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STATE AESTHETICS AND STATE MEANINGS: POLITICAL ARCHITECTURE IN GHANA AND CÔTE D’IVOIRE

JULIA GALLAGHER, DENNIS LARBI MPERE AND
YAH ARIANE BERNADETTE N’DJORÉ*

ABSTRACT

There are striking differences between state buildings in Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire; and in how citizens living in each country’s capital city think and talk about them. In this article, we explore the degree to which these buildings illustrate very different ideas of statehood in West Africa. We draw on art theories from West Africa to argue that architectural aesthetics rest on juxtapositions of beauty and the sublime and we suggest ways these help establish state meaning. We then apply our aesthetic approach to citizens’ evaluations of their state buildings in Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire and illustrate how differently the approach plays out, in Ghana where the state emerges as acclimatized and relatively robust and in Côte d’Ivoire where the state emerges as idealized and fragile.

THIS ARTICLE IS ABOUT STATEHOOD in Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana, neighbours with very different state aesthetics. In it, we explore how these states are embodied by their buildings—presidential headquarters, parliaments, government departments, hospitals, and police stations—which we take as both projections of the state and a surface upon which state meaning is

*Julia Gallagher (jg35@soas.ac.uk) is a professor of African Politics at SOAS, University of London, and Visiting Professor at the Johannesburg Institute of Advanced Studies, University of Johannesburg. Dennis Larbi Mpere (dennismperelarbi@gmail.com) is a graduate of and teaching assistant at the University of Ghana. Yah Ariane Bernadette N’djoré (arianendjore@gmail.com) is a PhD student in Communication Science at Université Félix Houphouët-Boigny. This article is part of a project that receives funding from the European Research Council under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No 772070). The authors are grateful to Lesley Lokko, Anne Schumann, Moudwe Daga, the participants in ‘The Politics of Architecture in Africa’ workshop at the Johannesburg Institute of Advanced Study in December 2019, and the reviewers and editors of *African Affairs*.

read.¹ Some buildings symbolize the state, as backdrops to big political events, on bank notes, stamps, and tourist posters. Others facilitate state activities such as policy making and implementation, legal organization and enforcement, or service provision. Citizens experience buildings as directly representing and enacting statehood, noting where they sit in the city, who is allowed inside, and whether the style seems foreign or locally sympathetic, monumental, or modest. They have ideas about when they were built, who paid for them, and which regimes have occupied them. They associate some with national events such as presidential inaugurations, state funerals, debates, speeches, and demonstrations of popular dissent and others with mundane activities like visiting the hospital or police station, paying their taxes or applying for a passport. The buildings' physical characteristics, histories, and stories establish not only what the state looks and feels like, but what it means. Materially, and through analogy, they constitute the state body and its 'personality'.²

A starting point is to read the buildings as those who commissioned and designed them intended. From the Roman founder of architectural theory Vitruvius to twentieth-century high modernism, with a heavy dose of colonial construction along the way, buildings have been used by architects and political elites in attempts to reform, organize, and civilize societies. Architects are attracted by ideas of abstraction and the order it enables.³ At its most extreme, such an enterprise attempts a great 'tidying up of things' as architect Charles-Edouard Jeanneret Le Corbusier argued of his modernist planning.⁴

1. We contribute to discussions about how buildings project political power, express ideology, and carry collective memories. African examples include the following: Nnamdi Elleh, *African architecture: Evolution and transformation* (McGraw-Hill, New York, NY, 1997); Nnamdi Elleh, *Architecture and power in Africa* (Praeger, Westport, CT, 2002); Dominique Malaquais, *Architecture, pouvoir et dissidence au Cameroun* (Karthala, Paris, 2002); Tom Avermaete and John Lagae (eds), 'L'Afrique, c'est chic: Architecture and planning in Africa 1950–1970', *OASE* 82, 2010; Fasil Demissie (ed.), *Colonial architecture and urbanism in Africa: Intertwined and contested histories* (Ashgate, Farnham, 2012); Simon Bekker and Goran Therborn (eds), *Power and powerlessness: Capital cities in Africa* (HSRC Press, Cape Town, 2012); Nora Greani, 'Monuments publics au XXI^e siècle: Renaissance africaine et nouveaux patrimoines', *Cahiers d'études africaines* 227 (2017), pp. 495–514; Daniel Mulugeta, 'Pan-Africanism and the affective charges of the African Union building in Addis Ababa', *Journal of African Cultural Studies* (2021), DOI: 10.1080/13696815.2021.1884971; Joanne Tomkinson, Daniel Mulugeta and Julia Gallagher (eds), *Architecture and politics in Africa: Making, living and imagining identities through buildings* (forthcoming).

2. These readings reflect Amos Rapoport's point that 'the lay public, the users, react to environments in associational terms', Amos Rapoport, *The meaning of the built environment: a nonverbal communication approach* (Sage Publications, Beverly Hills, CA, 1982), p. 19; and Rasmussen's point that they often anthropomorphize buildings, Steen Eiler Rasmussen, *Experiencing architecture* (MIT, Cambridge, 1964).

3. Jeremy Till, *Architecture depends* (MIT, Cambridge, 2013), p. 28.

4. Charles-Edouard Jeanneret Le Corbusier, *Towards a new architecture* (BN Publishing, Hawthorn, 2008).

The high modernism of the twentieth century, often implicitly assumed to possess a civilizing, rationalizing ‘Europeanness’ that could be transmitted to non-European cultures,⁵ heavily influenced late colonial and early independent states across Africa and remains visible in many of its architectural legacies, not least in Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire.⁶ But its domination of many African capital cities opens up a puzzle: how does this ‘rationalizing’ architecture fit with experiences of post-colonial African statehood often associated with selfish elites encouraging and exploiting disorder?⁷ Danny Hoffman, in his study of modernist buildings in Monrovia, describes the political failures of this ‘formal’ architectural style.⁸ Discussing the Edward J. Roye building (originally the True Whig Party headquarters), he notes disjunctures between the ‘cartesian grid of the tower...a message of bureaucratic efficiency’ and how this building—abandoned, collapsing, and squatted—created a ‘thinly veiled fiction: that the Liberian economy was a freely functioning, rational machine, driving the growth and development of a democratic state’.⁹ Hoffman’s juxtaposition of the aspirations of the original design and positioning of the building and the views of the Monroviaans who live near and in the ruined building together provide a compelling picture of the Liberian state project, as intended by elites and as experienced by citizens. State reality emerges somewhere between the two perspectives. This phenomenon is nothing new, as Dominique Malaquais demonstrates in her historical study of palace complexes in Cameroon, where architecture was used by elites to support existing power structures

5. Liora Moshe, ‘Regional and colonial architectures in French west Africa: Formalistic dialogues’, *Présence Africaine* 171 (2005), pp. 59–68; Okwui Enwezor, ‘Modernity and postcolonial ambivalence’, *South Atlantic Quarterly* 109, 3 (2010), pp. 595–620, p. 595; William Whyte, ‘Modernism, modernization and Europeanization in west African architecture, 1944–94’ in Martin Conway and Kiran Klaus Patel (eds), *Europeanization in the twentieth century* (Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2010), pp. 210–228.

6. Ola Uduku, ‘Modernist architecture and “the tropical” in west Africa: The tropical architecture movement in west Africa, 1948–1970’, *Habitat International* (2005), doi:10.1016/j.habitatint.2004.11.001; James F. Alayande, *Abuja: Readings in city planning* (Createspace, Scotts Valley, CA, 2006); Janet Berry Hess, *Art and architecture in postcolonial Africa* (McFarland and Company, Jefferson, LA, 2006); Edward Denison, Guang Yu Ren and Naigzy Gebremedhin, *Asmara: Africa’s secret modernist city* (Merrell, London, 2006); Johan Lagae and Kim De Raedt, ‘Building for “Pauthenticité”’: Eugène Palumbo and the architecture of Mobutu’s Congo’, *Journal of Architectural Education* 68, 2 (2014), pp. 178–189; Manuel Hertz, *African modernism: Architecture of independence* (Park Books, Zurich, 2015).

7. Chinua Achebe, *The trouble with Nigeria* (Heinemann, Portsmouth, 1984); Jean-François Médard, ‘L’état patrimonialisé’, *Politique Africaine* 39 (1990), pp. 25–36; Jean-François Bayart, Stephen Ellis and Béatrice Hibou, *La criminalisation de l’état en Afrique* (Éditions Complexe, Bruxelles, 1997); Jean-François Bayart, *L’état en Afrique: Les politiques du ventre* (Librairie Arthème Fayard, Paris, 2006).

8. Danny Hoffman, *Monrovia modern: Urban form and political imagination in Liberia* (Duke University Press, Durham, 2017), p. 77.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 105–106.

and by non-elites as a focus for dissidence (particularly, as she details, in acts of destruction) and a vehicle for counter-narratives.¹⁰

Taken at face value, state architecture describes very different state personalities in our two case studies. Ghana has an eclectic and relatively permeable collection of colonial and post-colonial-era buildings, while Côte d'Ivoire's buildings are relatively aloof and monolithic, dating more narrowly from the post-independence economic boom. In order to engage the gap Hoffman describes between aspirations to an ordered state and its more complex reality, we take these different architectural aesthetics as starting points to describe the ideas and forms of two African states, juxtaposing them with citizens' perceptions, which might suggest acceptance, avoidance, challenge, or fear of their state buildings.

