

The antimonies of heritage: tradition and the work of weaving in a Ghanaian workshop

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Weaving and the Complex Entanglements of Craft, Heritage and Livelihoods

Drawn from an ethnography of work and learning amongst *kente* weavers in a village workshop in the Ghanaian town of Kpetoe, this chapter explores the tensions between weaving as a form of work that crucially underpins the livelihoods of craftspeople and craftwork as a form of heritage practice. Ghana is famous for its narrow-strip *kente* weaving, and the often brightly coloured cloths are widely worn to celebrate births, marriages, festivals and at funerals, as well as being an important part of chiefly regalia. Amongst the Ghanaian diaspora and African Americans who trace their origins back to this part of West Africa, *kente* has also become a powerful and enduring symbol of heritage and cultural patrimony, even if international and tourist buyers constitute only a tiny fraction of the market for *kente* cloths.

Kpetoe is a rural town that functions as the capital of the Agotime traditional area in Ghana's Volta Region, some five hours drive from the national capital Accra and 100km inland from the coast. However, it is best known locally and further afield for its woven *kente* cloths. This research is based upon two periods of fieldwork in the village, one conducted between September 2012 and November 2013, the other being a shorter visit during May and June 2015. As an apprentice in the workshop during my initial fieldwork, this space was the focus of the project and my contacts with local elders, heritage NGOs and other members of the local crafting community were negotiated from this position.

In a context where weaving is ambivalently framed as both the esteemed 'work of the community' and a dead weight of tradition that offers limited opportunities for young weavers, the values attached to local heritage and craftwork have become highly contested.

Taking the practices and traditions of weaving as a nexus around which different social actors, notably young weavers and community elders, negotiate ideas of heritage and development, this chapter argues that the value of neither heritage nor tradition is immutable, but rather both are socially situated, structured and patterned. In this regard, young weavers contending with precarious economic conditions, high levels of youth unemployment and informalised economies have quite different ideas of heritage than village elders, whose economic positions are often more secure and whose ties to local and national elites are stronger. The ethnography looks at the different ways in which heritage and tradition are configured, highlighting two parallel perspectives. The first is exemplified by the local annual *Agbamevoza* festival, a celebration ostensibly focusing on the narrow-strip *kente* cloth which the town's weavers are renowned for producing, in which local ideas of heritage and tradition are performed. The second centers upon the everyday practices which weavers use to negotiate the opportunities and limitations of their working lives.

Analysis of Kpetoe's annual festival suggests some of the ways in which heritage has been constructed in the intersections between local politics and the history of the Ghanaian nation state, with local experiences of modernity and governmentality underpinning the construction of certain ideas of tradition in Agotime. Attention to the routines of work, on the other hand, shows how the quotidian and practical demands of making a living often produce quite different ideas of heritage. The notion of intangible heritage, and the according of value not only to crafted products but also to the livelihoods and life-ways of craftspeople, is important here (see Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004) and UNESCO has furthered this agenda, in various guises, since the early 1990s. The Proclamation of the Masterpieces of Intangible Heritage, instituted in 1997, was an important moment in shifting focus from objects of heritage to processes of cultural production. However, as this chapter shows, this paradigm shift has been neither straightforward nor complete (see Bartolotto 2006). The ethnography put forth here looks at the limitations of such an approach, arguing that the sustainability of Agotime's crafting heritage is crucially bound up with the fostering of livelihoods and equality of educational and working opportunities for often marginalised makers. When weavers are unable to live through their work, the heritage of their craft is put in jeopardy. Fundamental here is a conception of craft as a process not only of making cloths but also of forging

livelihoods. When looking at Agotime's weaving festival and the working cultures of weavers in Kpetoe, two distinct pictures of heritage emerge, one based on spectacle and thus much more amenable to heritage discourses, the other more routine and unremarked upon but nonetheless essential to the crafting of local cloths.

