pleasures of social life. Although the ideal might increasingly be oriented towards the nuclear family, from earliest childhood craftspeople are socialised in rich, overlapping communities of practice that extended outwards as they grew older, engaged in various forms of work and migrated in search of opportunities.

Nonetheless, the narratives underpinning hope tended to revolve around the desire that weavers would be able to start families, have children and offer them a better start in life than they themselves had known. The rewards of weavers' undervalued and precarious work lay in the hope that their children would do better and go further than they had done, which more often than not revolved around the aspiration that children would eventually find work outside of the craft. It also lay in the tangible products of their work, in school fees paid, meals provided and the construction and maintenance of safe, comfortable homes for them and their families¹²¹. In the time since I first travelled to Kpetoe, both Francis and Bright had realised their plans for family homes of their own. The completion of these

¹²¹ Van der Geest's work in a Ghanaian Akan village highlights the fact that being able to build a house for ones' family was seen as part of having lived a good and worthwhile life, and was bound up with people's sense of security and self-esteem (1998)

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longstanding building projects, into which a great deal of work, cash and optimism had been sunk, was a hopeful reminder that amidst the challenges were also successes to be savoured and enjoyed. Bound up with their aspirations for a better future, these homes contributed to the security that weavers were working towards for themselves and their families as well as to the narratives they could tell about the value of their work.

Craftspeople's aspirations were obviously not solely tied to the routines getting by, but were also bound up with the pursuit of life's pleasures. Wanting to spend time with family, friends and neighbours as well as having the means to celebrate important occasions such as outdoorings, weddings, festivals and funerals were important. Similarly, pride was taken in matters of style and self-presentation, with weavers spending considerable time preparing fashionable textiles which could then be tailored into clothes for themselves, their wives and their children to wear on special occasions. Framed photos on display at home attested to the memories of these special times. Whilst children tended to have few play-things, bicycles were covetable (and practical) possessions in the village and for Christmas 2015 Francis and Sena bought their four year old son a bike so he could join his friends playing in the neighbourhood. In all of these ways, Kpetoe's weavers gave shape to their hopes for decent lives for them, constituting narratives of aspiration and hope which spanned generations and looked towards the future.

Religion, aspiration and finding purpose in the divine

Whilst family was an important anchor in many young weavers' narratives of success, religion and the prospect of finding purpose in the divine was another way in which craftspeople made sense of their uncertain trajectories through learning and work. The sociality of religious communities was an important part of the ways some young weavers strategically oriented themselves towards work opportunities, and the church functioned as alternate social networks craftspeople deployed in managing their work and learning. However, Pentecostal Christianity also offered novel forms of individualised subjectivities and spiritualities which could be put to use reconfiguring ideas of personhood, patterns of sociality and the processes whereby weavers navigated uncertain social and economic terrain.

It has been persuasively argued elsewhere that the proliferation of Pentecostalism across West Africa constitutes an attempt to master, through techniques of individual self-discipline and spiritual "work", the uncertainty of life in

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post-colonial contexts (see Marshall, 2009: 174-177; see also Gilbert, 2014). That the individualising discourse of Pentecostalism emerged at the same historical juncture as neoliberal policies of structural adjustment, which shifted emphasis from shared state structures of support towards demands for self-sufficiency, should be no surprise.

Writing of the upsurge in Pentecostal spiritualities in Nigeria since the late 1970s, Marshall writes that:

"This context of uncertainty...goes beyond purely material problems of poverty and physical insecurity [and encompasses] the institutions, modes of thought, and disciplines instituted by colonialism [which] have failed to provide the means for either understanding or mastering the ordeal of the present, opening up lines of flight that have led to a generalised "crisis of governmentality" of increasingly acute proportions. In this context of radical insecurity...the Born-Again revival found its initial conditions of plausibility and pertinence..." (2009: 8)