Our aesthetic reading is situated between and against James Scott's and Achille Mbembe's influential accounts of the state. We treat these as 'ideal types', a starting point from which to explore real-world examples. Both accounts have been drawn into a tendency to homogenize the state in Africa,¹¹ but they have little else in common. Scott describes how state elites seek to make the societies they govern legible by simplifying and standardizing them. 'seeing' societies from a remove, states replace social complexity and ambiguity with abstraction and idealization in a bid to erase society's 'political autonomy' and make it easier to organize.¹² Scott presents us with a struggle between the elites' promotion of simplicity and order and the grassroots' defence of heterogeneity and disorder.¹³ In contrast, Mbembe describes a state that is co-produced between elites and citizens, locked into impotent disorder that produces a mutual 'zombification'.¹⁴ Mbembe's descriptions of state power are less an account of state control than that of the inevitability of a dysfunctional state farce, the antithesis of Scott's tidying state. We borrow from both authors' accounts of

10. Malaquais, *Architecture*.

11. It is 30 years since Martin Doornbos made the case for describing 'the African state' as a broadly similar entity across the continent. If he was stretching the case then, it would be almost impossible to make it now. Martin Doornbos, 'The African state in academic debate: Retrospect and prospect', *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 28, 2 (1990), pp. 179–198.

12. James Scott, *Seeing like a state: How certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed* (Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 1998), p. 54.

13. Scott's African example is Anglophone Tanzania, but his analysis can be applied to Francophone examples where state–society relations are presented as highly divided, a dominant, remote state imposing a 'divine' authority from above, in Dominique Darbon's reading, or a powerful entity overwhelming a weak society in Maurice Kamto's: Dominique Darbon, 'L'État prédateur', *Politique Africaine* 39 (1990), pp. 37–45; Maurice Kamto, 'Les rapports état-société civile en Afrique', *Revue Juridique et Politique: Indépendance et Coopération* 48, 3 (1994), pp. 285–291.

14. Achille Mbembe, *On the postcolony* (University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 2001).

the state aesthetic, exploring the importance of the ‘tidying’¹⁵ and the ‘zombie’¹⁶ states, particularly as they are understood by citizens. We attempt to avoid the dangers of homogenization by providing an explicit comparison between two countries. Our ambition is to establish an epistemological approach to the state—a new way to read states aesthetically—that will uncover different state ontologies.

Since we are in the world of architecture, we use ideas from aesthetics to create our theoretical framework. In particular, we draw on ideas of visibility, invisibility, beauty, and the sublime from various art forms, to establish a theoretical approach to reading state meaning, as expressed by buildings and as experienced by citizens 襟. A dialectic that echoes both Scottian legibility and Mbembian ambiguity emerges from this reading. Applied to Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire, this framing illustrates how state meaning pivots differently between an appreciation of both rationalizing order and disruptive disorder.

The article is organized into five sections. The first discusses our theoretical approach, drawing on art aesthetics in West Africa. The second details our methods, including the basis for comparing Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire. The third and fourth sections address our empirical findings, showing how citizens’ descriptions of state buildings in Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire establish very different state ideas. The fifth section concludes by using these differences to draw implications for broader understandings of African statehood.

An aesthetic framing

We begin with a discussion about African aesthetics, drawn from literature about art, including dance, music, sculpture, painting, masks, and storytelling. Some of these artistic productions are tied to spiritual and political rituals and meanings, so that the power of a work is not always just a reflection on the social world (as it might be in the West),¹⁷ but more clearly part of it. Aesthetics therefore often concern artistic objects that have effectual power as well as affective power.

There are different ways to cut the concept of aesthetics: we have chosen to describe it in terms of beauty and the sublime.¹⁸ This decision is based in part on preoccupations in the literature on African arts—particularly that which deals with West Africa—which lend themselves to discussions of the

15. Le Corbusier, *Towards a new architecture*.

16. Mbembe, *On the postcolony*.

17. Susan Vogel, ‘African art/Western eyes’, *African Arts* 30, 4 (1997), pp. 64–77.

18. For different ways to make this ‘cut’ see Rowland Abiodun, ‘African aesthetics’, *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 35, 4 (2001), pp. 15–23; Sarah Nuttall, ‘Introduction: Rethinking beauty’, in Sarah Nuttall (ed.), *Beautiful/ugly: African and diaspora aesthetics* (Duke University Press, Durham, 2006), pp. 6–29.

sublime because of relationships between aesthetics and the spirit world. Beyond this, a beautiful–sublime framework complicates simplistic binaries (we come back to this point later) and avoids an excessive focus on value judgements that might occur within a more philosophical beauty–ugliness framing.¹⁹

We use the term beauty to describe things that are attractive, ordered, regular, and conventional, following Justin Njiofor's definition of beauty as 'ordered proportion, symmetry in the arrangement of parts, and the resultant harmony thereupon'.²⁰ Two examples from West Africa provide support for this approach: Gilbert's discussion of the Akan term for beauty, *eye fe*, which describes something that is 'nice, amusing'²¹ and William Murphy's discussion of the Mende term, *nyande*, which describes something orderly and decorative.²² In these readings, the word beauty applies to qualities that please; provide a sense of calm, order, and tidiness; and concern pleasant, knowable, and essentially prosaic things.

This suggests that ugliness, the absence of beauty, is a description of things that are disruptive, untidy, and unpleasant. However, ugliness does not capture an important aspect of aesthetics: its relation to power. Here, the term sublime appears more appropriate. Staying with the examples from Ghana and Sierra Leone, Gilbert and Murphy each discuss powerful forms of art that are not beautiful but where the term ugly is inadequate. Gilbert assesses the fascinating power of concert posters displayed on Accra's billboards, which depict bizarre, obscene, and thrilling images, which she describes as 'ridiculous, frightful, dreadful...they take your breath away...stomach-burning'.²³ Murphy's discussion of ceremonial dances in Sierra Leone explores the 'wonder and mystery' they evoke through 'a palpable sense of danger'.²⁴ In both examples, art forms induce physical reactions by implicating the observer who becomes breathless, whose stomach burns, and who feels danger. We can add other accounts to these. Straying into central Africa, Mbebe describes late-twentieth-century popular Congolese music, which

19. See Polycarp Ikuenobe, 'Good and beautiful: A moral-aesthetic view of personhood in African communal traditions', *Essays in Philosophy* 17, 1 (2016), pp. 125–163; Baqie B. Muhammad, 'The Sudanese concept of beauty, spirit possession, and power', *Folklore Forum* 26, 1/2 (1993), pp. 43–67.

20. Justin C. Njiofor, 'The concept of beauty: A study in African aesthetics', *Asian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 7, 3 (2018), pp. 30–40, p. 30.

21. Michelle Gilbert, 'Things ugly: Ghanaian popular painting', in Sarah Nuttall (ed.), *Beautiful/ugly: African and diaspora aesthetics* (Duke University Press, Durham, 2006), pp. 340–371, p. 346.

22. William P. Murphy, 'The sublime dance of Mende politics: An African aesthetic of charismatic power', *American Ethnologist* 25, 4 (1998), pp. 563–582, p. 564.

23. Gilbert, 'Things ugly', p. 346.

24. Murphy, 'The sublime', p. 568.

through ‘sporadic eruptions...corruption through noise’²⁵ produces ‘emotional intoxication...transforming the rules of musical beauty’.²⁶ And, drawing on examples from various African contexts, Mary Nooter and Alan Roberts describe the unsettling quality of the ‘fantastic’ in African visual art that addresses the ‘breach between the known and the infinite’.²⁷

The word sublime—*sub* means ‘under’ or ‘up to’ and *limin* means ‘threshold’—refers to something that lifts us out of the everyday.²⁸ The sublime encompasses elements of beauty and ugliness but goes beyond them by adding wonder and transcendence. Since the eighteenth century, the term has been associated with obscurity: things imagined rather than seen, Edmund Burke argued, cause the deepest ‘admiration, reverence and respect’ and ‘astonishment’.²⁹ Carolyn Korsmeyer encapsulated the sublime as ‘qualities of vastness, danger, desolation, infinity, great size, difficulty, and magnificence...a degree of power that puts their might above that of a human being’.³⁰ In our examples, the word sublime applies to work that is disturbing, ambiguous, and other-worldly.

Ambiguity, obscurity, and secrecy are central to power in many African artistic forms, where the visible is only symbolic or even a distraction.³¹ In relation to Ghana, for example, various authors have discussed how Akan royal regalia that form the showy part of kingship only symbolize the king’s power, which actually resides in objects kept hidden inside his palace.³² Similarly, the physical attributes of powerful Dangme objects are unimportant—most objects being ‘manufactured from base or perishable materials’, often covered, and not seen at all.³³ In other West African contexts, although important objects are shown under particular conditions on

25. Achille Mbembe, ‘Variations on the beautiful in Congolese worlds of sound’, in Sarah Nuttall (ed.), *Beautiful/ugly: African and diaspora aesthetics* (Duke University Press, Durham, 2006), pp. 60–93, p. 76.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 71.

27. Mary Nooter Roberts and Alan F. Roberts, *A sense of wonder: African art from the Faletti family collection* (University of Washington Press, Seattle, WA, 1997), p. 32.

28. Richard Rorty, ‘The sublime and the beautiful: Studies in criticism and theory 982’ (The Richard Rorty Papers 52, 8, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA, 1998).

29. Edmund Burke, *A philosophical enquiry into the origin of our ideas of the sublime and beautiful* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2015), p. 47.