It is with both of these perspectives in mind that those engaged with heritage matters in African contexts must ensure that policies effecting craftworkers take account of the challenges that makers face forging livelihoods, and work to actively support them in seeking out dignified and meaningful lives. Bringing together these strands, the chapter seeks to further a view of heritage and development that prioritises the positive contribution crafting can make to local livelihoods and lifeworlds, rather than viewing heritage and tradition solely in terms dictated by elite actors. Failure to balance the spectacle of tradition with intangible heritage and the everyday needs of weavers, risks turning heritage into a weighty burden upon those already contending with precarity.

Heritage, Development and the Elite in a Ghanaian Festival

Instituted in 1995 at the behest of current paramount chief Nene Nuer Keteku III and marked annually in September, the *Agbamevoza* is a week-long festival celebrating traditions of cloth production in Agotime, a community of thirty-seven towns and villages on either side of the southern reaches of the Ghana-Togo border. The festival is comprised of historical re-enactment, a *kente* weaving competition, firing of musketry and a 'Women and Children's Durbar' that seeks to reframe female initiation rites from a heritage perspective. Celebrations culminate on the last Saturday of the festival, in a Grand *Durbar* held at the Ghanaian Customs and Excise Preventive Service parade ground in Kpetoe. The *Durbar* is an elaborate spectacle, commonly composed of a public procession of local leaders that concludes with a formal reception where high profile guests are entertained, and the political power of local elites is enacted and legitimised (see Umar-Buratai 2012). Enmeshed with the historic encounter between extant traditions and British colonial incursions across the region, the *Durbar* as a form of heritage practice is most closely associated with the Emirates of Northern Nigeria, but continues to form an integral part of festivals across Anglophone West

Africa (Apter 2005:167-199). Considering the crucial importance of claims to tradition in festivals across Ghana (Lentz 2001:54), the *Agbamevoza* authenticates itself through displays of weaving. The craftsmen with whom I worked described weaving as the ‘traditional work of the community’, despite it being just one form of labour that they had to balance against driving, farming and professional work in their attempts to forge sustainable livelihoods. Historical re-enactment and rowdy displays of musketry fire from local *Asafoⁱ* groups also played a part in forging an authentic sense of local heritage, linking contemporary festival practices with the public performance of Agotime history. The festival’s success in forging a spectacular and performative kind of local heritage was evident in its popularity amongst young weavers in Kpetoe and its capacity to draw the Agotime diaspora back home, bringing families together in celebration.

Nonetheless, the picture of heritage put forth in the festival is crucially bound up with the perspective of select elite actors. Proud of his title as ‘guardian of Ewe *kenteⁱⁱⁱ*’ the Agotime paramount, like traditional leaders and chiefs across Ghana, positions himself as an important intermediary through which ‘true’ knowledge of Agotime heritage can be accessed (see Yarrow 2011). These claims are bolstered by the fact that he has written several lengthy accounts of Agotime history and has collaborated with UNESCO on projects documenting the history and practise of *kente* weaving in Agotime. It can be argued that the paramount’s position as a gatekeeper of local knowledge works to fulfil his aspirations to recognition as both a skilled craftsman and chief. In this way, the form that the festival has taken has emerged from astute political calculations on the part of the paramount and his entourage as to how local practices can most convincingly be put to work not only in performing cultural heritage, but also in accruing elite prestige. One particularly telling instance of these negotiations is the way in which, having originated in the 1980s as a triumphalist celebration of Agotime’s military endeavours against the Asante, the festival has come to focus instead on weaving and the history of craftwork in Agotime. In the run up to the celebrations, demand for *kente* produced by local weavers increases and participants in the festivities routinely don their finest cloths when attending events. However, alongside other more

established festival practices, recent innovations in the festival's form include a weavers' *palanquin*ⁱⁱⁱ procession through the Grand *Durbar* and a youth weaving competition.