Similar arguments can be made about Ghana, and in a context marked by the ongoing social and material demands of contingency, Pentecostalism offered some workshop weavers a compelling narrative that not only helped them make sense of uncertainty, but also offered them the tools to position themselves in relation to the unexpected. Engagement with Pentecostal congregations and charismatic pastors tapped into craftspeople's aspirations, offering the prospect of both spiritual and material rewards for self-discipline and hard work. Instilling ethics of discipline and self-control, Pentecostalism gave young people the tools with which to contend with their longstanding struggles to find work and secure a decent livelihood, whilst all the while conferring upon these challenges a sense of higher meaning (Marshall, 2009: 176). For weavers these attitudes were manifest in their diligence and comportment, the company they chose to keep, the emphasis they placed on maintaining work routines alongside a commitment to their religion, with discipline being seen as a process of self-improvement. Should this work fail to bear fruit in the here and now, as persistent uncertainty undermined weavers' attempts to pursue educational opportunities and find secure work, there was some reassurance to be had that these efforts would not have been in vain and that a spiritual reward would eventually be due.

What is more, in emphasising discipline as a process of adjusting one's own behaviour and engaging in techniques of self-fashioning, the practice of Pentecostalism offered young Agotime weavers agency in a context where little else was within their direct control. Similarly, the plethora of denominations and sects along with the social valorisation of choice when it came to matters of religion offered followers a veritable "marketplace" of possibilities, the space to choose that which suited them best and the opportunity to change or combine religious affiliation at will.

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Considering that the constraints of existing social structures and the so-called “free market”¹²² have singularly failed in providing most workshop members with much degree of choice when it comes to matters of their own work and learning, this freedom was much vaunted and exercised.

Coupled with these ideas of religious freedom was the allure of Pentecostal narratives that bypassed traditional forms of authority in favour of a direct connection with God and control over one’s own destiny. In a context where generational cleavages could be fractious and weighed down by structural inequalities, these stories made sense and held considerable appeal for young weavers. Moreover, when the weight of sociality was such that success could be experienced by individuals as a burden and even a threat, Pentecostalism validated new ways of relating which allowed people to cut problematic social ties and obligations (Marshall, 2009: 174). Religion thus helped craftspeople negotiate the social demands of their work whilst also to forging personally meaningful narratives from their ongoing experiences of struggle which validated their work in the present and far into the future.

Weavers and their changing social worlds- crafting in a time of uncertainty

In looking at how Agotime weavers narrate and make sense of their experiences of uncertain work and limited educational opportunities, it is clear that what is at stake is a set of changing relations between Ghanaian craftspeople and their social worlds. Whilst the family acted as an anchor for young weavers in negotiating ideas of and work towards the future, Pentecostal religious discourses sought to unmoor work and value from the burdensome demands of community and broader social structures. Similarly, whilst the ongoing success and popularity of Agotime’s *Agbamevoza* signals a resurgence of interest in matters of local heritage and history, the social and economic relations of production which underpin weaving textiles are becoming increasingly unliveable for local craftspeople. As I sit down to write this conclusion, almost four years after I began my doctoral fieldwork in Kpetoe in the autumn of 2012, it saddens me to hear that more than two thirds of the weavers who I worked with at that time have left their looms and the workshop in search of other opportunities and the hope that they might find decent work elsewhere.

¹²² Not only does neoliberalism falter in providing and fairly distributing choice and opportunity, but it also fails to account for the social complexity and dynamism of everyday practices in places like the Agotime workshop.

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Agbamevo weaving is not, however, a dying craft. Despite Ghana's economic troubles Kpetoe remains a centre for the production and sale of beautiful handwoven *kente*, weaving retains a role in many craftspeople's broader livelihood strategies and the craft plays an important part in structuring young people's aspirations and identities. Rather, the point is that the practice of craftwork is enmeshed with the changing everyday lives of craftspeople and the ever-shifting social and economic terrain which they must navigate in search of dignity and decent work. It is bound up with young weavers' hopes and the practice of the craft is but one strand in complexly interwoven livelihood strategies that face ongoing challenges far beyond their control. No doubt, the lives of Agotime's artisans have never been plain sailing and makers everywhere must deal with the challenge of forging a decent livelihood from their particular set of craft skills. However, the experience of Agotime's weavers is of particular importance for the insight it offers not only into the lifeworlds of craftspeople, but also how these intersect with broader contemporary experiences of youth. If African experiences might rightly be said to presage social and economic currents felt later elsewhere (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2012: 18), looking at how weavers in the Kpetoe workshop navigate chronic uncertainty and find a way through the challenges of limited educational opportunities and precarious work gives us a window onto emerging forms of occupational experience amongst young people worldwide.