30. Carolyn Korsmeyer, ‘Delightful, delicious, disgusting’, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 60, 3 (2002), pp. 217–225, p. 221.

31. Vimbai M. Matiza, ‘African social concept of beauty: its relevancy to literary criticism’, *Asian Journal of Social Science and Humanities* 2, 2 (2013), pp. 61–70.

32. Tony Yeboah, ‘“Asantean noumena”: The politics and imaginary reconstruction of an Asante palace’, in Joanne Tomkinson, Daniel Mulugeta and Julia Gallagher (eds), *Architecture and politics in Africa: Making, living and imagining identities through buildings* (forthcoming); Michelle Gilbert, ‘The leopard who sleeps in a basket: Akuapem secrecy in everyday life and in royal metaphor’ in Mary Nooter (ed.), *Secrecy: African art that conceals and reveals* (Museum for African Art, New York, NY, 1993), pp. 123–139.

33. Nii Otokunor Quarcoopome, ‘Agbaa: Dangme art and the politics of secrecy’, in Mary Nooter (ed.), *Secrecy: African art that conceals and reveals* (Museum for African Art, New York, NY, 1993), pp. 113–120, p. 115.

special occasions, their physical forms are secondary to their hidden qualities. Susan Vogel describes how in Côte d'Ivoire the power of Baule art objects lies in what the people perceiving them imagine rather than what they see; the artist is responsible 'not [for] the object's powerful essence but simply its locus, a shell that is its physical exterior'.³⁴ In another example from Côte d'Ivoire, Sasha Newell similarly discusses ambiguous dynamics in the way fashion 'bluffeurs' juxtapose brands and fakes. The 'bluffeurs' draw their power from a 'public secret', where 'surface and depth, illusion and authenticity are not opposed but intertwined...[so that] unmasking does not expose or diminish mystery, but rather extends it, exposing not the truth itself, but the reliance of truth upon illusion'.³⁵ Invisibility and secrecy have been applied explicitly to architecture in West Africa too—for example, in pre-colonial Cameroon where the Banjoun chief's *tsa* (palace) was used to hide him from his subjects.³⁶ Mark DeLancey explains that the palace's ability to project power rested on the political strategies used to create, possess, and convey the idea of secret knowledge, even more than the secret itself.³⁷

Particularly interesting is the relationship between beauty and the sublime. Murphy explores this in his discussion of charismatic power in Mende dance and politics, 'eruptions that break through the regularities of the political world'.³⁸ The 'regularities' can be described as beautiful (ordered and harmonious), while the 'eruptions' are sublime, unexpected, and subversive moves that overturn regularity. One political example he gives is where a weak election candidate overcomes a much stronger one, drawing on secret support from his rival's avowed followers, 'hidden strategizing that circumvents political norms while publicly appearing to abide by them'.³⁹ Public admiration for such clever strategizing is a response to its mysterious sources of power. Murphy uses this approach to explain how the secrecy of Sierra Leone's Poro and Sande societies 'reflects a general order of politics operating at two different levels: a public, civic level of chiefs and government officials and a hidden level of spiritual and strategic forces influencing public events'.⁴⁰

34. Vogel, 'African art', p. 72.

35. Sasha Newell, 'Brands as masks: Public secrecy and the counterfeit in Côte d'Ivoire', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 19 (2013), pp. 138–54, p. 141.

36. Malaquais, *Architecture*.

37. Mark Dike DeLancey, *Conquest and construction: Palace architecture in northern Cameroon* (Brill, Boston, MA, 2016).

38. Murphy, 'The sublime', p. 566.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 568.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 569.

The relationship between beauty and the sublime is dichotomous in a multi-dimensional way. They possess oppositional qualities that operate along several axes: visible/invisible, ordered/disordered, and material/spiritual. Linked to the invisible world, the sublime is impossible to pin down and could be said to be ‘another side of all things’ rather than a one-dimensional ‘something other’.⁴¹ It is as if beauty provides a baseline of the expected and solid and the sublime pushes and pokes at it from many angles in ways both disturbing and thrilling.

Notions of subversiveness also pervade West African storytelling, in myths about the ‘trickster’—a liminal, ambiguous character found in various forms across the region, who constantly unleashes disorder, provoking laughter and ultimately creating new forms of order through constant challenges to the rules.⁴² Ananse is one such figure, the ‘spider’ whose adventures are part of Asante folklore. Ananse, driven by greed, lust, and envy, ‘shatters and reforms both the too-neat structures of the world and the too-smooth images of the mind’, in the process producing ‘the ironic mode, suspicious of all tidiness and insistent on the doubleness of all reality’.⁴³ The trickster’s ambiguity merges destructiveness with creativity.⁴⁴ His challenges to norms are dialectical: disturbing and refreshing. Yet although the trickster shapes society, summoning up the forces ‘which give life its real density’,⁴⁵ he is always a marginal figure. He is there to disrupt ‘ordinary structure’;⁴⁶ the trickster’s sublime aesthetic has no purchase and indeed might be overly disturbing, without a robust, beautiful aesthetic to challenge.⁴⁷

The dialectical relationship between beauty and sublime is an idea that resonates with art theory from beyond Africa. For example, Robert Venturi argues that buildings are aesthetically powerful when they express tension between ‘irrational parts’ and a ‘rational whole’.⁴⁸ John Dewey writes

41. The phrase is borrowed from Mbembe, *On the postcolony*, p. 145.

42. The trickster appears across West Africa, in traditional and modern manifestations. Kwabena Opoku-Agyemang, ‘The logic of escape in the Akan trickster tale’, *Asemka* 8 (1995), pp. 101–112; Robert D. Pelton, *The trickster in west Africa: A study of mythic irony and sacred delight* (University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 1980); Zinta Konrad, *Ewe comic heroes: Trickster tales in Togo* (Routledge, Abingdon, 2015); Amadou Hampaté Bâ, *L'étrange destin de Wangrin* (UGE, Paris, 1973); Dominique Malaquais, ‘Arts de feyre au Cameroun’, *Politique Africaine* 82 (2001/2), pp. 101–118; Bob W. White, ‘Modernity’s trickster: “Dipping” and “throwing” in Congolese popular dance music’, *Research in African Literatures* 30, 4 (1999), pp. 156–175.

43. Pelton, *The trickster*, p. 260.

44. Konrad, *Ewe comic heroes*.

45. Pelton, *The trickster*, p. 31.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

47. Christopher Vecsey, ‘The exception who proves the rules: Ananse the Akan trickster’, *Journal of Religion in Africa* 12, 3 (1981), pp. 161–177.

48. Robert Venturi, *Complexity and contradiction in architecture* (Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, 1966), p. 25.

that powerful art describes and reproduces experiences of both helplessness in the face of chaos and agency in the creation of order or what he terms ‘undergoing’ and ‘doing’.⁴⁹ And Hanna Segal argues that great art provides an ‘unshrinking expression of...full horror...and the achieving of an impression of wholeness and harmony’.⁵⁰ All point out that powerful art explores rather than resolves human experiences of struggle—rational versus irrational; doing versus undergoing; or harmony versus horror. Artworks that do this succeed because, as Robert Pelton says of West African tricksters, they describe ‘how the human mind and heart are themselves epiphanies of a calmly transcendent sacredness so boldly engaged with this world that it encompasses both nobility and messiness – feces, lies, and even death.’⁵¹ Completely disordered art is simply a mess; overly ordered art is vacuous, simply tidy.

The extremes of this aesthetic speak to our ideal state types. Mbembe’s post colony traps elites and citizens in disorder, decay, and horror. There is a strong flavour of the sublime in the ambiguous, subversive, and destructive qualities of the ‘zombie’; its associations with decay and death; and its sense of impotent undergoing.⁵² Scott’s ‘seeing state’ attempts to replace ambiguity with rational organization, through unceasing, potent doing.⁵³ Individually, such ‘ideal types’ are aesthetically too thin to capture the ambiguities of social and political experience. However, like all ideal types, they are heuristically useful in an exploration of difference in real-world examples—our next step. But before we turn to the scope and meanings of beauty and the sublime found in the Ghanaian and Ivoirian states, we need to explain our methods.

Making comparisons and collecting data

Immanuel Wallerstein pointed out in 1971 that Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire, which started independence with similar economic structures, levels of political centralization, climate, religious, ethnic, and linguistic diversity (including a shared Akan component), were ‘natural’ candidates for comparison.⁵⁴ Elisa Prosperetti shows how the two countries have competed

49. John Dewey, *Art as experience* (Penguin, New York, NY, 2005).

50. Hanna Segal, *Delusion and artistic creativity and other psychoanalytic essays* (Free Association Books, London, 1986), pp. 185–206, p. 199.