These shifts are important when considering that local leaders have legitimated not only their power, but also their particular view of heritage through aligning themselves with the dominant cultural forms of 'outsiders' who have greater access to resources (Mosse 2005:218). In the case of Agotime's festival this has meant eschewing militarised history in order to garner the support of the Regional House of Chiefs, who provide financial resources and much sought-after recognition to celebrations that '...promote interethnic exchange and development' (Lentz 2001:54). Thus, local elders and festival organisers have tactically deployed craftwork, rather than military history, as the focus of the celebration, with weaving becoming a legitimate fulcrum around which both, local pride can be expressed, and outside support garnered.

This work of cultural negotiation has been executed by the paramount and his chiefly colleagues with great diplomacy and skill, and their profound knowledge of local history and craft practices is undoubted. Nonetheless, Nene Keteku's position as a gatekeeper can be seen to undermine other views of local heritage, particularly those of workshop members who spoke with guarded bitterness of their marginalisation in the process of organising the festival, and their distrust of local leaders. Although the event was eagerly anticipated by young workshop weavers as a chance to market their wares and socialise with friends and family, many of their views on the festival were not actively sought by the organising committee. Even those elements of the festival, like the weaving competition and loom-palanquin (see Figure 7.1) that were meant to represent the local crafting community were organised in conjunction with a local NGO rather than the weaving workshop members themselves. Rather, dismissed by certain local elders as 'thieves', oriented towards money rather than tradition, many young craftsmen are judged by their elders to fall short in terms of both their technical skill in the loom and their knowledge of the craft's history and lore. Despite emerging from experiences of modernity, when ideas of tradition and heritage functioned as impracticably high standards against which young craftsmen often fell short, these discourses worked to powerfully exclude some craftspeople from the everyday

advantages of a 'modern' life (Herzfeld 2004:20). Those struggling to make a living in the craft came to occupy precarious social spaces of 'waithood'. For these young men, difficulties accessing education and decently recompensed work have meant that all-important social markers of adulthood, including the resources to marry and support a family, are becoming ever-harder to attain (see Honwana 2012). As such, attitudes towards heritage very much depended upon one's 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 made of weavers trying to market a product.

<Insert Figure 7.1 near here>

This process is bound up with both modernity, where the integration of mobile technologies and media into the everyday lives of young people around the world has broadened their horizons (see Honwana 2012: see also Jua 2010), and the ever-quickenning pace of globalisation, which increasingly imperils artisans' livelihoods as crafted products have been largely overtaken by mass-produced goods (Scrase 2003:449; see also Herzfeld 2004). As has been persuasively argued elsewhere, ideas about heritage are crucially tied to experiences of (and indeed against) globalisation (see Herzfeld 2004). What is more, the intersection between globalisation and heritage issues fundamentally alters '...how people understand their culture and themselves' (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004:58). In one sense, this is evinced by the integration of media and technology into how the festival is celebrated. Social media and messaging services, including Facebook and WhatsApp, play an increasingly important part in the dissemination of information about and images of the festivities through social networks of kin and friends. Local radio and print media also play a role in the promotion of the festival. However, on another level this relationship was evident in the dissonance between the lavish presentation of local heritage put forth during the celebrations and the challenging reality of young weavers contending with deep-rooted social inequalities and economic precarity. For them, a festival focused on the technicolour spectacle of chiefly processions rather than the viability of craftwork and livelihoods was failing to address the everyday needs of weavers.

This is not to say that heritage in Agotime was divorced from broader political and social currents. Indeed, with coverage from local and national media, as well as an increasing social media presence, the festival formed part of widely circulated images of Ghanaian and West African culture. However, to the extent that the festival functioned as an arena within which the local elite could forge and strengthen their ties both to politicians and NGOs, these exchanges could be exclusive and exclusionary. An organising committee composed of the paramount chief, local business owners and other local ‘big men’ is tasked each year with inviting guests of honour, and the presence of MPs, government ministers and NGO officials forms an important part of the celebrations. However, the workshop weavers whose craft sits at the heart of the celebration, were notably absent and effectively excluded from this committee. Thus, the festival constitutes a nexus between local and national elites, offering politicians an opportunity to connect with their constituents and giving the local elite a legitimate forum within which demands for resources and support for development projects can be made, whilst simultaneously reinforcing social hierarchies which marginalise young craftspeople (see Lentzt 2001). The performative offering of cash donations during the course of the Grand *Durbar*, along with the ritualised displays of respect through chiefly processions and greetings, sees prestige accrue on both sides. In this way, the political and material aspirations of both chiefly and political leaders become wedded to the exclusive forms of heritage on display in the festival.