As such, this ethnography contributes a craft perspective to the literature on the possibilities for and challenges faced by youth, furthers work on the relationship between heritage issues and the studies of livelihoods, and opens up possibilities for further research into the meaning and value of work when occupational strategies become, of necessity, fragmented and work becomes increasingly precarious. The conflicted role that education plays in structuring aspirations and access to opportunities also deserves further attention, as the increasingly limited value of schooling in preparing young people for saturated and precarious work markets becomes ever-more apparent in Ghana and elsewhere (see Deleuze, 1992).

Nonetheless, it seems clear that Agotime weaving is not imminently endangered and despite the serious and systemic challenges faced by craftspeople, the production of textiles remains a vital part of many young people's broader livelihood strategies and the community that binds them together. Considering the resilience of the craft, future investigations might take a closer comparative look at the various ways in

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which crafting traditions endure, thrive or cease to be in relation to shifting economic and social contexts and the attendant changes in makers' attitudes and aspirations.

Alongside these questions, the enduring quality of craftwork and the resilient optimism of Agotime's weavers calls for recognition of its own. I would hope that whilst this ethnography contributes to ongoing discussions about the anthropology of aspiration, it also serves as a concrete reminder that a better future is not only possible, but must form the very basis of our shared struggles. In the words of Agotime's weavers, *agbenenyo* "things should be better".

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Adinkra- A lexicon of Akan symbols that index particular aphorisms and proverbs. Adinkra symbols are widely used throughout Ghana, not only in crafted textile and carved products from Asante crafting communities such as Ntonso and Asoka, but also more widely on commercially mass-produced products and in advertising.

Afor'titi/ Avɔsisi*- Agotime Ewe word for warp threads.

Afɔtɛmeka*- Agotime Ewe term for the pedals connecting the heddles to the weaver's foot.

Agbamevo- Agotime Ewe term for weaving.

Agbamevoza/ Agbamevorza- The name given to Agotime's annual *agbaemvo kente* festival, instituted in the mid 1990s and celebrated during the second week of September.

Agbati- Ewe term for loom, both fixed and portable, used both in Agotime and in coastal weaving centres.

Agbenenyo- Ewe for "things should be better". The Agotime workshop is also known as the Agbenenyo Weavers Association.

AGOSEC- Agotime Senior High School, Agotime's public senior high school.

Akan- Designates both the related groups of people and their languages, found west of the Volta in southern Ghana and Côte D'Ivoire. Akan peoples include the Asantes, Akuapems, Fantes, Avatimes and the Baoule. The Akan language is composed of the related dialects of Asante, Akuapem (together known as Twi) and Fante.

Avornlorga/Agbaŋgɔgbe*- Agotime Ewe word for warp beam.

Batakali/ Batakari- A smock sewn from narrow strips of plain weave cotton fabric, usually in muted colours, typically worn in Northern Ghana but popularised throughout the country by Jerry Rawlings.

CEPS- Custom Excise Preventive Service, the Ghanaian government agency responsible for the regulation and collection of import duties. A division of the Ghana Revenue Authority, Kpetoe is home to a division of CEPS and a CEPS training camp and school, known as CEPS Academy.

CFA- Abbreviated name of the Communauté Financière Africaine Franc, the currency of Togo and seven other Francophone West African countries, the value of which is tied to the euro. A parallel currency union, with the exact same relative value to the euro, exists in five Francophone Central African countries, however, West African CFA cannot be spent in countries that are part of the Central African CFA and vice-versa.

Chef du Canton- Designation of a position in the Togolese cheifly hierarchy, roughly translatable as town or village chief. However, a Togolese Chef du Canton is not directly comparable to a Ghanaian Paramount Chief, as the Togolese chieftaincy

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system constitutes a part of the state government, rather than functioning as a parallel system of power and governance.