51. Pelton, *The trickster*, p. 4.

52. Mbembe, *On the postcolony*.

53. Scott, *Seeing*.

54. Immanuel Wallerstein, ‘Introduction’, in Philip Foster and Aristide R. Zolberg (eds), *Ghana and the Ivory Coast: Perspectives on modernization* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL, 1971), pp. 3–8, p. 3.

ever since, from the moment of independence when Félix Houphouët-Boigny proposed a ‘wager’ to Kwame Nkrumah as to which country’s economic system would succeed in the long term.⁵⁵

West African neighbours, Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire’s colonial experiences—British and French, respectively—inaugurated a process of divergence confirmed by different economic and political policies and styles after independence.⁵⁶ The headline effects were dramatic. Ghana experienced a sharp economic decline and political turmoil soon after independence, followed by a long and bumpy transition to relative stability.⁵⁷ Côte d’Ivoire experienced an ‘economic miracle’ under a founding president who stayed in power for 33 years until his death. Economic and political crises began to emerge from the 1980s, building to political collapse and civil war in the early 2000s.⁵⁸

Scholars have shown how headline political and economic differences mirrored broader political cultures. Wallerstein describes a Ghanaian culture of irrepressible, pluralist public debate, contrasting it with the ‘more secretive, nonpublic, and personally dangerous quality’ of Ivorian public life.⁵⁹ More recently, Lauren MacLean’s exploration of social reciprocity and citizenship in Akan-speaking villages either side of the Ivorian/Ghanaian border traced differences in popular ideas of the state and its relationship with citizens.⁶⁰ She suggests that Côte d’Ivoire’s centralized system (inaugurated during French rule and further concentrated after independence) helped establish individualistic, vertical relationships of reciprocity between citizens and state. In contrast, Ghana’s decentralized, smaller state (again, building on the foundations of British rule) ‘spurred diversification’, establishing more complex patterns of reciprocity through horizontal networks.⁶¹ Maclean argues that political culture is produced iteratively through interactions between elites and citizens and can change over a relatively short time period.

55. Elisa Prosperetti, ‘The hidden history of the west African wager: Or, how comparison with Ghana made Côte d’Ivoire’, *History in Africa* 45 (2018), pp. 29–57, p. 46.

56. Markus Eberhardt and Francis Teal, ‘Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire: Changing places’, *International Development Policy* 1 (2010), pp. 33–49. More generally this approach, which challenges the idea of the relatively minimal impacts of colonialism (see for example Bayart, *L’état*), supports Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardin’s analysis of its profound legacies. Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardin, ‘État, bureaucratie et gouvernance en Afrique de l’ouest francophone: Un diagnostic empirique, une perspective historique’, *Politique africaine* 96 (2004), pp. 139–162.

57. Roger Gocking, *The history of Ghana* (Greenwood Press, Westport, CT, 2005).

58. Francis Akindès, ‘Côte d’Ivoire: Socio-political crises, “Ivoirité” and the course of history’, *African Sociological Review* 7, 2 (2003), pp. 11–28.

59. Wallerstein, ‘Introduction’, p. 5.

60. Lauren M. MacLean, *Informal institutions and citizenship in rural Africa: Risk and reciprocity in Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010).

61. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

By entering a similar space—between elite-built state structures and popular understandings of them—we aim to add insights into how elite–citizen relationships produce different understandings and forms of statehood in Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire. State buildings give us a material embodiment of the state around which, as with the art forms discussed above, political meaning is built. Emerging from a bricolage approach, our empirical material comprises stories about buildings from different angles.⁶² We present a series of observations of key buildings in Ghana’s capital Accra, and Abidjan and Yamoussoukro, Côte d’Ivoire’s *de facto* and nominal capital cities. In March 2019, we explored these cities to find out what state buildings look like, where they sit in their cities, and what surrounds them.⁶³ As David Adjaye has documented, Africa’s capital cities are strongly flavoured by their architecture, which conveys an enormous variety of histories of social and political organizations.⁶⁴ We attempted a ‘rhythmanalysis’⁶⁵ of these cities, ‘hanging out’ around state buildings to gather a sense of how comfortable people felt about them, who went in and out, whether people lingered or avoided them altogether. In more relaxed contexts, we chatted to people passing or working nearby, asking about the buildings and going inside ourselves; in others, we followed locals hurrying by with averted eyes. We documented our findings in field notes and photographs.

Our second source of information was a series of 18 focus groups carried out with citizens living and working in and around Accra and Abidjan from March 2019 to January 2020.⁶⁶ Aiming to reach a wide range of people, our groups included men and women from different ethnic, social, religious, and age groups. Again, in the spirit of bricolage, we did not aim for a scientifically representative sample of citizens, but a collection of reflections from a variety of citizens who live in the two capital cities, urban residents’ readings of the state told through stories of the buildings that house it.⁶⁷ One advantage of using focus groups over one-to-one interviews is the way they can shift power towards participants, enabling them to

62. ‘Bricolage’ involves collecting what is at hand, improvising, rather than using an abstracted method, to reflect the real world. Joe L. Kincheloe, ‘On to the next level: Continuing the conceptualization of the bricolage’, *Qualitative Inquiry* 11, 3 (2005), pp. 323–250, p. 331.

63. Beyond capital cities, local municipal buildings, police stations, courts, schools, and medical facilities often take different shapes; FGDs compared prestigious facilities in Abidjan or Accra and smaller, shabbier rural counterparts.

64. David Adjaye, *Adjaye. Africa architecture: A photographic survey of metropolitan architecture* (Thames and Hudson, London, 2012).

65. Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, time and everyday life*, trans. Stuart Elden and Gerald Moore (Bloomsbury, London, 2004).

66. Discussants participated under conditions of anonymity. We have given each group a simple descriptor to allow the reader to contextualize the discussions.

67. ‘Citizens’ rather than ‘subjects’ in Mahmood Mamdani’s formulation. Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and subject: Contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1996). Carried out in rural areas, this project might produce rather different findings.

shape the narratives independently of the researchers' agenda.⁶⁸ Another is the way in which the dynamics of the conversations enable and illustrate thinking within relationships, mirroring the way ideas are constructed socially.⁶⁹

Each group contained between 6 and 10 people. The groups were usually approached through and assembled by a gatekeeper—a religious leader or local community group, or university teacher—so each one was reasonably homogenous.⁷⁰ This helped establish relaxed conditions where people could identify with each other, trust, discuss, and think together. We started discussions by asking members of the group to list their country's 'most important public buildings'. Once a list had been agreed, we asked them to describe the buildings. Most groups initially found the topic peculiar and people were anxious that they 'didn't know much about it'. But once we explained we were interested in observations and opinions rather than facts, most conversations became animated. Our interlocutors quickly made connections between buildings and politics, moving easily between descriptions of buildings and state activities and meaning. As one male Abidjan student pointed out towards the end of the discussion: 'When we talk about architecture, we talk about the way we think. The art of how to build is to transform according to rules, using aesthetic criteria; this is all about social rules.'⁷¹

Ghana: beauty and sublime in creative tension

Ghana's state buildings, like its broader architecture,⁷² are eclectic, largely because they were built over a long time period. The oldest still in use is the seventeenth-century Danish-built Osu Castle, formerly Christiansborg Castle, a slave trading base, home to the British governor, and office of the president and other government and military offices. It continues to stand as a 'symbol of power' representing the continuities and disjunctions

68. George Kamberelis and Greg Dimitriadis, 'Focus group research: Retrospect and prospect', in Patricia Leavy (ed.), *The Oxford handbook of qualitative research* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2014), pp. 315–340.

69. Alan Bryman, *Social research methods* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012); Sophie Duchesne, 'L'entretien collectif comme méthode expérimentale d'objectivation de l'identification nationale' in Fred Dervin (ed.), *Analyser l'identité: Les apports des focus groups* (L'Harmattan, Paris, 2015).

70. Sophie Duchesne argues that socially homogenous FGDs establish common ground and limit domination by more powerful individuals. Sophie Duchesne, 'Using focus groups to study the process of (de)politicization,' in Rosaline Barbour and David Morgan (eds), *A new era of focus group research* (Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2017), pp. 365–388.

71. FGD, University Students, Abidjan, 29 March 2019.

72. Kuukuwa Manful, 'Whose style? Taste, class and power in Accra's architecture', *The Metropole*, 2019, <<https://themetropole.blog/2019/11/13/whose-style-taste-class-and-power-in-accras-architecture/>> (8 April 2020).

in Ghana's history.⁷³ Accra has a variety of government department buildings, many erected in the 1950s during the transition to independence, in the contemporary tropical modernist style.⁷⁴ Iconic modernist buildings came after independence in 1957, including Black Star Gate, a new Parliament, and the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Kumase.⁷⁵ Economic problems slowed further architectural projects, but with recent stability came grander government departments in the north of the city including the classical-style Ministry of Defence and Jubilee House, the new Presidential Offices, both completed in 2009, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration, completed in 2013.

The Focus Group Discussion (FDG) descriptions of Ghana's 'most important buildings'—which included these examples alongside hospitals, police stations, and courts—were preoccupied with beauty as we have defined it: orderliness, attractiveness, and modernity. Leslie Lokko says Accra's beauty 'lies in the detail';⁷⁶ it was seen by our interlocutors in 'big, storey-buildings'⁷⁷ with 'proper furniture...ultra-modern designs...computers'⁷⁸ and air conditioning. Beautiful state buildings were surrounded by well-laid gardens and large car parks.⁷⁹ They were made of bricks or 'cement so our buildings are very strong'⁸⁰ and well-painted and secured by walls and security guards.⁸¹

The legibility of this beauty was made much easier by what interlocutors described as the relative openness of Ghana's state buildings. A good physical example was the Ministries area, home to many government departments (see [figure 1](#)). In the centre of the complicated matrix of Accra, wide congested roads gave way to a sleepier, almost residential feel. Containing a mixture of low-rise tropical modernist and larger recently built buildings arranged around wide, tree-filled car parks, the area was traversed by suited or smocked officials, street food vendors, and the occasional uniformed security guard lounging by a car park gate. Locals wandered between and into the buildings, easily identifying their purpose. One could explore the air-conditioning apparatus and dustbins on the backsides of the buildings; it was as if the inner workings of the state were on display.