However, these displays and their efficacy in forging relationships between local and national leaders, do little to allay a fundamental lack of trust weavers have in their representatives, both elected and traditional. In conversation with workshop colleagues it was not uncommon for talk to turn to local development projects that remained incomplete. During the summer of 2013, a long-promised road linking the Kpetoe’s main thoroughfare to the town’s market and the villages in the hinterland beyond remained unfinished. With the festival on the horizon, one weaver complained that although the local MP and district assembly had pledged the community this road several years before, work had ground to a stand-still. He wondered what might be said by officials about the matter during the upcoming celebrations and lamented what he viewed as the corruption of community leaders. These exchanges were

a frank expression of the fundamental divorce between the aspirations of craftspeople and those of elites, with ideas of heritage doing little to bridge this gap.

History, Policy and the Creation of Local Heritage in Agotime

As a nexus around which the relations between various elite actors are negotiated, the forms of culture on display at the festival, along with the heritage discourses at work in Agotime more broadly, are underpinned by the Ghanaian state's cultural policy. These in turn are linked to a series of longstanding international debates across sub-Saharan Africa and beyond about the social, economic and cultural value of patrimony and the precarious status of heritage in post-colonial contexts (UNESCO 1972; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004; Senah, 2013). In a crucial sense, from the colonial period, through the liberation struggles headed by Nkrumah in the 1940s and 50s and up until the present moment, ideas of the 'nation' in Ghana have been constructed in relation to the political and social authority embedded in localised forms of heritage.

During the colonial era, the powerful symbolism of chieftainship, *kente* cloths, and the cultural festivals enacted through *Durbar* displays, along with other emblems of supposedly 'local' traditions were put to work in shoring up the power of chiefly elites reconfigured by the colonial authorities. Across the African continent, invented traditions introduced by European colonisers in African colonies tended to focus on governance and subordination, rather than production (Ranger 1983:228; see also Umar-Buratai 2012). As such, throughout much of the Britain's colonial history in the former Gold Coast,^{iv} when their involvement was largely limited to coastal enclaves, a policy of indirect rule was fundamental to governance in the colony. These policies worked to '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 chieftaincy to work supporting the political and economic exigencies of the colonial administration. Thus, the institution of chieftaincy, so central to contemporary notions of tradition across Africa, was to a considerable degree born from a colonial history of 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 political history of the region.

Andrew Apter's work interestingly examines the intertwining of localised forms of culture and processes of state formation in cultural festivals (Apter 2005:167-169). As an invented tradition that has its origins in the British colonial administration of India, and was introduced to West Africa by General Lugard^v, Apter (ibid.) highlights the role that the *Durbar* played in Anglophone colonial West Africa, including the former Gold Coast. 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 cultural practices that consecrated these new chiefs. Thus, it is little surprise that in Agotime, as elsewhere across southern Ghana, the paramount chief and his entourage are often at the heart of festival celebrations. The *Durbar* is a ubiquitous feature of Ghanaian festivals and these performances, rooted as they are in the exercise of colonial power, continue to play a role in defining the relations between state power and local culture.