Chop bar- Roadside establishments, most often run by women and girls from small kiosks or portable tables, but occasionally from larger premises, selling basic cooked food. Chop bars are often specialised in particular kinds of food, offering only a limited selection of dishes, most usually *fufu*, *akple*, *banku*, stew, *jollof* rice and *redred*.

CPP- Convention People's Party, established in 1947 with Kwame Nkrumah as leader. In power from 1951 and through the independence struggle, with Nkrumah becoming the first President of Ghana in the 1960 elections. The CPP government was overthrown in the coup of 1966 and the party banned, before being reconstituted in 1996. The CPP is currently headed by Samia Nkrumah, Kwame Nkrumah's only daughter.

Dangbe (also Agotime)- The indigenous language of the Agotimes, Dangbe is still spoken as a first language in Agotime Afegame, a village north of Kpetoe directly on the Ghana-Togo border. Dangbe is also spoken by older members of the community in Kpetoe, for whom it is also their mother tongue. Dangbe is a member of the Kwa language family and is related to the more widely spoken Dangme or Adangme.

Dangme (also Adangbe and Adangme)- The indigenous language of the people of Prampram, Ningo, Ada, Sha, Osudoku and Krobo, to whom Agotime claim kinship. A member of the Kwa family of languages, Dangme is much more widely spoken than Dangbe and is very closely related to Ga.

Dipo- Female initiation rites of the Dangme-speaking people and their Dangbe-speaking kin, now only performed by the Krobo. Dipo was also once performed in Agotime, at Afegame, until the village shrines there were abandoned and desecrated.

Dorsosro/ Dɔsrɔvi*- Ewe term for apprentice/ apprenticeship.

Drinking spot- Local bars where soft drinks, beer and spirits can be bought and consumed. Spots are usually run from established premises with seating and often screen football matches, making them a popular place for young men to meet. Although women may work in drinking spots, they rarely patronise them.

Efor/ Efɔ̄*- Agotime Ewe term for beater.

Egle/ Eglē*- Agotime Ewe word for heddle pulley.

Enɔ̄*- Agotime Ewe term for a pair of heddles

EPC- Evangelical Presbyterian Church, the main Protestant mainline church in eastern Ghana which developed out of the activity of the Bremen missionaries who arrived east of the Volta in 1847.

Ewe- The language spoken most widely in Kpetoe, across the Volta region and in southern Togo. Ewe belongs to the Gbe family of languages.

Ewu/ Evu*- Agotime Ewe word for shuttle.

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FESTAC- Abbreviation of the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture, hosted in Nigeria in 1977.

Ghana Cedi- The currency of Ghana. Following devaluation in 2007 that saw four zeros taken off the value of the currency, the Ghana Cedi was introduced to replace the extant New Cedi.

IMF- International Monetary Fund.

JSS- Junior Secondary School.

Juju- A generic term used across West Africa to refer broadly to (largely) malevolent practices of spell casting. In the Agotime workshop, it was said that the victims of juju were unaware of those acting to harm them and that juju afflicted certain parts of the body. Purveyors of juju were also said to work alone, unlike practitioners of witchcraft who operated in groups, whose victims were aware of them and who targeted the whole body.

Kafowmo/ Katromɔ* - Ewe term for the “spinning machine” or bobbin winder, the hand-operated tool used to spin yarn onto bobbins, in preparation for weaving.

Kente- The term generally used across the region to describe narrow strip weaving. The word *kente* originates from Akan.

Kete- An Ewe term for narrow strip weaving, used in both Agotime and in weaving centres along the coast. *Kete* is said to onomatopoeically refer to the sound of a narrow strip loom as the heddles open and close, and is made up of the Ewe words *ke* meaning “to open” and *te* meaning “to press”.

Konor- The Adangbe term for Paramount Chief, used in Agotime and by the Krobo people.

Kpl̩sho*- Agotime Ewe term for the hand-held bobbin carrier that is used to lay the warp.

Kuble- Agotime Ewe term for the cloth beam.

NDC- National Democratic Congress, social democratic political party founded by Jerry Rawlings and in power between 1993-2001, and 2008-present. Currently headed by John Dramani Mahama, President of Ghana.