73. Per Hernæs, 'A symbol of power: Christiansborg Castle in Ghanaian history', *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 9 (2005), pp. 141–156.

74. Uduku, 'Modernist architecture'.

75. Lesley Naa Norle Lokko, 'From modernism to mud. And back again', in Andres Lepik (ed.), *Afritecture: Building social change* (Architekturmeueum, Munich, 2014), pp. 255–257; Hess, 'Imagining architecture'.

76. Lokko, 'From modernism', p. 255.

77. FGD, final-year students, Accra, 20 April 2019.

78. FGD, craft sellers, Accra, 9 March 2019.

79. FGD, artisans, Accra, 11 March 2019.

80. FGD, elders, Accra, 13 August 2019.

81. FGD, Pentecostal church members, Accra, 18 August 2019.



Figure 1 Ministries, Accra, March 2019. Photograph by Julia Gallagher.

Our interlocutors moved easily (literally or in imagination) in and out of these and other buildings they had not necessarily visited. Descriptions suggested that the surface and insides of the state were qualitatively similar: people assessed them using the same register of beauty; there was little suggestion of mystery. One female student disparaged the Ministries buildings as ‘very old’ and ‘not disability-friendly’, but conceded that ‘from the outside I don’t like them but when you enter, the place looks nice’.⁸² Another said of Parliament House: ‘It’s big and it is a storey building actually with glass, so when you are inside...you could see everything that goes on.’⁸³ This impression of legibility was reinforced when we joined visitors lining up to enter the Parliament—we went in, looked around, and watched a debate, all without appointment or heavy-handed security protocols. But even people who had not visited described the Parliament with a sense of familiarity, instilled by TV coverage. Many discussed the décor of the chamber, the quality of the seating, the carpeting, and how well or badly the air conditioning and microphones worked (see [figure 2](#)). 襟

Order was an important feature of architectural beauty. For example, a group of craft sellers discussed the issue of planning, complaining about how unplanned houses were built too close together, which blocks air flow;

82. FGD, final-year students, Accra, 20 April 2019.

83. *Ibid.*



Figure 2 Parliament House, Accra, March 2019. Photograph by Julia Gallagher.

they had no toilets, pipes, or gutters so that, as one man put it, ‘you can sleep and you will see that the rain is entering your ears’. But ‘if all these things are planned, the one going to raise the structure, he will just think...He will think, he will sit down’.⁸⁴ The discussion explored how beautiful buildings emerged from the order, comfort, and calm that came from thinking, a rational, active process.

Many iconic state buildings were praised for possessing the qualities arising from good planning, but most mundane state buildings were not. Their lack of beauty was experienced as a ‘lack of seriousness’,⁸⁵ a ‘tense atmosphere’,⁸⁶ ‘low levels of discipline’,⁸⁷ or ‘the smell of corruption’.⁸⁸ Unbeautiful state buildings, mostly schools, hospitals, police stations, and regional courts, were ‘choked’, ‘congested’, ‘messy’, ‘smelly’, ‘empty’, ‘dark’, ‘disorganized’, and ‘dilapidated’. They were often small, made of wood, blocks, or mud with rusty iron sheet roofs; they had bucket toilets and were hot and badly ventilated. Our interlocutors rarely described ‘seeing’ these things; their impressions were dominated by smells, sounds, and

84. FGD, craft sellers, Accra, 9 March 2019.

85. FGD, first-year students, Accra, 27 May 2019.

86. FGD, artisans, Accra, 11 March 2019.

87. FGD, youths on national service, Accra, 15 March 2019.

88. FGD, artisans, Accra, 11 March 2019.

darkness. Their obscurity left people undergoing instead of doing, impressions that begin to approach the sublime. '[F]eces, lies, and even death'⁸⁹ created ambiguity and removed the observer's sense of control.

Several FGDs associated such sublime qualities with 'Africanness', contrasting them with 'Western' modernity. The craft sellers made this point in relation to the market where they worked, which looked, one man said, 'African' because it was a hand-built wooden structure with a tin roof.⁹⁰ They expressed affection for it, alongside irritation at its inadequacies. The building, they explained, was designed to appeal to Western tourists, conveying impressions of neglect, lack of planning, and non-mechanized techniques which confirmed outsiders' ideas of African mess in comparison with tidying Western modernity.

However, although rationalizing modernity might set out to control, it was also susceptible to the subversions of 'African disorder'—as though the trickster remained on the edge, ready to undo colonial forms.⁹¹ Even the grandest of state buildings might be susceptible to creeping disorder as microphones and air conditioning failed, roofs leaked, and weeds overtook lawns, and such ideas could appear amusing rather than concerning. This ambivalence about state beauty nodded towards an ambivalent state idea as part-foreign import, not perhaps African at all.⁹²

Yet the dynamic between modernity and Africanness was often flipped. Alongside the associations between beauty and order and planning and thoughtfulness—qualities often described as modern or Western—our interlocutors also associated beauty with 'typical Ghanaian', 'traditional' decorations,⁹³ including Adinkra symbols and kente cloth found on and in the Parliament—'our kente...very, very, decorative'⁹⁴—and references to the *asesedwa* (stool), the Asante symbol of political authority, whose representation in the new Jubilee House was, as one woman put it, 'very nice, no doubt'.⁹⁵ Our interlocutors described how these symbols decorated the surface of what were otherwise seen as 'Western' or 'British' buildings.⁹⁶ Taken as representative of Ghana, rather than their original narrower cultural antecedents, these were associated with attractiveness and order—a way to describe a more legible state idea. As de Witte and Meyer argue, attempts to use such symbols to create an overarching Ghanaian identity

89. Pelton, *The Trickster*, p. 4.

90. FGD, craft sellers, Accra, 9 March 2019.

91. Novelist Ayi Kwei Armah explores this idea using architectural metaphor to depict corruption in 1960s Ghana as a rotting staircase in a government parastatal building: Ayi Kwei Armah, *The beautiful ones are not yet born* (Heinemann, London, 1969).

92. Pierre Englebert, 'The contemporary African state: Neither African nor state', *Third World Quarterly* 18, 4 (1997), pp. 767–776.

93. FGD, artisans, Accra, 11 March 2019.

94. *Ibid.*

95. FGD, wood processors, Accra, 30 July 2019.

96. FGD, artisans, Accra, 11 March 2019.

(*Sankofaism*) divorced them from the spiritual world so that, ‘the visually appealing display of culture as a lavish spectacle or a sophisticated design strips cultural heritage of its dangerous power’.⁹⁷



Figure 3 Staircase to former slave quarters, Osu Castle, Accra, March 2019. Photograph by Julia Gallagher.

Osu Castle is a good example of how ‘Africanness’ could be a civilizing marker of beauty used to overlay an ambiguous, problematic, and sublime colonial history (see [figure 3](#)). No one we interviewed had been inside Osu Castle; many had only vague ideas about what went on inside.⁹⁸ Its position is striking, a white fortress overlooking the coast—from the beach, all high walls with tiny, out-of-reach windows and a crenellated top with ancient canons poking through gaps towards the sea. From the road, it is equally intimidating, set apart from the bulk of the city, and heavily guarded. Exclusion reinforced secrets about colonialism and the slave trade; people talked about its slave dungeon, describing it as ‘chilling’⁹⁹ and a place of ‘pain’.¹⁰⁰ These aspects gave the building disturbing qualities and took

97. Marleen De Witte and Birgit Meyer, ‘African heritage design: Entertainment media and visual aesthetics in Ghana’, *Civilisations* 61, 1 (2012), pp. 43–64, p. 18.

98. The most historic parts opened to the public one day a month in late 2018, but few were aware of this.

99. FGD, local assembly members, Accra, 21 August 2019.

100. FGD, wood processors, Accra, 30 July 2019.

it beyond ugliness to the sublime. However, Osu's sublime dungeons had been overlaid and partly overcome by civilizing post-colonial forces. The artisan group made this point in a discussion of the castle's history:

I think it was built by the Danes...Nkrumah was there...Rawlings spent the whole of the 19 years over there...it is right up there when you want to write the political history of Ghana...It was built for us, we didn't build with our money, with state money, but it has become now a friendly place instead of the previous slave dungeon that it was. Now we are using it for positive business it is fine.¹⁰¹

In this narrative, the act of independence challenged the horrors of Osu Castle, turning it from something chilling, that was undergone (a 'slave dungeon', 'built for us') to a place of agency and ownership ('friendly' and 'positive'). It echoed Nkrumah's description of walking through Osu (then still Christiansborg) Castle on the day of independence, finding it eerily stripped bare, and wondering how to begin to put the new state together.¹⁰² He pursued a modernizing programme to do it,¹⁰³ a 'dialectic of destruction and rebirth'.¹⁰⁴

Yet although the people we spoke to described Osu as a place where beauty had overcome the sublime in the rationalization brought by Presidents Nkrumah and Jerry Rawlings, stories about the slave dungeon remained troubling. Layers of beauty and sublime describe arrangements and rearrangements of history in which subversiveness appeared in different guises. Of note, here is the degree to which our interlocutors were able to discuss the sublime and their ambivalent feelings about its contribution to state meaning. This was because the sublime appeared marginal—associated sometimes with an 'Africanness' that might be seen to have more in common with the liminal trickster who pokes up at order from below and sometimes with the overturned colonial era. The prevailing order sat reasonably firmly but still a little uncomfortably above reserves of disorder: the sublime carried the potential to have a poke.