In the period since independence these forms of culture have been re-purposed and, not without awkwardness, married to a vision of national unity. The state-sponsored notion of 'Unity in Diversity'—a slogan commonly broadcast through the radio and plastered on hoardings across Ghana—espouses values of democracy, tolerance and equality, whilst highlighting the tensions inherent to a nationalism that rests upon diffuse, and often conflicting, local identities. A short excerpt from the policy document of the National Commission on Culture quite clearly lays out the issues at stake:

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)

Although this cultural work has not been restricted to Ghana alone, having historically found its echoes across sub-Saharan Africa in Leopold Senghor's Senegalese *negritude* and Mobutu's Congolese 'African authenticity', these sister movements have similarly struggled in their attempts to forge national sentiment from disparate local traditions. The very idea then of 'local' heritage, was arguably born out of the internecine struggles of modernity for power and identity in a region riven by colonial and post-colonial fault-lines. Whilst not totally discredited, for pride in local heritage in a place like Agotime remains and is evinced in events such as the *Agbamevoza*, ideas of local heritage have not emerged from these struggles unscathed. Rather, the politics of heritage and nationalism carries with it the heavy baggage of a project which, due to its internal contradictions, was not, and may never be, fully realised.

'Local' heritage, the Ghanaian nation and the power of chiefly and political elites make the sorts of cultural practice on display in events like the *Agbamevoza* hegemonic ones, representing largely elite concerns rather than the everyday issues faced by many weavers. Nonetheless, this is not to say that heritage and powerful ideas of community and identity did not play a key role in the lives of Agotime weavers. Rather, the importance of cultural practices for young craftspeople lay more in the routines of their work, sociality and other elements of what might be termed intangible heritage, rather than in the spectacle of the festival. Arguably, it is in these practices of sociality, and the lifeworlds that they sustained within the crafting community, that a great deal of Agotime's crafting heritage is vested (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004:61).

Community and the Social Grounding of Weaving Heritage

The everyday practices of sociality that patterned life in the workshop and the experience of weaving in Agotime were the unremarked upon basis of workshop weavers' festival

celebrations. Weavers valued the festival not only as a spectacular display of local power, but also as an opportunity to market their cloths and a chance to join together in strengthening and broadening the social networks of family, friends and customers that underpinned their livelihoods. In the run up to the *Agbamevoza* in September 2013, a group of workshop colleagues came together to set up a stall at the Grand *Durbar* selling their cloths. Weaving was a skill that was most often learnt in the context of the work of the household, with fathers, uncles, older brothers and neighbours teaching younger family and friends how to work at the loom. Thus, the cloth stall at the festival had been organised by male cousins who teamed up with neighbours and friends to sell their wares. Beautiful cloths in rainbow hues were carefully displayed under a canopy the weavers had rented together, and each man took the chance to show off their skillfully made pieces. Potential customers were courted with smiles and welcoming handshakes and the weavers themselves modeled carefully woven and stitched *batakari* (smocks made up of stitched together cotton strips that are widely worn across Ghana but are nonetheless considered typical of the north of the country) like those they had on sale. The men shared responsibility for looking after the stall, taking turns as they alternated between selling cloth and exploring the *Durbar* grounds. Photos of the jubilant crowds and the *palanquin* processions were snapped on mobile phones, and the families and friends of the weavers stopped by the stall to chat and share snacks of fruit, maize and ice cream.

For Francis, an accomplished workshop weaver and one of my friends and mentors in the crafting community, the *Agbamevoza* was a chance to sell cloths and develop relationships with new customers, whilst also participating in the life of the village, learning about Agotime's heritage and sharing this knowledge with his child. Describing the festival, 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)

Much like weaving knowledge itself, which was socially situated and crafted between family and friends in community spaces like the Kpetoe workshop (see Lave and Wenger 1991), heritage was articulated as much in the relationships that weavers had with one another, their families and the broader community, as in the spectacle of the *Durbar*.