NMG- Norddeutsche Missionsgesellschaft, also known as the Bremen missionaries, was a pietist mission founded in Hamburg in 1836 that arrived east of the Volta in 1847. Following Germany's defeat in World War I, the Bremen missionaries were expelled from what had been German Togoland and the church they left behind, the Ewe Evangelical Church, gained independence. The increasing involvement of other ethnic groups in the churches activities saw the Ewe Evangelical Church renamed in 1954 to the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.

Nogā*- The Ewe term for the “big heddles” that are suspended closest to the weaver in the loom and that have enough leases so that each individual warp element has its own lease. The *nogā* is used to weave warp-faced plain weave textiles.

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Novi*- The Ewe term for the “small heddles” that sit further back in the loom and have fewer leashes so that individual warp elements are grouped together when threaded through. The *novi* is used to weave weft-faced plain weave textiles.

NPP- New Patriotic Party, centre-right political party founded in 1992 and the main contender against the NDC. The NPP, with John Agyekum Kufuor as leader, held power between 2004-2008. The current NPP flag bearer is Nana Akufo-Addo and party headquarters are in Kumasi, Ashanti region.

Okado- The popular name given to motorcycle taxis. The word *okado* comes from Nigeria and was originally attached to a now defunct domestic airline whose customers were wealthy members of the local elite. *Okado* is thus named ironically, referencing the uncomfortable nature of the ride as well as calling attention to the latent inequalities underpinning the work of *okado* boys (see Smith, 2014: 36).

Outdooring- A rite common across southern Ghana that is usually combined with the naming ceremony of a new-born baby and that tends to happen seven days after the birth. Gifts are usually offered to the mother and child from the father, other relatives, friends and neighbours and the outdooring is of particular interest to kente weavers because in Agotime and across south-eastern Ghana the occasion calls for offering and wear of special pale coloured cloths shot through with lurex thread.

Paramount Chief- Arising from the period of British colonial rule, in Ghana the Paramount Chief is the highest level chief in a formally designated Traditional Area. Agotime is, for example, a Traditional Area, in which Nene Keteku III is the current Paramount Chief. Various area, war and village chiefs are subordinated to the paramountcy in this political hierarchy, which across Ghana is conceived of as a parallel system of governance to the state and its MPs.

Peace Corps- An international volunteering programme, funded by the US government, that sends US graduates to host countries to work on projects related to social and economic development. Postings last two years and between 2006 and 2012 Kpetoe hosted three Peace Corps volunteers.

PNDC- Provisional National Defence Council, the name of the Ghanaian government after Jerry Rawlings overthrew the elected People's National Party on December 31st 1981. The PNDC remained in power until 1993 when it was succeeded by Rawling's new party the National Democratic Congress (NDC).

PNP- People's National Party, led by Hilla Limann, and was the party of government during Ghana's third republic (1979-1981).

Shed- In weaving terms the shed is the separation of upper and lower warp yarn through which the weft is woven. In Agbamevo weaving the shed is opened by pressing open one or other of the heddle pedals or treadles, before the weft shuttle is thrown.

SHS- Senior High School.

Snap- The pidgin term used when taking a photograph.

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Soti*- Agotime Ewe term for the warp pegs which are used to lay the warp threads.

Trotro- Shared taxis, often dilapidated minibuses imported from Western Europe with refitted interiors to accommodate more passengers, that service fixed routes both within towns and across greater distances. *Trotros* are one of the most common ways of getting around, and with prices set by drivers' unions they are also one of the cheapest modes of transport.

Tuanyi*- Agotime Ewe word for a skein holder machine.

UNESCO- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, UNESCO has a country office in the capital Accra.

USAid- United States Agency for International Development.

Uumeyre*- Agotime Ewe term for the small bobbins used to throw the weft threads

*The weaving terms given me by workshop weavers have been supplemented here by those set out in Malika Kraamer's extensive list of Agotime Ewe weaving terminology (2005: 573-576); those terms marked with an asterisk are the ones set out in Kraamer's work, whilst unmarked ones were given to me by workshop weaver Francis Keku.

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