Finally, this dynamic can be explored in reactions to Ghana's controversial new presidential office, Jubilee House (see [figure 4](#)). Opened in 2008, Jubilee House is as striking as Osu and even more impenetrable. It cost an

101. FGD, artisans, Accra, 11 March 2019.

102. Kwame Nkrumah, *Africa must unite* (Panaf Books, London, 1998), p. xiv.

103. Kwaku Larbi Korang, *Writing Ghana, imagining Africa: Nation and African modernity* (University of Rochester Press, Rochester, NY, 2004), p. 263.

104. Jeffrey S. Ahlman, *Living with Nkrumahism: Nation, state and pan-Africanism in Ghana* (Ohio University Press, Ohio, 2017), p. 11.

estimated US\$45 million¹⁰⁵ and was completed amidst intra-party arguments about the abandonment of Osu, questions over its Indian financing and its location, security arrangements, and name.¹⁰⁶ In FGDs, there was (sometimes grudging) admiration for the building's design: a delicate concave roof sits on top of four sturdy 'legs', making it look like a massive, golden *asesedwa*, 'a Ghanaian thing, but in a modernized form'.¹⁰⁷



Figure 4 Jubilee House, Accra, March 2019. Photograph by Julia Gallagher.

A key preoccupation was the building's enormous size and the ambiguities of what lay inside. A group of students told stories about a secret underground complex, complete with hospital and police station. They wondered whether this was true and who might use it. As one reflected, 'I wonder if people are allowed inside...you will be passing there, you will

105. Third World Architecture, 'The Flagstaff House', *Third World Architecture*, 11 January 2018, <<https://3rdworldarchitecture.wordpress.com/2018/01/11/the-flagstaff-house-accra/>> (22 October 2019).

106. Deccan Herald, 'Another row over India-funded presidential mansion in Ghana', 22 August 2011, <<https://www.deccanherald.com/content/185456/another-row-over-india-funded.html>> (6 April 2020); 'Ghanaian President moving into Indian-financed residence?' 27 August 2012, <<https://www.deccanherald.com/content/274526/ghanaian-president-moving-indian-financed.html>> (6 April 2020).

107. FGD, elders, Accra, 13 August 2019.

not see anyone, no car entering and no car coming out'.¹⁰⁸ The building's heavy security was much discussed, as this excerpt from a church group illustrates:

When we were getting closer, the soldiers came to stop us [and said] that we should leave.
 But what are you going to do in there?
 If you don't heed their warnings too, you will be arrested.
 I didn't see it well so can't tell.¹⁰⁹

People were impressed, perplexed, and made anxious by Jubilee House's sublime characteristics. One group of artisans discussed their approval of the idea that this opaque building represented and upheld the prestige of the president; grand scale and secrecy were appropriate, perhaps even slightly underdone as it 'is too close to the road' and 'in the open'.¹¹⁰ But others felt uncomfortable about the building's obscure grandeur; many were angry because 'as an ordinary Ghanaian you will not be allowed to enter'.¹¹¹ A man described its 'show of extravagance' as a 'historical misplacement', while a male colleague compared it unfavourably with Nkrumah's more 'modest buildings'.¹¹² Jubilee House emerged as just the latest iteration of the complex aesthetic of Ghana's state, troubling order with its ambiguous foundations, 'extravagance' and 'historical misplacement'. And yet the ease with which people were able to explore their ambivalence suggested again that the state idea is relatively robust. Recognition and tolerance of ambiguity implied a sense of familiarity, even affinity, with the state. One woman described the 'irony' of putting the President's office 'directly opposite' housing that is 'not even painted'. She described the 'sharp contrast' as proof 'that the president can actually live among us'.¹¹³

To conclude, we found Ghana's state represented by buildings of aesthetic depth, described in terms of beauty and sublime which work with and against each other to produce a largely legible state with ambiguous foundations. The citizens we listened to were able to explore it, inside and out, describing the legible bits they could see and illegible bits they could feel. Although the sublime was there, it was bearable, perhaps because it could be put into the context of a state meaning that could be largely explained. Trickster-like, sublime elements described in state buildings might poke at

108. FGD, first-year students, Accra, 27 May 2019.

109. FGD, Pentecostal church members, Accra, 18 August 2019.

110. FGD, wood processors, Accra, 30 July 2019.

111. FGD, youths on national service, Accra, 15 March 2019.

112. FGD, artisans, Accra, 11 March 2019.

113. FGD, youths on national service, Accra, 15 March 2019.

and challenge state order, but there was enough robustness there to make such a prospect potentially creative rather than overwhelmingly alarming.

Côte d'Ivoire: beauty and the sublime in unequal struggle

The Ivorian state is represented by particularly dramatic architecture from a narrower time period, a product of 'rapid and extroverted growth'.¹¹⁴ From independence in 1960, Houphouët-Boigny employed modernism to demonstrate Ivorian regional exceptionalism¹¹⁵ and religious symbolism to underpin political power.¹¹⁶ Both were incorporated into many of the buildings he commissioned, rooted in what Issa Diabaté calls 'a strong political backbone in terms of vision and projection'.¹¹⁷ In this section, we discuss how the aesthetic projected by these buildings, and the way citizens read them, describe an extraordinary but troublingly ambiguous state idea. Although there were some references to beauty, these were more dominated, even overwhelmed, by the sublime than in the Ghanaian example.

Plateau, the main administrative and business centre of Abidjan, is home to the Cité Administrative, which faces the daringly abstract Cathédrale Saint-Paul and tropical modernist Maire du Plateau.¹¹⁸ Further south lie the mysteriously hidden presidential complex, its green concave roof designed to represent a stool only just visible over a high wall,¹¹⁹ and the iconic Pyramide market in the middle of the neighbouring business district.¹²⁰ Most of these can be viewed from the modernist luxury Hotel Ivoire¹²¹ and from the districts surrounding Plateau across the Ébrié Lagoon, where residents are treated to views of this dramatic collection of skyscrapers locally described as 'little New York'. Yamoussoukro,

114. Guillaume Koffi, 'Introduction, Côte d'Ivoire', in Philipp Meuser and Adil Dalbai (eds), *Architectural guide: Sub-Saharan Africa* (Dom Publishers, Berlin, 2021), pp. 213–217.

115. Jean-Fabien Steck, 'Abidjan and the Plateau: What urban models for the showcase of the Ivory Coast's "miracle"?' *Expertises Nomades* 80, 3 (2005), pp. 215–226; Hugo Massire, 'Le Palais présidentiel d'Abidjan: La logique de l'opulence', *In Situ: revue des patrimoines* 34 (2018), <<https://journals.openedition.org/insitu/15837>> (21 October 2019); Jerome Vogel, 'Culture, politics, and national identity in Côte d'Ivoire', *Social Research* 58, 2 (1991), pp. 439–456.

116. Aristide R. Zolberg, 'Political development in the Ivory Coast since independence', in Philip Foster and Aristide R. Zolberg (eds), *Ghana and the Ivory Coast: Perspectives on modernization* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL, 1971), p. 28.

117. Issa Diabaté, 'The future of Ivorian architecture in the face of urbanisation', in Philipp Meuser and Adil Dalbai (eds), *Architectural guide: Sub-Saharan Africa* (Dom Publishers, Berlin, 2021), pp. 218–219.

118. Udo Kultermann, *New directions in African architecture* (Studio Vista, London, 1969).

119. Massire, 'Le Palais'; Danielle Ben Yahmed and Nicole Houstin (eds), *Côte d'Ivoire: Les archives de la nation* (Les Éditions du Jaguar, Saint-Étienne, 2017).

120. Blazej Ciarkowski, 'The post-colonial turn and the modernist architecture in Africa', *Art Inquiry: Recherches sur les arts* 17 (2015), pp. 239–249.

121. Hertz, *African modernism*.

Houphouët-Boigny's new capital city established in 1983, has another modernist presidential palace erected on the banks of a crocodile lake—a gigantic, marble-lined Fondation Félix Houphouët-Boigny pour la Paix, a chain of large new administrative and parliamentary facilities and the famous, baroque-style Basilique Notre Dame de la Paix, modelled on Rome's St Peter's, and reputedly the largest Catholic Church in the world. Nnamdi Elleh writes that the basilica, sitting incongruously within a modest African village, 'exceeds all built, colonial-inspired chauvinist projects on the continent'.¹²² Its construction is said to have doubled the country's external debt¹²³—an observation that many interlocutors reported with pride.¹²⁴

Houphouët-Boigny's building programme was enabled by the economic boom that characterized the early years of independence. Since the crises that began in the 1980s,¹²⁵ prestigious building projects became rarer and as a result Houphouët-Boigny's architectural representation of the state remains its main embodiment, a material narrative of the miracle state fallen on hard times.