Craft Learning and Intangible Heritage

Looking at craft learning and the shared knowledge of festival practices as instances of intangible heritage in the weaving community it is clear that both were structured around exchange. Both at the festival and in the workshop, weavers shared stories, food and social contacts as they navigated the routine demands of their work and its place within the broader context of Agotime's crafting heritage. Just as my colleagues' stall at the *Agbamevoza* had been characterised by the pleasures of weavers sharing food, meeting friends and taking part in the festivities, so too was the weaving workshop a place where weavers worked together to share ideas, develop their craft practice and showcase their skills. The steady rhythm of work at the loom was punctuated by discussions about how best to use materials or which combinations of shape and colour would be most aesthetically pleasing. Trusted colleagues shared work with one another, and established workshop members would offer guidance to younger weavers. As an apprentice myself I often benefitted from the input of experienced craftsmen sharing their expertise and tools with me, as we spoke over some food or a drink. These exchanges occasionally became quite raucous, participants putting forth and defending strong opinions about how best to approach the making of a cloth.

Apart from the practical problem-solving part of these conversations, they also served as a focus for the negotiation of social norms in the workshop. Certain kinds of behavior were often reinforced in these exchanges, particularly those surrounding cleanliness and order. I was often reminded of the importance of sweeping my loom before the start of work, and there were tacit links drawn between the maintenance of a clean loom and control of the spiritual hazards of weaving work. One friend went as far as to admonish me for repeatedly forgetting to clean my loom, saying that by ensuring that the space where I worked was

swept, I would be ridding it of possibly malignant spirits. Whilst rites associated with weaving in Agotime were not an obviously commonplace part of the everyday routines of craftwork, habits such as these were nonetheless embedded within the wider cosmological and cultural ideas that constitute intangible heritage (for further discussion of the intersection between the routine and ritual practices of work, see Dilley's 1987 account of Senegalese Tukolor weavers).

The offering of libations and the sharing of food to mark the beginning and end of apprenticeship was another practice which similarly brought together sociality, work and 'intangible' cultural ideas. Small celebrations, during which weavers, their families and friends came together to mark and legitimate the training and skill of new members of the crafting community, these gatherings were low-key affairs that lacked the pomp and ceremony of the festival. Nonetheless, the part they played in the socialisation of weavers was significant, importantly underpinning how craft learning and practice was transmitted and sustained in Agotime.

Conclusion: Imperiled Livelihoods and the Role of Heritage

In the summer of 2015, I returned to the Kpetoe workshop to visit friends and see how things had changed since completing my initial fieldwork at the end of 2013. Despite maintaining contact with two of my former mentors, I was saddened to find the workshop, which had once been home to nearly thirty weavers, a much quieter place. A core of about ten weavers remained in the workshop. However, a number of others had abandoned the loom for work elsewhere, focusing instead on cultivating their family farms, finding work as drivers or on furthering their education in the hope of maybe securing an elusive government job. Those who remained spoke dispiritedly of the challenges they faced in making ends meet. The ongoing Ebola crisis, which began in 2014, was widely felt to have had a negative impact on the viability of workshop livelihoods. Although no cases of the disease had been reported in Ghana, several workshop members were sure that the humanitarian crisis ongoing in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea had dented the local tourist trade, with visitors postponing travel to the region, causing a knock-on effect to their trade in cloth. They spoke eloquently about the

ways that media coverage of events had stoked fears that travel 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. Furthermore, the Ghanaian government had called in the IMF towards the end of 2014, and agreement on a package of loans and austerity measures at the start of 2015 heralded a worsening domestic economy. Taken together, these crises were felt to have chipped away at the sustainability of life in the workshop, whose membership had more than halved in the three years since I first arrived in Kpetoe.

Reflecting upon these changes, and the daily challenges weavers faced supporting themselves and their families from the craft, it was clear that macro-economic, political and social factors far beyond the control of Agotime's weavers have long challenged their livelihoods. In moments of crisis, the viability of crafting livelihoods was acutely affected, pushing many weavers from the loom into other types of work which they hoped would offer a modicum of security, but which were also often just as insecure. Driving *Okado*, which involved offering pillion rides on the back of rented motorcycles, was just one example of the precarious work that some young craftsmen took part in when weaving jobs were in short supply. Plying potholed roads for passengers was not only dangerous, but also far from lucrative, with drivers having to cover both the price of fuel and the rent of the bike from their limited earnings. Those remaining in the workshop were left to negotiate these challenges with the limited social and material resources available. Social ties with kin and customers were carefully cultivated and maintained, whilst resourceful and inventive use of materials played a part in producing desirable and marketable cloths (see Clifford Collard 2016).