Abidjan's Cité Administrative is a good example of the sublime—beyond ordinary comprehension in magnificence and danger, glimpsed rather than fully understood (see [figure 5](#)). Begun in the 1970s, it was completed in 1984 using foreign loans as the economy faltered.¹²⁶ To our eyes the buildings stuck into the sky like five cuboid, gilded fingers. The surfaces of latticed windows conveyed solid regularity and order on a massive scale. Yet although the complex was signposted and visible from most angles of Plateau, there were no external indications of which government departments are housed there or how they are arranged. It was visible to everyone, but also opaque to most people who can only gaze from a distance, a sense brilliantly captured in Ivoirian artist Joana Choumali's painting, 'As the wind whispers', which pictures the towers from across the lagoon—square, colourless, and modernist, poking up from an organic, highly coloured, and ambiguous landscape.¹²⁷

In FGDs, the towers were described as 'works of art',¹²⁸ always 'seen from the outside'.¹²⁹ Their scale and regularity represented the extraordinary feat of building skyscrapers in a tropical African capital city. Similarly

122. Elleh, *Architecture and power*, p. 159.

123. Mike McGovern, *Making War in Côte d'Ivoire* (Hurst, London, 2011), p. 17.

124. The basilica, now owned by the Catholic Church, was described as a state building in all FGDs.

125. Akindès, *The roots*.

126. Abou B. Bamba, *African miracle, African mirage: Transnational politics and the paradox of modernisation in Ivory Coast* (Ohio University Press, Athens, 2016).

127. See Choumali's website, <<https://joanachoumali.com/index.php/projects/mix-media/alba-hian>> (13 October 2020).

128. FGD, university students, Abidjan, 29 March 2019.

129. FGD, teachers, Abidjan, 8 August 2019.



Figure 5 Cité Administrative, Abidjan, March 2019. Photograph by Julia Gallagher.

remarkable, the presidential palaces, the Yamoussoukro basilica and peace institute, the Assemblée Nationale, the Université Félix Houphouët-Boigny, and the Pyramide were all described as ‘jewels’, ‘icons’, ‘masterpieces’, ‘chic’, ‘perfect’, and ‘shining’.¹³⁰ Such descriptions escaped our definition of beauty, giving impressions of mysterious wonder instead of legibility. In a discussion between public sector workers about the basilica, one woman said: ‘I am always struck, fascinated by the quality of the work and then, it is an architectural masterpiece...it is impressive for an African country to achieve such a work’, while a colleague added, ‘we still wonder how all this could have been possible’.¹³¹

Part of people’s wonder was rooted in the buildings’ exceptionalism. They were ‘famous and respected’ throughout the region. The basilica was ‘the largest in the world’ and ‘one of the most visited in the world’;¹³² the

130. These terms were used across our FGDs.

131. FGD, civil servants, Abidjan, 20 June 2019.

132. FGD, university students, Abidjan, 29 March 2019.

Pyramide was ‘one of the most beautiful buildings in history’.¹³³ Some said that Abidjan was more European than African; others spoke with pity at seeing inferior buildings in neighbouring countries. A student described being ‘blown away’ when he visited the Hôtel des Parlementaires (originally accommodation for Members of Parliament (MPs) but now a luxury hotel) in Yamoussoukro. ‘I thought maybe I was in London or in other countries...We don’t know how important our country is to the outside world because we are here...when you look at the whole, in West Africa, Côte d’Ivoire is a beautiful country.’ Another agreed: ‘When we find ourselves in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, we beat our breasts and say, we have jewels, we can compete with others.’¹³⁴

The Yamoussoukro basilica was cited in all groups as one of the most important Ivoirian state buildings (see [figure 6](#)). It can be seen from most angles of the city, peeping over one of its six-lane roads. As we reached its gate, we saw, still at a distance, a circular, domed building fronted by a portico supported by four pairs of pillars. On each side was a delicate arrangement of pillars and mini domes, curving towards each other like encircling arms. The main dome was a pale blue colour against the dusty pinkish yellow of the stone walls, topped by a golden orb and cross—the final touch which takes its height (158 m) above that of the Vatican’s St Peter’s. It took a long time to walk the road (a kilometre of marble, lined by formal gardens), which we did with a group of singing worshippers, and had plenty of time to appreciate the structure’s enormity, eventually entering between pillars as wide as buildings themselves. Inside, the church benches (which famously contain air-conditioning units—but these were not working when we visited) encircled a central altar, the whole framed by French-imported windows in jewelled reds, yellows, and greens depicting biblical stories and images of the apostles.

Many popular stories about the Basilica deal with Houphouët-Boigny’s subversive cleverness. Houphouët-Boigny’s portrait in the stained glass windows—putting himself (twice!) into biblical scenes—was often raised as an example of his cheekiness.¹³⁵ Another was his use of public funds to pay for it—when challenged on this he is reported to have replied: ‘You can’t put a price on a gift to God.’¹³⁶ The story also goes that Houphouët-Boigny lured the Pope to its inauguration by promising not to make the building taller than St Peter’s and only afterwards added the orb and cross, which took it over the line. He famously made a gift of it—and its eye-watering upkeep costs—to the Catholic Church.

133. FGD, elders, Abidjan, 21 January 2020.

134. FGD, university students, Abidjan, 29 March 2019.

135. *Ibid.*

136. This story was reported by our official tour guide at the basilica.



Figure 6 Basilique Notre Dame de la Paix, Yamoussoukro, March 2019. Photograph by Julia Gallagher.

Unlike in Ghana, the origins of this remarkable Ivoirian architecture seemed difficult to discern. No one discussed prosaic planning processes, concentrating instead on mysterious or even miraculous origins and properties. A teacher said of the Yamoussoukro peace foundation that ‘the colours, and the light, even when you’re angry, when you walk in...it calms you down’.¹³⁷ One state official said of the Hôpital Mère-Enfant at Bingerville that ‘as soon as you leave I think that 50 percent you’re already cured because of the level of architecture’.¹³⁸ Transcendence emerged in accounts of buildings designed and constructed by foreign or other-worldly architects and builders. One man spoke of structures ‘built by Italians, with a know-how not possible’.¹³⁹ A female colleague replied that some of the buildings were so miraculous they could only have been ‘built by masks,

137. FGD, teachers, Abidjan, 8 August 2019.

138. FGD, self-employed workers, Abidjan, 19 June 2019.

139. FGD, university students, Abidjan, 29 March 2019.

by geniuses'.¹⁴⁰ Another woman thought the buildings were elevated by their associations with Houphouët-Boigny, who was 'a genius; seriously, he wasn't normal'.¹⁴¹ All this was wonderful stuff—buildings described in abstract ways, out of reach, miraculous, and illegible and widely different from Ghana's more down-to-earth state structures.

However, other-worldliness also carried hints of unease, related most commonly in a story about the presidential palace in Abidjan being rented, probably from the French, and not Ivoirian at all. This story emerged in all discussions and in a particular way; it was reported as a rumour that the interlocutor could not vouch for. One woman said: 'The presidency, it seems, I don't know if it is from a reliable source, but they say that the presidency is rented. Well now, I don't know how it goes.'¹⁴² The story's status as rumour gave it the flavour of a 'public secret',¹⁴³ something everybody 'knows' but nobody explicitly acknowledges.

Our FGDs produced relatively few descriptions of beauty. Some buildings were discussed in terms of paint and tiles, modern furnishings, computers, air conditioning,¹⁴⁴ and cleanliness¹⁴⁵ on the inside and tarred roads outside. There was respect for regularity, efficiency, and most of all a cleaning up of dirt, and an appreciation for order overcoming disorder, but they were quickly overtaken by grander descriptions—not just positive, but also more disturbing versions of wonder, particularly in relation to interiors.

It was notable how little detail people related about what happened inside iconic state buildings. In contrast to Ghana, where people spoke with relative ease about the inside of the state, many Ivoirians preferred to talk of its exterior, so that, as one man said of the *Assemblée Nationale*, 'from the outside yes, but from the inside no...from afar, I see'.¹⁴⁶ However, in discussions about mundane buildings, the interiors were described as a source of disturbing ambiguity. For example, a male teacher described feelings of confusion on visiting the regional ministry headquarters:

Well, there are buildings you're looking for, there aren't even signs, that is, you can pass without knowing you've passed the building...And then when you find the building too, you come in, no one tells you, you have to ask. I've come to withdraw my certificate, where should I go? They say

140. *Ibid.*

141. *Ibid.*

142. FGD, traders, Abidjan, 8 January 2020. The ambiguity might arise from disputes between former President Laurent Gbagbo and his successor, President Alassane Ouattara, about Côte d'Ivoire's relationship with France. Gbagbo made some political capital from this claim while in office, which was later repudiated by Ouattara.

143. The term is borrowed from Newell, 'Brands', p. 144.

144. FGD, Treichville residents' group, Abidjan, 19 January 2020.

145. FGD, Women's group, Abidjan, 8 January 2020.

146. FGD, civil servants, Abidjan, 20 June 2019.

good, take the elevator and you go to the sixth. But you arrive in front of the elevator, elevator number two, it's closed: broken down. Elevator number three, broken down. Only one elevator is here, it's drunk, no you can't use it, you have to take the stairs... You get to the sixth, it's not organized. The offices are there, you don't know which one... this, that, nothing... You lose yourself. Nothing is indicated.¹⁴⁷

The man described being at the mercy of the building, which worked against him at every turn. As if to reinforce such a sense of illegibility, many descriptions of the insides of state buildings focused on haptic sensory engagements; as in Ghana, they were rarely seen, but instead smelled, felt, and heard the disorder and unpleasantness of sweat, excrement, flimsiness, and danger, leaving feelings of confusion and impotence. A group of private-sector workers mentioned courts as 'too small, squashed', where 'you hear but you cannot see'.¹⁴⁸

This group also focused on schools they described as 'soft buildings' made with wood and straw, so that 'with even a small wind, everything flies away', where students are 'stuck, tight, and when it's like that, it's complicated'.¹⁴⁹ A group of teachers described local hospitals, which are dirty and 'make you feel sick'; 'when you go in there you feel you're going to die, even if you're not ill'.¹⁵⁰ The prison, they said, is 'humiliating, it's not pretty at all to see'; police stations are 'degraded, lacking hygiene and order'; and the Abidjan Detention and Correction House needs to be 'unclogged'.¹⁵¹ The most common horrors are the toilets, 'the evil of public buildings', according to one woman.¹⁵² Here, the sublime contained dense ambiguities that produced Mbembe-like descriptions of abjection—'stress', 'complication', and¹⁵³ 'humiliation'¹⁵⁴—removing people's capacities to discern state meaning. It was illegible.