However, whilst the material and social fabric of weavers working lives was under constant strain, the spectacle of heritage on display in the festival achieved little in securing sustainable livelihoods for craftspeople. The gap between hegemonic, elite forms of festival heritage and the cultural routines that constitute craft-working is not necessarily, in and of itself, a negative thing. In one sense, it is evidence of the ways that culture is socially patterned and structured. What is, however, undeniable, is that the disjuncture between

festival heritage and the routine practices of weaving as a form of heritage work that underpins crafting livelihoods, highlights the differing values attached to heritage by members of various elites and *kente* weavers themselves. For weavers, craftwork was approached pragmatically as an everyday means of making a living, whilst for elite actors the festival was an occasion to accrue prestige and bolster their position within social hierarchies. Although these prerogatives might not always be in direct opposition, they seemed to rarely intersect, with resultant tensions and disagreements between different actors about what constituted heritage in the crafting community. In a situation where young weavers are struggling to sustain their livelihoods in the face of deep-seated systemic and globalised inequalities, their voices about what heritage should be, and the pressing priorities of getting by through craftwork, were often marginalised in favour of a view of heritage that favoured spectacle over the pressing, quotidian needs of craftspeople for dignified and rewarding work.

Policy Suggestions

The kind of elision highlighted above is not primarily a question of academic debate, but rather has very real ramifications for people whose work is bound up with important ideas of culture and tradition and who are also living with precarity. It is arguably the work of heritage officials to try and reconcile the appeal of festival heritage with alternate views of crafting heritage that foreground the aspirations of weavers to dignified, sustainable and meaningful forms of work. To these ends, it is hoped that this ethnography will encourage those engaged with matters of heritage, sustainability and policy to:

1. Pay attention to how issues of heritage, tradition and culture are socially stratified and structured, both locally and in wider, more global terms;
2. Consider how amenable heritage discourses and practices are to the everyday challenges of making a living;
3. Remember that heritage must be valued not only in terms of ‘tangible’ displays of culture, but also for the positive contribution it makes to livelihoods and communities. In this sense,

heritage should be seen as crucially embedded in the shifting, mutable routines of the everyday rather than just as a form of cultural spectacle.

Notes

- i During periods of Akwamu and Asante expansionism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries *Asafo* companies played an important role in military resistance east of the Volta and their inclusion in contemporary festivals makes important claims to local history.
- ii Although Agotime history is distinct from that of their more populous Ewe neighbours, and older members of the community speak Agotime Dangbe, rather than Ewe as their mother tongue, Ewe is the most widely spoken language in the area and Agotime is widely seen as ‘...a kind of proxy Ewe [culture]’. (Nugent 2008: 948).
- iii Palanquins are decorated chairs, borne aloft by several carriers that are generally used for the ceremonial transport of chiefs at durbar celebrations in southern Ghana. A weavers’ palanquin featuring a weaver working at a loom is a novel interpretation of this tradition.
- iv The Gold Coast was formed in 1867 by the British government seizure of private lands along the coast of the Gulf of Guinea. As a British colony it continued to be known as the Gold Coast, the British claiming further territory through the Anglo-Ashanti wars that ended in 1902. Following independence in 1957, the territory was renamed Ghana after the ancient empire that lay to the north-west of the current Ghanaian state.
- v General Lugard was a 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).

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Figure 7.1: Kente weaving competition winner being carried through the durbar ground on the loom palanquin, Agbamevoza festival, Kpetoe, September 2013. (Photo Credit: Niamh Clifford Collard 2013)