Such discussions led to reassessments of iconic structures, where FGDs returned to consider the possibilities of hidden horrors. It appeared that many 'icons' were worryingly neglected. The Institut National Polytechnique Félix Houphouët-Boigny was 'dying, well, falling apart'.¹⁵⁵ The awe-inspiring basilica was increasingly shabby, with cracks in the walls now host to weeds. One group talked of 'slackening...[and] areas that oozed' and a recent visit where 'there was brush all over the place, the paint was

147. FGD, teachers, Abidjan, 8 August 2019.

148. FGD, private-sector workers, Abidjan, 9 August 2019.

149. *Ibid.*

150. FGD, teachers, Abidjan, 8 August 2019.

151. *Ibid.*

152. FGD, traders Abidjan, 8 January 2020.

153. FGD, self-employed workers, Abidjan, 19 June 2019.

154. FGD, teachers, Abidjan, 8 August 2019.

155. FGD, university students, Abidjan, 29 March 2019.



Figure 7 Palais Présidentiel, Yamoussoukro, with man watching a crocodile, March 2019. Photograph by Julia Gallagher.

gone, frankly there was no more shine'.¹⁵⁶ Some decay was associated with the decline of Côte d'Ivoire since Houphouët-Boigny's death. Yet the picture became more complicated as people thought about the origins of their state buildings where ambiguity emerged as hauntings, the bodies of migrant labourers buried in the foundations, and rumours about tunnels within and between the buildings. The presidential palace in Yamoussoukro has its crocodiles, Houphouët-Boigny's hand-picked guards, which have, since his death, broken through the fence to wander the town (see [figure 7](#)). The massive, uncanny beasts attract observers to the banks of the lake that flanks the palace. The building itself, not used now, appeared to be in immaculate condition, a shrine to the late president. But the crocodiles were a grisly and dangerous legacy. One woman said: '[Houphouët-Boigny] had to make human sacrifices and he had to throw people into the Caiman Island, albino people... History has really terrorized us. When you see the caimans, you think they're man-eaters, so it's really scary. Well, we don't know if it's true, but [on reflection] it's still true.'¹⁵⁷

156. FGD, civil servants, Abidjan, 20 June 2019.

157. FGD, private-sector workers, Abidjan, 9 August 2019.

Houphouët-Boigny was a key protagonist in all descriptions of the Ivoirian state, and his role was an ambiguous one. His foreign-designed modernist architecture was described as an example of a desire to emulate the ordering structures of the West. The continuing involvement of the French, in architecture as in other aspects of Ivoirian statecraft, stressed continuity with the colonial period.¹⁵⁸ Yet there were strong flavours of Houphouët-Boigny's own disrupting qualities—like Murphy's election candidate who avows support for another but secretly organizes against him.¹⁵⁹ Unlike in Ghana, there was very little left of the actual colonial in Côte d'Ivoire's state architecture (instead an old colonial capital, Grand Bassam, is full of crumbling abandoned buildings that speak powerfully to the idea of decline and overthrow), and Houphouët-Boigny's attempt to create a brand-new capital city in his hometown powerfully challenges the old order. His character was also admired for subversiveness—stories about the eye-watering costs of the basilica, his double portrait in its stained glass, and his insistence at getting the Pope to inaugurate it were reminders of the disruptive trickster. His crocodiles, the epitome of the sublime, suggested a conscious attempt to foil his modernist palace, his basilica to rival the Vatican's, and his foundation to bring peace to the world. The political disorder that followed Houphouët-Boigny provided little in the way of stabilizing layers of ordering beauty.

To conclude, Côte d'Ivoire's architectural legacy embodied a state idea that was more ambiguous than a first reading suggests and much more illegible than Ghana's. We were brought to the point, within each FGD, of realizing that few of the state's buildings felt solid. Their extraordinariness turned ephemeral, a veneer hiding something disturbing, ugly, and destructive. Brief descriptions of beauty suggested relatively little sense of a structuring order: all was either wonder or horror. As representatives and embodiments of Ivoirian state meaning, these buildings conveyed state power as truly sublime, distant sources of wonder—extraordinary, ambiguous, and frightening.

Conclusion

We have used an aesthetic approach to explore differences between statehood in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. This has been a two-pronged approach encompassing the styles, origins, and myths associated with state buildings that touch on the ideologies, histories, and personalities of the regimes

158. There is a lively discussion on West African architecture concerning the inability of post-colonial administrations to break away from European aesthetic styles and methods: Diala Touré, *Créations architecturales et artistiques en Afrique sub-saharienne, 1948–1995: Bureaux d'études Henri Chomette* (L'Harmattan, Paris, 2002); Léo Noyer-Duplaix, 'Henri Chomette et l'architecture des lieux de pouvoir en Afrique subsaharienne', *In Situ* 34 (2018), doi: 10.4000/insitu.15897.

159. Murphy, 'The sublime'.

that created them and the ways in which they are interpreted and explained by the citizens that live with them. We have used ideas of beauty and the sublime to establish the ways in which aesthetic value is arranged around juxtapositions of order and disruption, arguing that our approach is a useful way to read states as things constructed as tangible objects, between elites and citizens, through which state workings and meanings can be understood.

Three main differences emerged between the aesthetics of the two states. The first involves the historical and aesthetic eclecticism of Ghana's buildings compared to the tighter range of Côte d'Ivoire's. The Ghanaian state is embodied by buildings that draw on medieval and classical European styles in buildings dating from the slave trade and colonial rule, alongside tropical-modernist, and monumental styles. Pre-independence buildings have been repurposed and redecorated—a process that helps them embody ideas of tension and disruption and the creation and subversion of beauty. The collection characterizes the state as contingent and practical, making do with what it has, finding funding where it can, in accommodating a complex history. In contrast, Côte d'Ivoire's buildings erected by the first post-independence regime appear carefully curated and controlled to produce the state as spectacle: Houphouët-Boigny's remarkable architectural legacy describes an almost magical state with ambiguous origins that is admired from afar. The two states are more and less comprehensible: Ghana's buildings map a state with its planning history on untidy show, while Côte d'Ivoire's suggest a complete, although nebulous order.

The second difference emerges in the buildings' depiction of relationships between beauty and the sublime. In Ghana, interlocutors focused on how some of their presidents had created beauty to overturn the sublime. Nkrumah's challenge and defeat of colonialism in particular showed how beauty created by post-colonial elites overcame a disordered, ambiguous history. Osu Castle became respectable and relatively safe, while the Parliament was redecorated with local symbols and designs that made it more legible. Jubilee House's potential for disordering provoked unease but also voluble argument around a relatively robust state that could stand it. In contrast, Côte d'Ivoire's leadership appeared to have inaugurated a sublime aesthetic by summoning mysterious resources to build the state. Houphouët-Boigny, in particular, emerged as an almost trickster-like character, stirring up disorder and creating confusion as he erected the 'miracle state'. As a result, his modernist buildings were full of wonder, obscurity, and fear, as although their unknown foundations could not be grasped or trusted.

The final difference involves Ghanaians' and Ivoirians' experience of state buildings as open or closed. In Ghana, people described a relatively

open state, in buildings they could enter in reality, through their televisions, or in imagination. This openness went some way to dispelling ideas of obscurity and secrets and lessened the impression of a sublime state aesthetic. The Ivoirian state buildings were more opaque, and citizens appeared unable or unwilling to describe their insides. This closedness enabled the state to keep its secrets, contributing to a powerful sublime state aesthetic. The difference in legibility of the two states engaged citizens in different relations of complicity: in Ghana people expressed strong opinions on which buildings should be used and how they should look; in Côte d'Ivoire people were more likely to speak like observers of the state project. Overall, the Ghanaian and Ivoirian architectural anatomies of statehood suggested the difference between a state whose buildings demonstrate its tensions and accommodations and a monolithic state where tensions are a public secret.

We found both Scott and Mbembe in the two states. There are attempts—more or less successful—at grand tidying, and there are eruptions—more or less terrifying—of potential chaos. The citizens we listened to could see and appreciate structuring order; but they felt and in different ways could appreciate disruptive disorder. The fact that we observed these common themes, emerging differently within two different contexts, underlines the utility of understanding the state as an aesthetic object and its meaning derived from its ability to embody beauty alongside the sublime, contributing to understandings of human life as shaped by constant, but always failed, attempts to impose order on disorder. Our comparison has helped us demonstrate how malleable this process is, shaped between the preoccupations and styles of leaders, and the expectations and adaptations of citizens over a relatively short time span. Both Scott's 'seeing state'¹⁶⁰ and Mbembe's 'zombie state'¹⁶¹ are part of the state aesthetic in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire; the balance and relationship between the two help us understand how differently statehood can be shaped and read.

160. Scott, *Seeing*.

161. Mbembe, *On the postcolony*.